



REFLECTION

BEYOND THE WHITE BOX

Setting the stage for interaction and connection

AR3CP010 Complex Projects

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2024

COMPLEX PROJECTS

Berlin studio

AR3CP010

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Berlin Studio
Health Group

The relationship between research and design

The main research question that I wanted to answer with this design assignment was:

"How can we design museum spaces differently so that they encourage active interaction with the art and visitors alike and subsequently foster a more profound understanding of the art works itself and more meaningful connections with each other."

This research question has seen a lot of development and reiterations from the very beginning to the end, however were all to a greater or lesser extent connected to the theme of connection and interaction. A topic that has always been really close to me as a person and future architect, how to foster real meaningful connections and interaction through architecture in a world where we as a society have become much more individualistic, segregated and alone.

During the first half of the studio the focus was on creating a design brief that would function as a starting point for the design in the second half. The design brief had to inform about the proposed program, site and client. In order to create a design brief that could later be used to design this new building that would try and answer this main research question of connection and interaction a lot of research had to be done, using a multitude of methods. One of the main research that has been done were case study analysis of different contemporary art museums. And also a week long field trip to Berlin to not only visit more than 14 museums but also see what is happening in the city and scouting for a good site location.

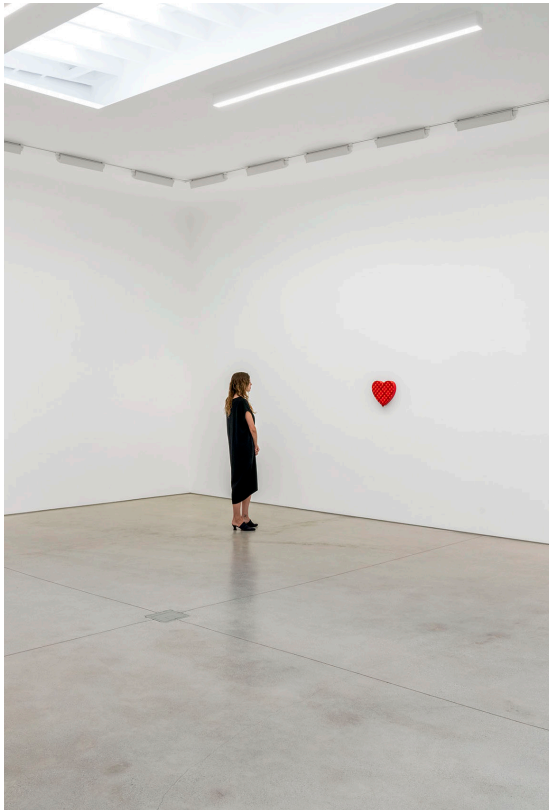


Figure 1, White Cube



Figure 2, Lumbung press documenta

The relationship between your graduation topic and studio topic

The topic of the whole studio is Bodies, Buildings, Berlin which refers to this concept of there being a deeply interconnected relationship between people, buildings and the city that they live and work in. They are all related to one another and the cant exist without each other, a city without people is not a city and a building without people is not a building. The buildings and the city they create form our everyday lives and, if designed well, can help us become a well functioning and society. However the same goes for buildings and cities that are not well designed that can create a society that is not functioning well. To add on to the studio topic, our group topic within the studio was Health. We have collectively done extensive research on the topic of health and took a couple main aspects from this research. One of which was the universal distinction of physical, mental and social health.

