

Final Reflection

Reflection on the method and argumentation

The research plan that was completed by late January was centered around the theme exploring ways to exhibit artwork about the environment. While that topic remains crucial to the design project of creating a museum about climate change and the environment, the method of researching has since been expanded to better suit the needs of the design process. Rather than limiting the research to the types of environmental art and the ways of exhibiting it, the focus was later shifted to finding building techniques and designs that convey change and that respond to the stimulus around it. In short the research scope was expanded to include the subject of 'responsive design'. This was done in order to improve the argument behind building an art museum dedicated to the environment. The new approach looked to create a design that would actively respond to the nearby climatic conditions as a way to demonstrate, in a visible way, the climatic alterations or the worrying trends caused by a changing climate. The new method involved taking a climate change premise and looking for a material or process that can visualise it and be applying to the design of the museum. For instance, events of heavy rainfall are expected to become more severe and more frequent, so the research looked for materials, organisms, design features that react to water and show this trend.

Your reflection upon the feedback that was given by your mentors

Looking back at the feedback from the P2 presentation, two main comments stand out. First, the premise of being a sustainable building should become the main strategy and driving force behind the design, otherwise the project risks becoming 'superficial' and lacking meaning. Essentially, the key issue behind making a museum that aims to be environmentally conscious is how to justify the act of designing and build a new structure in the first place. One tutor suggested attempting to fulfill the project without using standard terms such as 'building', possibly as a way to stimulate new ways of thinking and avoiding relying on easy but not revolutionary solutions to the problem of sustainability. Secondly, it was also stressed at the P2 presentation that it should be avoided to take a very cynical position regarding the sustainability question. Rather than assuming that the future is doom and very little can be done about it, it is more effective to remain thoughtful but optimistic that something can be done to mitigate and prevent the worst case scenario for the environment. In architectural terms this means that it is preferable for the visitors to leave the museum with a powerful but somewhat hopeful experience or feeling that might be translated into some personal action or change in behaviour that is ultimately beneficial to the community and beyond.

How you have translated the feedback into your work

In order to implement the comments from the P2 presentation, the first step was to reframe the research topic to include ways of demonstrating change and climatic alterations in a visual fashion. Following this research method, led to the finding of several interesting materials and organisms that are responsive to climatic conditions and that have been previously employed in design projects (very few findings were applied to the built environment, most of the results were from the fields of art and design). The next step was to apply these findings to create a working concept of the museum and explore ways in which visitors can experience this change. The last step was to translate the concepts into working designs, with considerations for the site, approach, routing etc. It was key to note that this was not always a linear process and in fact most weeks involved part research and part applying the findings to the design and testing different options.

How you've learned from your own work

The past semester has been enlightening on various levels. On one hand it allowed me to discover fascinating projects and innovations that deal with the field of sustainability, responsive design and environmental art. Even though the research process was lengthy and many of the findings did not end up being used in the design, there were some enjoyable discoveries and that helped me become more comfortable with trusting the design process and understanding that it is ok if most ideas/ drawings end up not working out. The most important thing to remember is that every step is part of a process that will ultimately lead to the final design.

What is a museum/ the new museum for you

It was very important during the course of this semester that I reframe the preconceived notion of what a museum is in order to come up with a new way of thinking about and also designing a museum. The museum for environmental art that this project aims to create aims to offer a new type of experience to the visitor as a way to encourage reflection on their thoughts and habits concerning the environment and perhaps to trigger a change. The museum is conceived not as a traditional super sophisticated, stone clad, white cube modern art museum, but rather as a collection of pavilions that are shaped by and respond to the change in climatic conditions around it. To achieve this, parts of the museum were designed to intentionally erode and change, thanks to the forces of the rain and wind. This museum not only offers a new kind of experience but as part of it erodes and changes over time, the museum itself becomes something altered or 'new' with the passage of time.

How the final quarter of the year will be filled out

At this stage, although the concept and general setup of the museum are defined, there are still many refinements to be made. In the weeks to come special attention will be given to the structure and construction details and some close up drawings can be made. Additionally, the interior spaces can still be further developed in order to give each pavilion its own set of characteristics, such as in the exhibition spaces. In this case, I look forward to playing with lights and shadows that are experienced indoor and to develop the promenade experience. Finally, it will be important to create a set of final drawings and visualizations that can convey the concepts developed, it is especially important to find a way to communicate the idea of erosion and alteration of parts of the museum over time.