

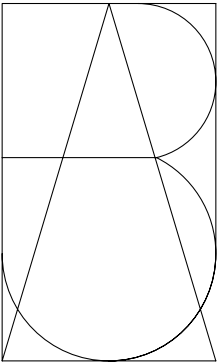
# FOREWORD

# PROJECTS

|                                                              |     |
|--------------------------------------------------------------|-----|
| 1401_EDOUARD MALINGUE GALLERY (CENTRAL)                      | 8   |
| 1607_EDOUARD MALINGUE GALLERY (WEST BUND)                    | 20  |
| 1701_HART HAUS                                               | 30  |
| 1808_CAO FEI: A HOLLOW IN A WORLD TOO FULL                   | 42  |
| 1816_CONTAGIOUS CITIES: FAR AWAY, TOO CLOSE                  | 52  |
| 1817_BOOKED: TAI KWUN CONTEMPORARY'S HONG KONG ART BOOK FAIR | 58  |
| 1821_KIANG MALINGUE (WAN CHAI)                               | 64  |
| 1901_39 KING'S ROAD                                          | 82  |
| 1903_CAO FEI: STAGING THE ERA                                | 96  |
| 1904_CAO FEI ARTIST STUDIO                                   | 114 |
| 1907_2019 UABB                                               | 124 |
| 2005_UNSCHEDULED                                             | 132 |
| 2013_BAY WALK ART PROJECT                                    | 144 |
| 2103_PROJECT OASIS                                           | 152 |
| 2113_PHD GROUP                                               | 168 |
| 2116_KIANG MALINGUE (TIN WAN)                                | 178 |
| 2313_CAO FEI: TIDAL FLUX                                     | 192 |
| 2404_SUPPER CLUB                                             | 202 |

# CONVERSATIONS

|                                          |     |
|------------------------------------------|-----|
| QUIET INNOVATION                         |     |
| WITH ROBERT-JAN VAN SANTEN               | 210 |
| ONTOLOGICAL HIPPOCAMPUS                  |     |
| WITH YSABELLE CHEUNG & WILLEM MOLESWORTH | 219 |
| BUILDING UNCANNY WORLDS                  |     |
| WITH CAO FEI                             | 227 |
| DECONSTRUCTING THE ART SPACE CANON       |     |
| WITH LORRAINE KIANG & EDOUARD MALINGUE   | 232 |



# PROJECT MAPS

|               |     |
|---------------|-----|
| BEIJING       | 242 |
| HONG KONG     | 243 |
| SHANGHAI      | 244 |
| SHENZHEN EAST | 245 |
| SHENZHEN WEST | 246 |

# PROJECT LIST

# BIOGRAPHIES

|                       |     |
|-----------------------|-----|
| CHARLOTTE LAFONT-HUGO | 248 |
| GILLES VANDERSTOCKEN  | 252 |

# CREDITS

# AN ALTERNATE ROUTE TO BEAUTY: TO REVEAL, TO INTERVENE AND TO REINTERPRET

BY CHARLES LAI, PHD  
ARCHITECTURAL HISTORIAN  
& ARCHITECT (UK)

The pursuit of beauty in architecture has been a central preoccupation of the architectural discipline since the origin of the field. Interestingly, the definition of what constitutes beauty in architecture has constantly shifted throughout history. This is especially the case since the dawn of modernity, as architecture as a discipline expanded beyond classical notions of aesthetics. Modern architects became increasingly conscious of the impact of architecture and its construction on society, and attempted to expand architecture's influence into the socio-political realms of the modern world. In his work "Ornament and Crime", Adolf Loos argued that ornamentation (embodiment of architectural beauty in classical notions) can only be valid if the use of social resources spent on their production can be justified in relation to the needs and values of modern society<sup>1</sup>. More recently, with the rise of digital culture in the architectural discipline, architects have begun to question the use of excessive complexity in the production of architectural spaces. They advocate a return to more simple, practical, and fit-for-purpose designs that are

1. In "Ornament and Crime", Loos discussed how the production of ornaments was irrelevant to modern society, and was harmful to the national economy and labour conditions of Austria.

Loos, Adolf. *Ornament and Crime*, Penguin Books Limited, 2019. (Originally published in 1913).

conscious of the social and economic impact of construction, rather than indulging in overly-designed forms.

To lay audiences, the rugged and austere aesthetics of BEAU's work may seem to contradict the popular notion of beauty. The images of BEAU's projects are perhaps more akin to Brutalist architecture, which was heavily criticised by many but has recently received renewed attention in the global movement towards waste and consumption reduction. Similar to the socio-political visions of Brutalist architects in the 1960s, this recent *revival* of Brutalist aesthetics responds to the global call for adaptive reuse of buildings as a way to reduce waste and carbon emissions from concrete and steel production and consumption in construction activities. Rather than pursuing flashy, disposable designs, BEAU's work embraces a more durable, sustainable approach that prioritises function and longevity over transient trends. While this aesthetic may not appeal to all, it represents BEAU's response to the awareness of the environmental impact of construction and a desire for more responsible, thoughtful design solutions.

It is against this background I will propose a deeper reading of BEAU's projects beyond its images. And to start with, I propose to read their projects through three *actions*, or strategies they most often deploy: to reveal, to intervene, and to reinterpret.

## TO REVEAL

One of the most obvious traits of BEAU's work since the beginning of the practice is the bare, stripped-down quality of the architectural shell that constitutes the space. Depending on the nature of the project, adaptation or newly built, this bareness is either achieved through a reductive process, by demolishing or stripping away elements added by previous occupants, or through a restrained additive one, sometimes even leaving the entire shell untouched.

This strategy is particularly legible in their transformation of given sites, where unlike the typical approach in architecture and design, professionals being often pressured to make dramatic changes – both for marketing reasons and to justify their fees – BEAU took a different path. In this role, they functioned as an *archaeologist-curator*, unearthing



inherent qualities, selecting which elements to keep, remove or reveal, emphasizing certain features while stripping away the unwanted aspects.

For instance, in the Hart Haus (2018) project, traces of previous use and wear were intentionally retained, signifying the industrial past of the architectural space before it was transformed into an artist studio and exhibition space. Through this curation of the architectural container, what is often considered mundane or unwanted is excavated and highlighted, revealing the past of the building's shell before its current occupation. At the same time, the austere quality of the exposed surfaces can be seen as BEAU's critique of the common practice in Hong Kong's fast-paced commercial interior and architecture market, where *brand-new* interiors are created through excessive additions and claddings rather than thoughtful interventions.