This is where my graduation topic has its origin, I combined my own fascination for connection and interaction with the social health aspect of our group topic and the main focus of the studio Bodies, Buildings, Berlin to research the existing situation. What I quickly found was that Berlin, like many other cities around the world, has seen increasing numbers of loneliness. In this Digital Age where everyone seems to be connected with each other all over the world through social media one in four adults experiences social isolation and loneliness. This does not only carry significant health risks for our own health but also for the well being of our society as a whole. People that don't have enough strong social connections are more at risk of stroke, anxiety, dementia, depression, suicide and more. The lack of social connection carries and equivalent, or even greater, risk of early death as other better-know risk factors – such as smoking, excessive drinking, physical inactivity, obesity and air pollution (World Health Organization: WHO, 2023). Loneliness often leads to social isolation as people withdraw from social interaction and connections. Conversely,

loneliness can occur as a result of social isolation when people become disconnected from relationships with family, friends or other sources of social interaction. This can result in a diminished sense of community and loosen the bonds that would otherwise help people find a shared sense of direction on many socio economic issues like poverty, violence, health or conflict that plague society (Sones et al., 2021).

So my graduation topic of creating a healthier society through architecture that emphasizes the interaction and connection with the building and each other integrates the studio topic of Bodies, Buildings, Berlin and Health almost literally.

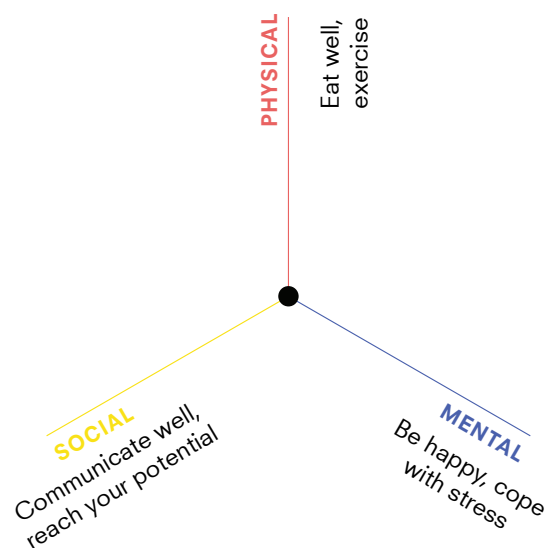


Figure 3, Health triangle

Research method and approach chosen by the student in relation to the graduation studio.

The graduation studio is very well organized, the first semester is about doing research and coming up with a well developed design brief that will later be executed in the second semester.

The brief constitutes of three domains; Site, Program and Client that along with the first orientation domain forms four segments of five weeks each. At the end of every five week period a presentation is held with the main findings. For the first five weeks I mainly did research by investigating the museum typology, its history and value to society, but also current interesting topics in relation to its development. The other weeks were spent researching the program, site and client parts. To understand the basics of the building program three relevant case studies were chosen based on their special nature. The analysis consist of measuring the square meters of the building and their function expressed in percentages. This will allow for an accurate comparison of the different museum programs and create a benchmark for the museums new program. Also the relationship between spaces is analysed and presented in a diagram scheme. The analysis done to find a suitable site location was done by doing research about the 'unhealthy' areas in Berlin. This is done by researching which areas are the most thermal, air and noise polluted and combining these to find where these areas overlap making it the most 'unhealthy' area. The second requirement comes from the intended ambitions of the museum which

relate to accessibility, neutrality and centrality. Accessibility is defined as the 15 min walk area around the main multimodal transportation hubs in Berlin, and a 45 min travel time to those hubs. This way all of Berlin is have easy public access to the museum within an hour. The neutrality is about the area between the touristic centre and the main residential areas, this way it is less for the tourists and more for the residents of Berlin without favouriting any residents or residential area. These are again combined and overlayed together with the group requirements to result in an area for potential site locations. Within this area potential free sites will be searched and compiled. Once at least two free sites are chosen they can be compared to find out which is better according to plot size, road and waterfront access. The role of the client is very important in the overall success of the project, they do not only supply the investment they want the project to align with their vision. To find the right client for the building and to make sure the project is aligned with their vision a intricate and comprehensive understanding of that client is needed. To find the right client research is done by compiling a list of similar projects in Berlin and analysing whom are involved and which is most suitable for this project. Then further analysis of the client is done by researching their previous projects, relations to other stakeholders and their vision.

The design part of the project is mostly led through research by design and references. Its not so much research as it is trying and doing.

