

Photo Simon Menges

Tanzhaus Zürich am Fluss Limmat von Barozzi Veiga aus Spanien
Tanzhaus Zurich at river Limmat by Barozzi Veiga from Spain



Photo Noam Galai/Getty Images for The World Around

Alberto Veiga (Barozzi Veiga) über öffentliche Räume
Alberto Veiga (Barozzi Veiga) on public spaces

Architecture's Now, Near and Next – The World Around Conference

Tulay Atak

How can architecture act as a medium and a format that enables narratives about the world we live in? The World Around conference at the Times Center in New York brought together a diverse group of architects, designers, artists and curators whose works concern not only architecture, but also the many fields beyond the boundary of the discipline.

The first session, "Reconnecting with the World Around" included presentations by Paola Antonelli, Xu Tiantian, Michael Wang, Josh Begley, David OReilly, Ibrahim Mahama, Julia Watson and Junya Ishigami. The discussed projects highlighted different contemporary issues, whether revitalizing the rural areas with "architectural acupuncture" in the work of Xu Tiantian, addressing the disappearance of ecosystems in the work of Wang, tackling the rise of national borders in a world connected by Google as mentioned by Begley, or the necessity to think of infrastructure differently in the work of Watson. Perhaps the most provocative presentation was OReilly's "Everything" – a simulation game, where players can assume the role of anything in the universe.

Elizabeth Diller and Catherine Ince then followed up on the new V&A East Collection and Research Center at London's East Bank development. The project integrates storage, gallery, studies, classroom, workshop and lab spaces and makes the collection of V&A available and accessible to the public. Not strictly a museum – but a hybrid between a collection, storage and educational institution – the project aims to inspire exploration of cultural heritage and its diversity. The project by DS + R emphasizes the possibility of discovery by packing

public, economical, environmental

the collection into a dense mass and excavating the spaces for the public. The collection is revealed either by means of proximity or by technological devices such as cameras and robot arms.

The final session, titled "Reconstructing the World Around", included presentations by Emmanuel Pratt, Cecilia Puga, Something & Son, Barozzi Veiga, Noura Al Sayeh-Holtrop and Shohei Shigematsu. Two contributions stood out as redefining reconstruction today. The Spanish architecture practice Barozzi Veiga, presented the recently completed Tanzhaus Zurich (architektur.aktuell 12/2019), a building comprising of a plinth providing a new ground, a new connection to the Limmat River as well as the architectural spaces of the dance studios. Emmanuel Pratt presented his "Sweet Water Foundation" and "Growing a Neighborhood" project that transforms vacant lots into ecologically and economically productive and sustainable places by means of urban agriculture, education, architecture and construction.

One thing missing throughout the day was a conversation with and for the audience. The provocative and compelling line-up of speakers presented current and near-future issues and a convincing menu of strategies with which to tackle them. A conversation among the presenters or a conversation with the audience could have yielded possible openings toward other questions. Perhaps the moment now requires a multifaceted description of the world we are living in, which the conference presented. A conversation could have initiated the world we might want to be living in.