#### TO INTERVENE

Another recurring trait found across BEAU's projects is the use of a lightweight grid or frame as an architectural intervention. The lightness of the frame resonates with the austere quality of the container, while the grid or frame, coupled with an infill material such as curtains or walls, transforms the spaces in dramatic ways. One of the most radical examples of this strategy is perhaps the exhibition design project for "Unscheduled" (2020). In this project, BEAU inserted a gridded system of arches into the heritage spaces of Tai Kwun, offering an effective and efficient solution that resolved the spatial, structural, and functional requirements of hosting exhibitions in these protected historic spaces. The gridded arches were a self-standing structure that required minimal fixings to the walls or floors, reducing disturbance to the heritage building while asserting a strong presence in the historic space, while partitioning the room into individual spaces for showcasing works from different artists.

Early projects often play a crucial role in shaping the design strategies and architectural details that define a practice as it grows. For instance, the nuances of Japanese architecture are deeply connected to the domestic projects where young architects in Japan spend years honing their specific sensitivity towards architectural spaces and materiality. In BEAU's case, it is clear that their design approach is

shaped by the gallery and exhibition projects they have specialised in since the beginning of the practice. In the Edouard Malingue Gallery (2016) in Shanghai, the bare architectural shell was defined functionally by the frames and infill wall surfaces. The design choice to detach the top of the walls from the ceiling allowed for visual continuity of the rhythmic ceiling light tubes, highlighting the relationship between the architectural shell as the container and the posts/frames/walls as autonomous *inserts* that give function to the space. Parts of the frames were deliberately left exposed, informing the audience of the partition structure while creating an in-between condition between solid and void. This strategy of austerity, expressed through both the visual outcome and the minimal use of structures, fixtures, and materials, was further developed in BEAU's subsequent exhibition design projects, such as "Cao Fei: A Hollow in a World too Full" (2018), "Contagious Cities: Architects Far Away, Too Close" (2019), and many others. The temporality of exhibition installations necessitated a flexible and minimal construction approach, which BEAU leveraged to create their architectural statements.

Contrary to the typical approach in white-cube galleries, where the architectural interiors are subdued, this intervention celebrated the tectonic expression that was originally created as a contingent solution to the temporality. Fixing points, structural frames, and counterweights, which are usually concealed, were revealed and became the focal points of the images they produced alongside the artworks. In other words, these interventions are at the same time passively serving their functional purposes and actively actuating on those functions. The interventions are purposely designed not as mere containers that are neutral, but as architectural objects whose materialities shape and engage their contents. This peculiar duality can be seen from the very start in BEAU's gallery and art exhibition projects.

#### TO REINTERPRET

From this perspective, BEAU's work can be seen as a continuation of the long-standing disciplinary discourse on the relationship between function, structure, and tectonic expressions. In the early 19th Century, French architectural theorist J.N.L. Durand illustrated the

potential of using a modularized grid as a universal system to generate architecture that could fulfil the ever-changing functional needs of modern society.<sup>2</sup>

While the functional universality of the structural frame was a central theme of the Modern Movement in architecture, architects shift their design focus on the specific ways in which the structural and material joinery of the posts and beams were resolved. By doing so, the tectonic expression of the materials employed to create the structure became the embodiment of design intentions and statements, casting meanings and effects onto the architectural spaces. For instance, in Mies van der Rohe's Farnsworth House, the plug welding of the steel frame successfully created an immaterial quality for the grid that reinforced its abstract quality as a spatial apparatus defining the space. Conversely, the socio-political visions of the Smithsons were embodied in the rudimentary, butt joints between the steel structure, exposed brick in-fills, and corrugated metal sheets.

Arguably, it is in the transformation projects that BEAU's most radical take on the architectural and material expression can be seen. In these projects, BEAU sought to reinterpret the typical reinforced concrete framing buildings of Hong Kong through meticulous articulation of the architectural details. For the facade of the *pencil tower* of 39 King's Road, the clarity and simplicity of the gridded design projects the logic of the building's structural framing onto its expression, while negotiating the complex building services, structural system, and regulations of Hong Kong, creating a simple yet powerful statement against the crowded, *chaotic* overtone of the city's urban scape. In Kiang Malingue (2019 – 2023), BEAU cuts the floor slab of a typical Hong Kong tenement building to reveal a *hidden* spatiality behind the rather unassuming outlook of the original facade, creating an unconventional double-height space. This seemingly simple gesture of removing a horizontal element is a complex and highly unorthodox procedure, especially under Hong Kong's notoriously stringent building control system.

The austere quality in the expressions of the bare containers and functional grids/frames sought to use the most simple and direct gestures to fulfil functional needs. More than a critique to

2. Refer to Durand's "Précis of the Lectures on Architecture" (1802 – 1805) for more details.

Durand, Jean-Nicolas-Louis. *Precis of the Lectures on Architecture; with Graphic Portion of the Lectures on Architecture*. Los Angeles, Calif: Getty Research Institute, 2000.

the culture of over-design and construction in the era of digital architecture and consumerism, the simplicity in BEAU's projects call for a return to the foundation of the discipline, in which the expression remains truthful to the material and construction, and to the site on which the architecture stands. In other words, BEAU's design strategies of revealing, intervening, and reinterpreting can also be seen as a set of architectural statement that is more than just to satisfy the functional needs of their clients. They are the practice's way to maintain a critical dialogue with the site, the city, and the discipline.

Charles Lai is an architect (RIBA) and researcher in the history and conservation of Hong Kong and Asian modern architecture. He received his PhD degree in architectural history from the University of Hong Kong Department of Architecture, and diploma degree from the AA School of Architecture in London. He currently teaches at the PolyU and the Lingnan University, and is a member of the DOCOMOMO HK Chapter. Charles is also founder and director of the architectural studio & heritage conservation consultancy, AONA, and co-founder of the digital marketing and experience curatorial company Culture Lab, focusing primarily on design, heritage conservation, research and curatorial works related to built heritage and architectural history. Finally, Charles also writes regularly for academic journals and columns. His research interests include the history of modern architecture in East and Southeast Asia, the material culture and history of *Shanghai plaster*, as well as the conservation of historical built heritages.