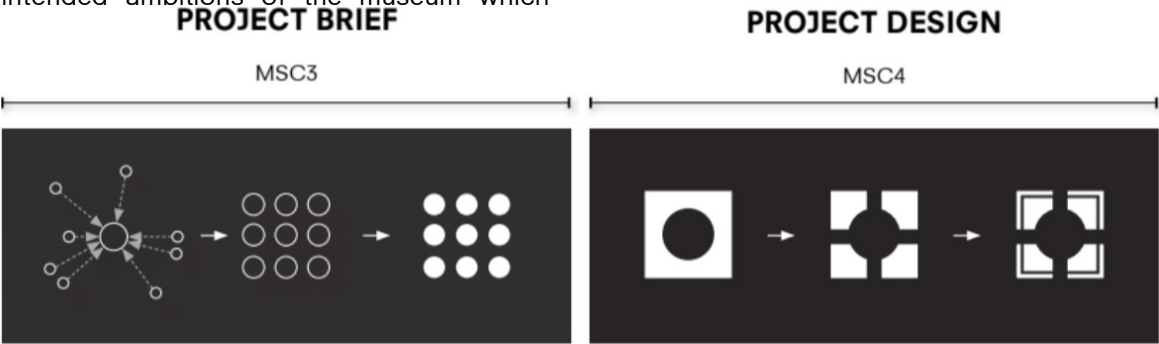


Figure 4, Complex Projects

Relationship between the graduation project and the wider social, professional and scientific relevance

This graduation project tries to answer the question of how a museum space can contribute to our individual and societal health through its design by fostering more meaningful connections and interactions. Because a healthy society is not only about minimizing death and disease and have access to good healthcare but also about the less commonly considered, but even more influential, factors such as genetics, the state of our environment, our income and education level or our relationships with friends and family.

The health of peoples lives is actually more determined by the context in which a combination of different factors like genetics, behavior and their physical, economic and social environment occur. However individuals often have very little power to change or influence this context, unlike the government with their legislative and executive power, they are able to create, design and shape this environment so that it is healthier for all individuals, communities and society. (Determinants of Health, n.d.). Other research has shown that the social determinants in particular can be of higher importance to our health than health care or lifestyle choices. Research even suggests that social determinants account for between 30 to 55% of our health (WHO, 2019). Social connections are vital to our individual and group health, mortality studies have shown that that being more socially connected (e.g. stronger network ties, social participation and sense of belonging) is associated with a 50% increased likelihood of survival. And on the other hand that social isolation and loneliness are associated with increased risk of depression, anxiety, physical inactivity and poor cardiovascular and immune function.

Moreover the effects of collective social ties and values on health at group level may go beyond those of the individual level. For example, community level trust and reciprocity have been linked to lower risk

of depression and higher self rated health among individuals. That is why it is extremely important for us in the field of architecture and urban planning to push, advocate and convince clients to create buildings and cities that fuel these social connections.



Figure 5, Dialogue

Ethical issues and dilemmas you may have encountered during graduation

I have not encountered any real ethical issue during graduation however one dilemma that has been a part of me since the beginning of this studio, or even since the beginning of the Architecture master, has been a slight cynicism towards the actual implementation and or effectiveness of the design choices I have made. I have found myself often trying to find a fundamental truth to what I was researching in order to make the right design choice. However I almost always found myself second guessing the outcome of those researches, after which I try and try again to come to an answer that feels right and correct which obviously never really happened. It is only when something is actually build we can asses if the design choices that were made actually worked as they intended to, as the British say the proof is in the pudding. It is within these finished projects which lies the extensive research and resulted design choices of the architect that if you really wanted to understand what is happening should be reengineered. This is why architectural research is often based around doing case study analysis, my problem with doing this is that I feel like I am only scratching the surface of the buildings complexity and coming up with results that are not thorough enough or even cliché, subsequently resulting in a superficial concept.

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