# EDOUARD MALINGUE GALLERY (CENTRAL)

DESCRIPTION

Located at the sixth floor of a typical office building in the Central District, this first collaboration between the Hong Kong-based gallery and BEAU focused on the tectonic potential and materiality of the existing space. The concrete ceiling was revealed and the original metallic false floor was intentionally kept as is. It was between these two surfaces that the main element of the project, known as *the wall*, was installed. This pristine white surface was drawn as a unique single line winding into the original envelope, defining and organising sub-spaces and functions. Proportions and pragmatic constraints dictated its dimension and turns. The wall didn't touch the ceiling, so as to emphasise its singularity and underline the fact that, in suggesting the existence of a backstage area, an art gallery is more than just an exhibition space. To emphasise these mechanisms, the wall was made as thin as possible, a proportion of 300 centimetres high by eight-point-five centimetres thick. To achieve this, its structure was *pushed out*, creating a repetitive pattern of stainless-steel poles on its outer side. If the external side was functional, integrating furniture and specific display, the inner one, receiving and displaying art, was plain and neutral. This duality was key to the project. It was expressed once, hence revealing itself, at the tension point between the public and private areas. This moment also coincided with the wall being the closest to the building's façade, re-establishing a visual relation with the city. Finally, a wooden meeting box was inserted at the plan's very core, purposely creating a *counterpoint* to the prevailing nature of the project, thanks to its domestic scale and material language.

PHOTO (ALL)  
Edouard Malingue Gallery,  
interior view,  
© Xu Liang Leon

DETAIL  
Edouard Malingue Gallery,  
post supporting wall and  
shelf fixation, scale 1/2

PLAN  
Edouard Malingue Gallery,  
layout, scale 1/200

SECTION  
Edouard Malingue Gallery,  
layout, scale 1/200

TYPE

Art gallery

YEAR

2014

ADDRESS

33 des Voeux Road  
Central  
Hong Kong

MISSION

Implementation of an art gallery in an office tower  
250 sq.m  
Built (demolished 2020)

TEAM

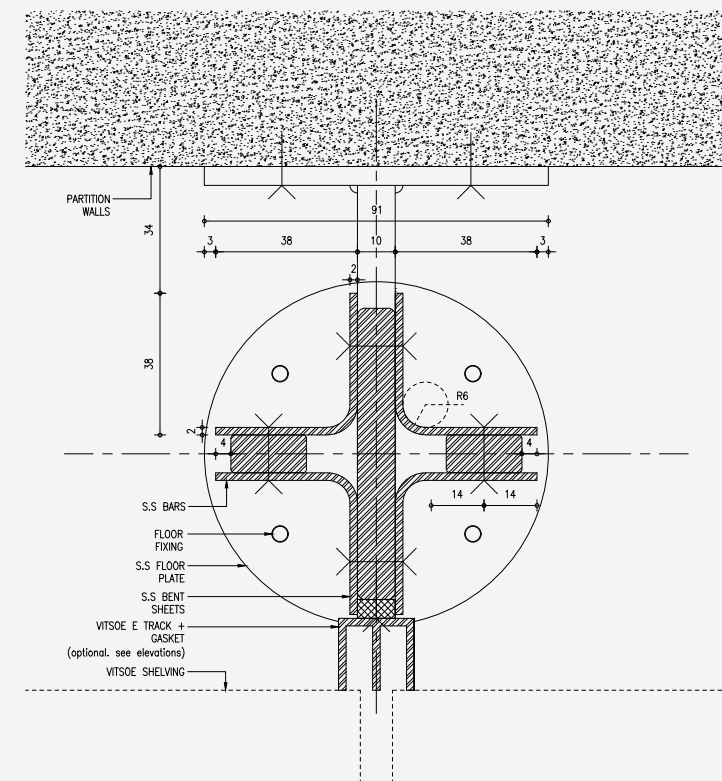
Client: Lorraine Kiang & Edouard Malingue  
Architect: BEAU  
Structural Engineer: Joseph Benedetti  
Acoustician: Thomas Scello  
Main Contractor: New Leaf Engineering  
Photographer: Xu Liang Leon





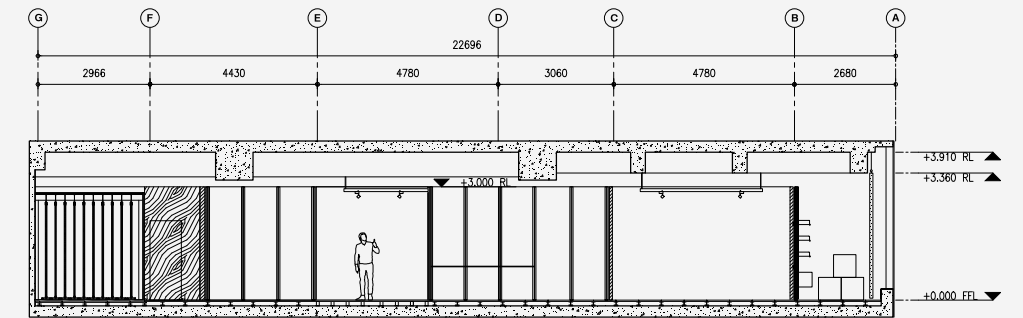
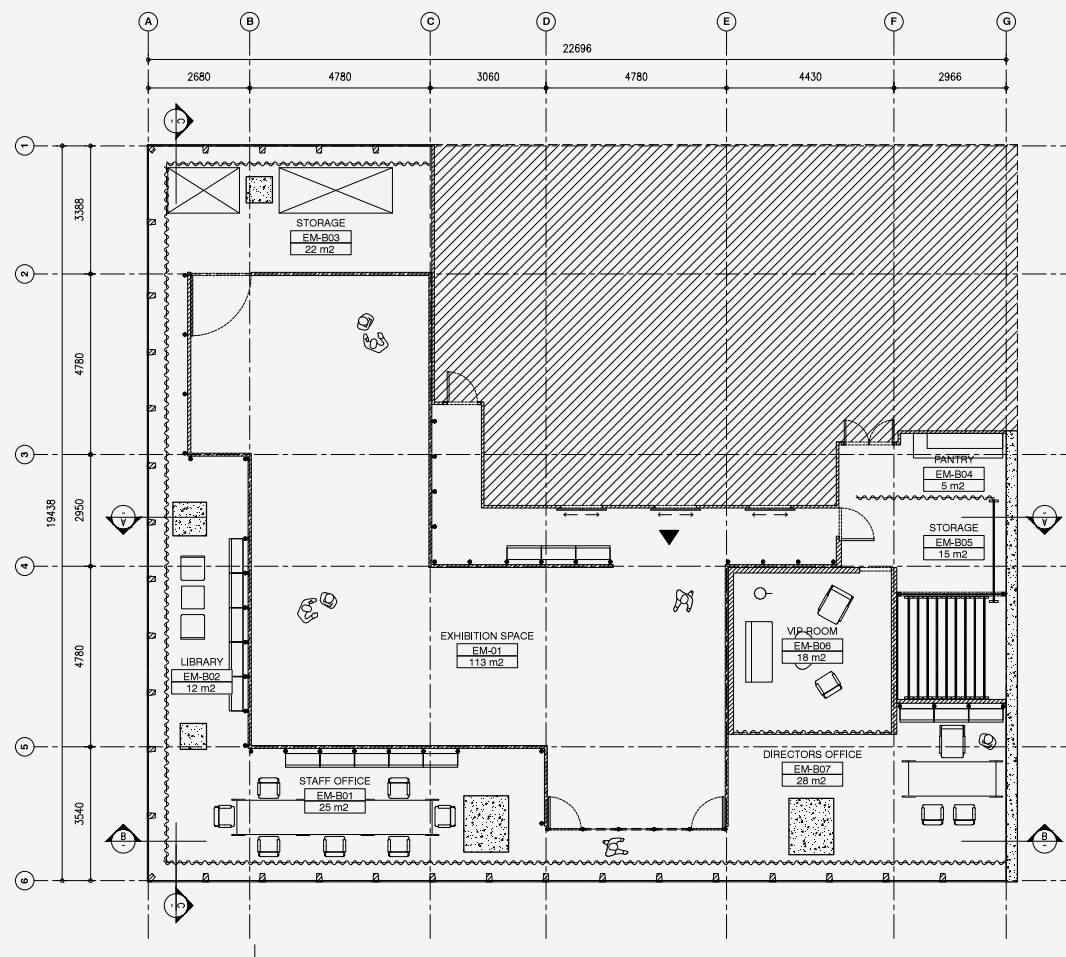




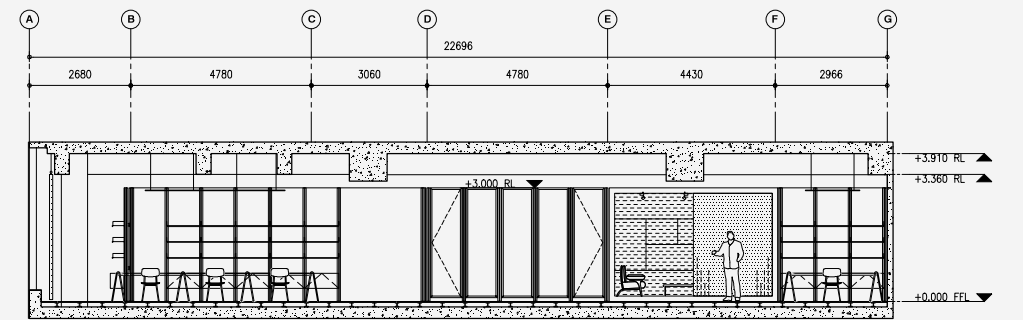




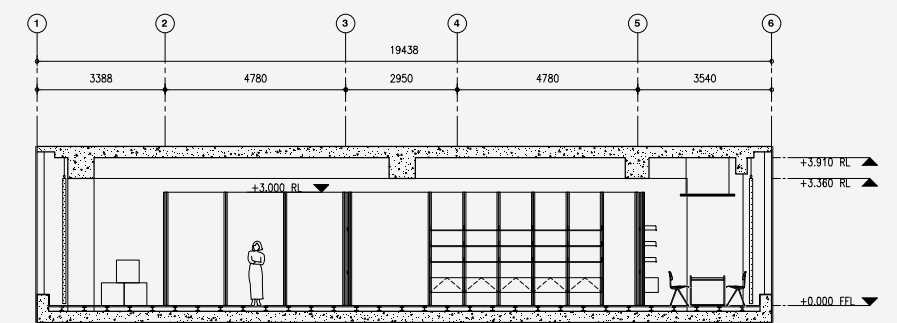




SECTION A



SECTION B



SECTION C



# EDOUARD MALINGUE GALLERY (WEST BUND)

DESCRIPTION

Located in a *post-mall* building along the West Bund Cultural Corridor in Shanghai's Xuhui District, the project was the second collaboration between the Hong Kong-based gallery and BEAU. As so, it elaborated on their previous discussions, especially a critical take on the nature of contemporary art galleries, the amount of means necessary to trigger their existence, and the extremely limited lives of such spaces in Asia. Tectonically and materially, the project experimented with the idea of literally merging with its context; not neutralising or romanticising it, but carefully discovering its potential and enhancing it with a few, ultimately necessary, adjustments. For the first intervention, a visibly thick floor was introduced to demarcate the exhibition area. This action generated an untouched *buffer zone* at the entrance and clarified the relationship between the building's perfectly regular existing structure and its strangely tilted envelope. The second intervention was related to the notion of flexibility and potential appropriation by artists and curators. A series of mountable/demountable posts, in tension between the floor and ceiling, were distributed according to a three-by-three metre grid. In between them, a series of linear light channels was installed as a purely pragmatic complement. These posts, a mere *souvenir* of the structure used at the gallery in Central District, defined an *order* and installed a *secondary scale* within the bare envelope, creating potential axis, sub-spaces, and perambulation phenomenon. The resulting system supported exhibition-related rooms, walls, filters, etc., constantly varying yet spatially and formally consistent, a principle BEAU sees as *flexibility through rigidity*.

PHOTO 1 & 2  
Edouard Malingue Gallery,  
installation view of Chou  
Yu-Cheng: Refresh, Sacrifice,  
New Hygiene, Infection, Clean,  
Robot, Air, Housekeeping,  
www.ayibang.com, Cigarette,  
Dyson, Modern People, courtesy  
the artist and Kiang Malingue  
© Zhang Hong

PHOTO 3  
Edouard Malingue Gallery,  
installation view of Éric Baudart:  
choo choo mama...,  
courtesy the artist  
and Kiang Malingue  
© JJY studio

DETAIL  
Edouard Malingue Gallery,  
flexible post system, scale 1/5  
  
ILLUSTRATION  
Edouard Malingue Gallery,  
axonometric view

TYPE

Art gallery

YEAR

2016

ADDRESS

Unit 2202, No.2878 Longteng Avenue  
Xuhui District  
Shanghai

MISSION

Implementation of an art gallery in a former shopping mall  
265 sq.m  
Built (demolished 2020)

TEAM

Client: Lorraine Kiang & Edouard Malingue  
Architect: BEAU  
Main Contractor: Runwang  
Curtain Contractor: Showtex

SECTION

Edouard Malingue Gallery,  
layout, scale 1/200

PLAN

Edouard Malingue Gallery,  
layout, scale 1/200



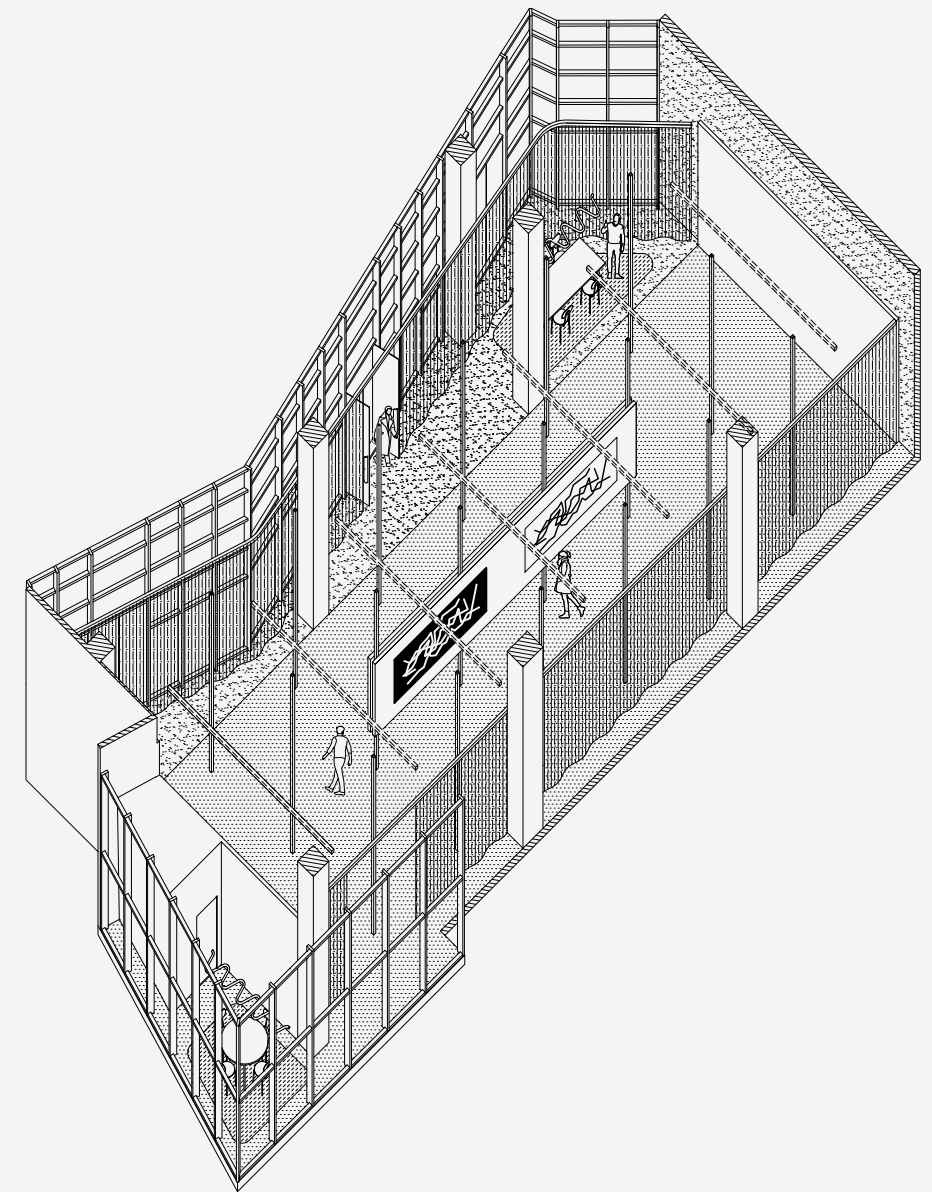
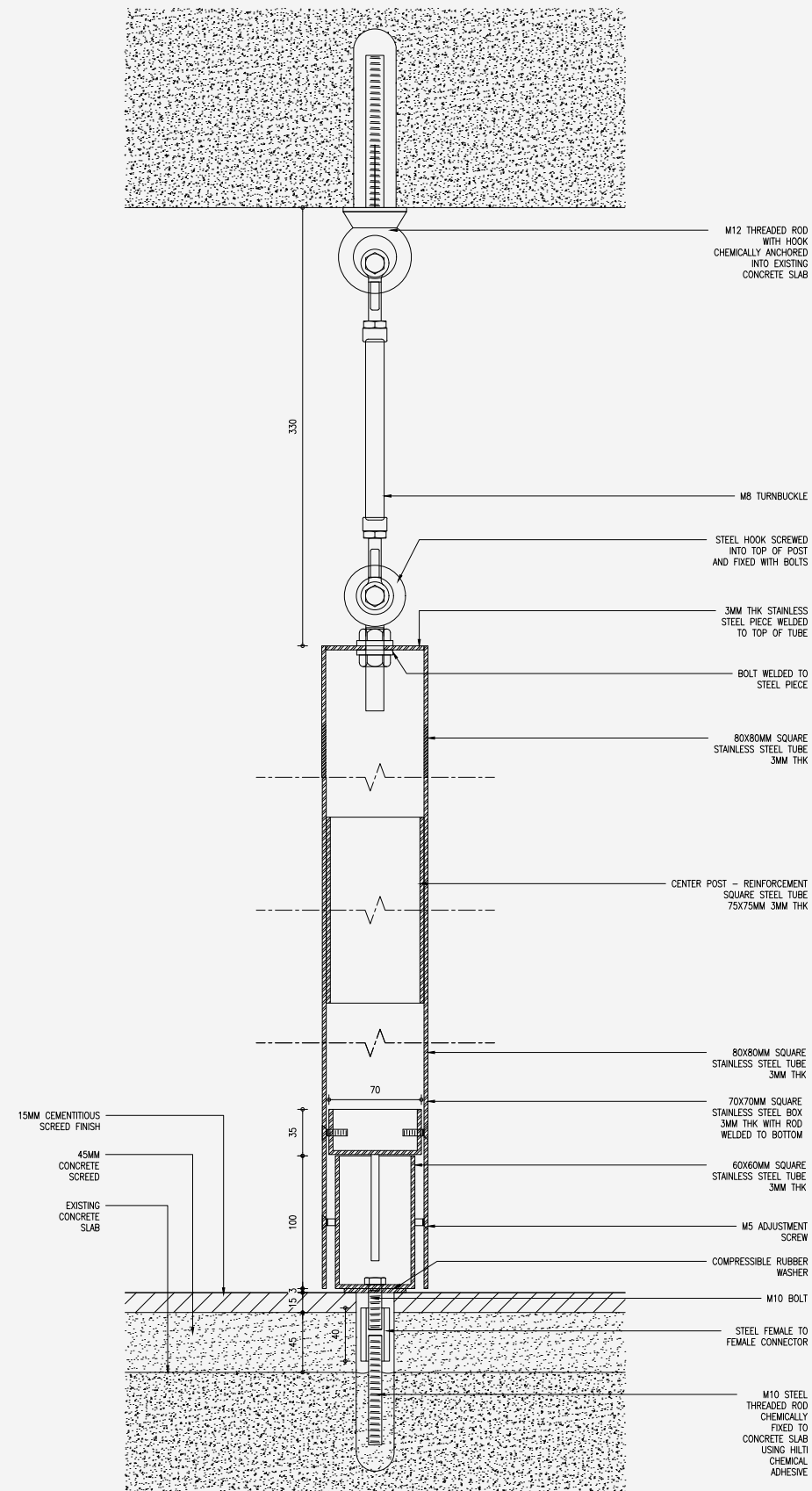


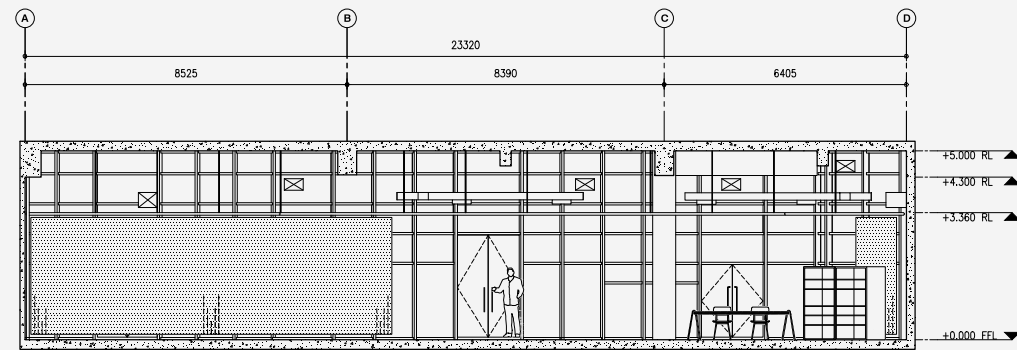




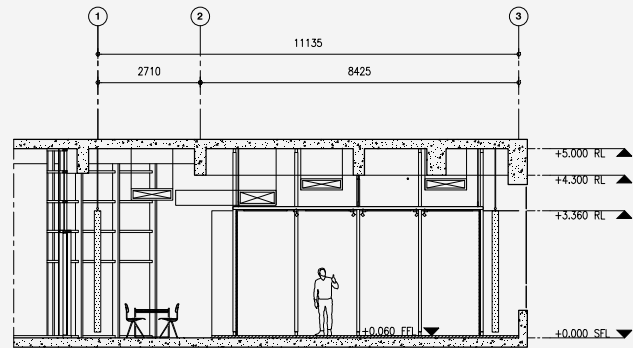




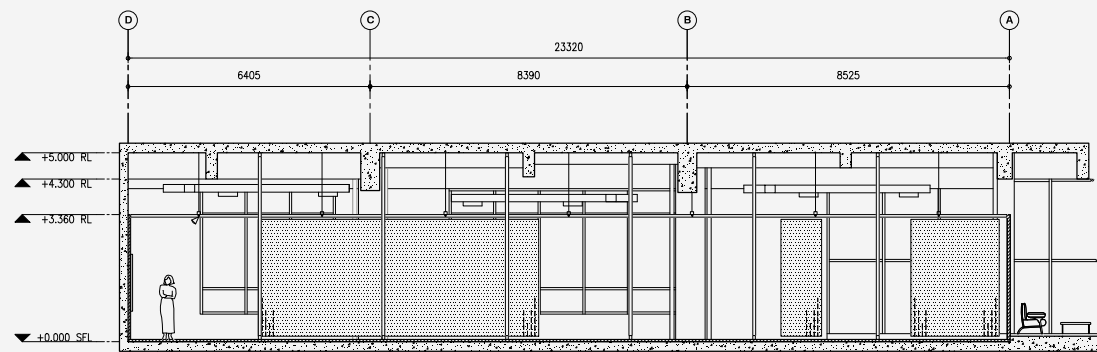




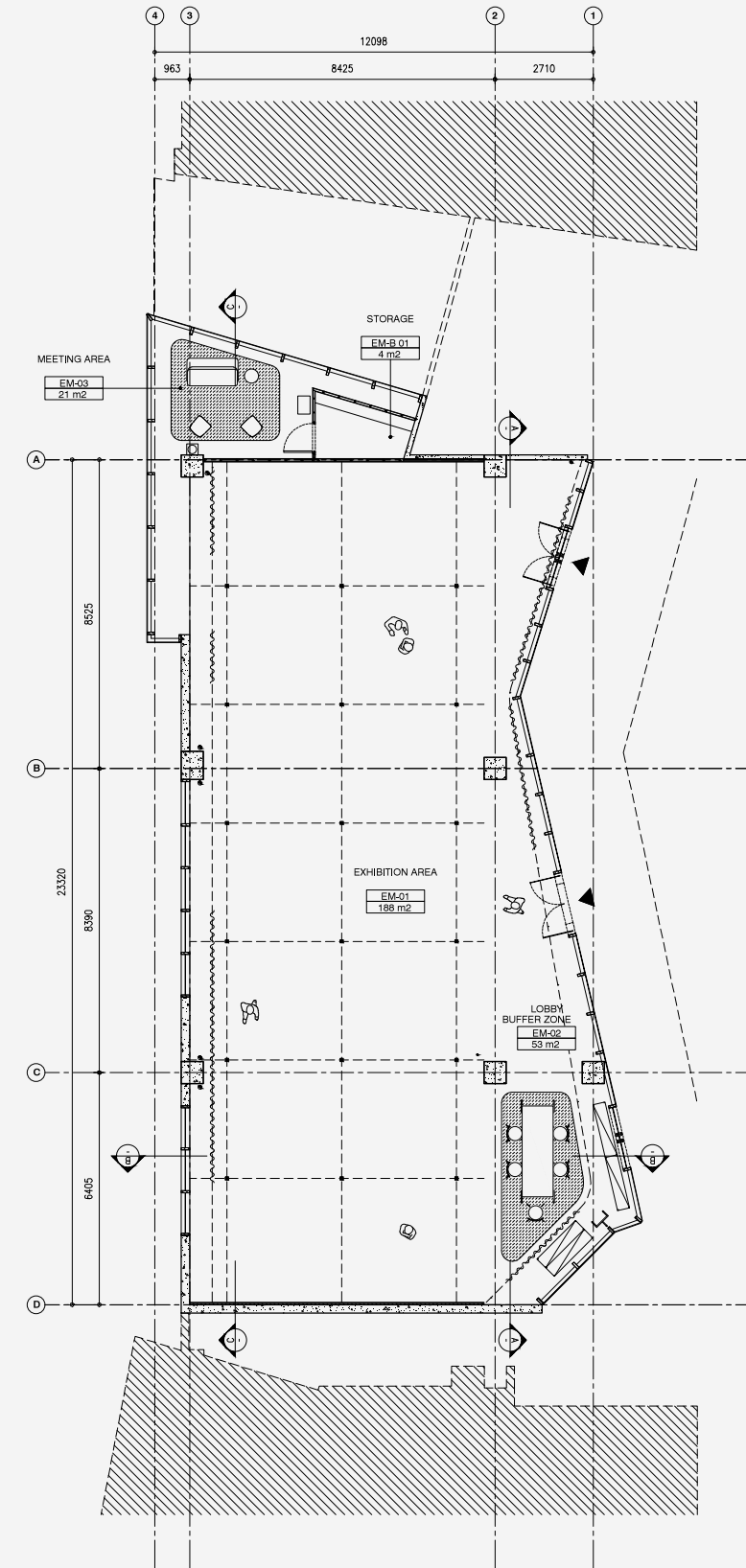
SECTION A



SECTION B



SECTION C





# HART HAUS

## DESCRIPTION

Located in the Kennedy Town District, Hart Haus is, per the client's description, a *modern-day art house* dedicated to the process of creation. Programmatically, it proposes a mix of ateliers and exhibition spaces, including small facilities as a lounge, kitchen, and library. Situated on top of a typical industrial building's podium, the space combines indoor and outdoor areas, a rare condition that was used as the generator for the main spatial strategy. As so, the layout plays with the idea of *layers* and *transversality*. The ateliers, implemented along the two main façades, benefit from natural light and garden access while also open to a central space that can be used for exhibitions, events, and workshops. This layering process is emphasised thanks to the use of transparent and translucent materials that separate, yet connect the various spaces. Generous double doors allow for permeability between them; in the most extreme scenario the polycarbonate partitions can also be deinstalled. Materially and constructively speaking, the project deploys notions as *sensible archaeology* and *process traces* combined with very minimal alterations and means. These *surgical* gestures, necessary to give the space its new function, were assumed and most of the original material was kept untouched. Standard or proprietary elements, as a shelving system, were hijacked to become a kitchen, a library, and a partition. Aside from this specific intervention, most of the space was left as *unfunctionalised* as possible to allow for full appropriation by its users.

PHOTO (ALL)  
Hart Haus,  
interior view,  
© Xu Liang Leon

DETAIL  
Hart Haus,  
polycarbonate  
partition, scale 1/5

ILLUSTRATION  
Hart Haus,  
axonometric view

PLAN  
Hart Haus,  
layout, scale 1/200

## TYPE

Artist atelier

## YEAR

2018

## ADDRESS

3/F, Cheung Hing Industrial Building  
12P Smithfield Road  
Kennedy Town  
Hong Kong

## MISSION

Implementation of collective artist ateliers  
in a former factory building  
970 sq.m (GFA 700 sq.m)  
Built

## TEAM

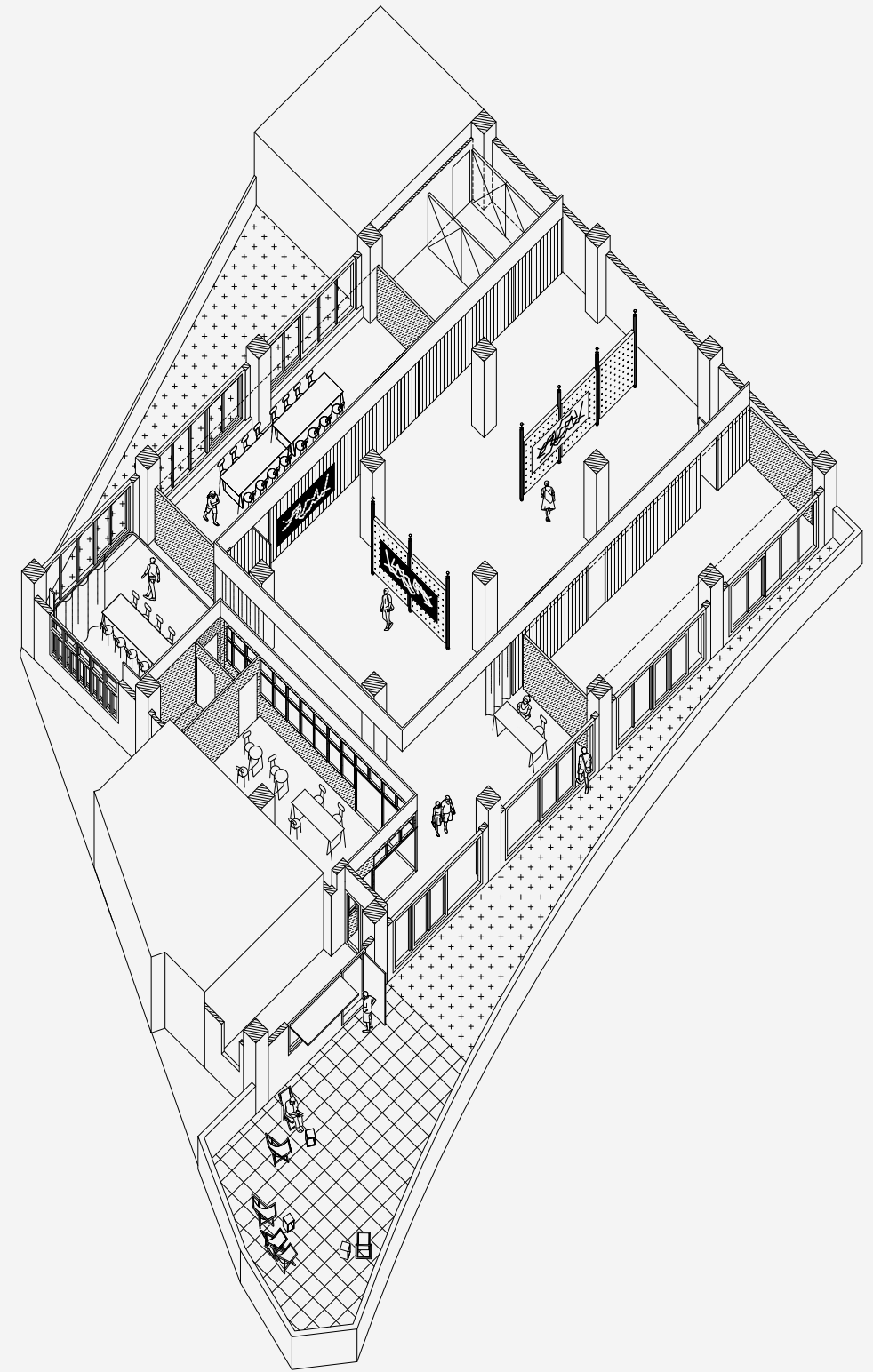
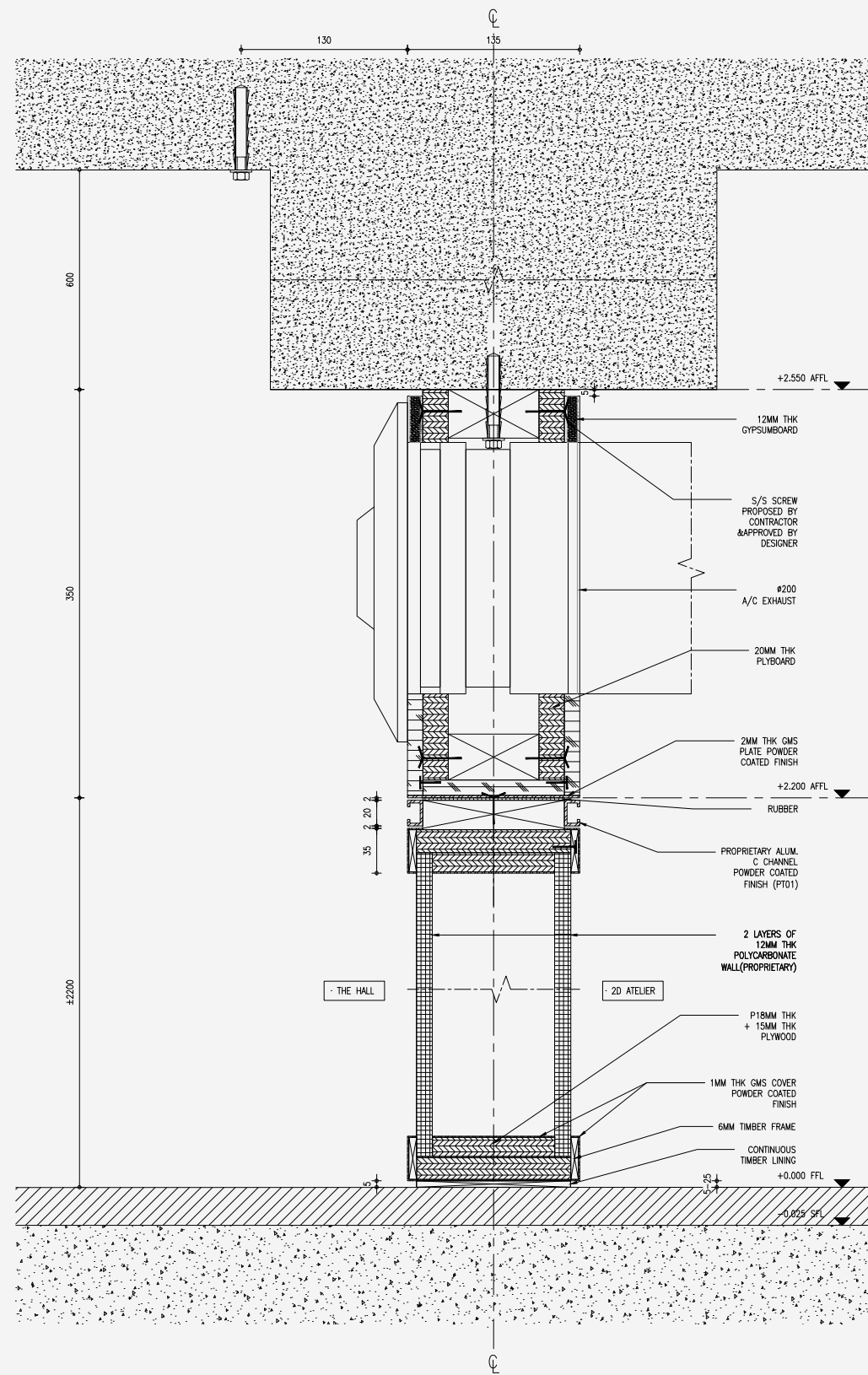
Client: Kristine and Vicky Li (Hart Collective)  
Architect: BEAU  
Main Contractor: KIN'S Building Materials & Contracting Ltd.  
Photographer: Xu Liang Leon





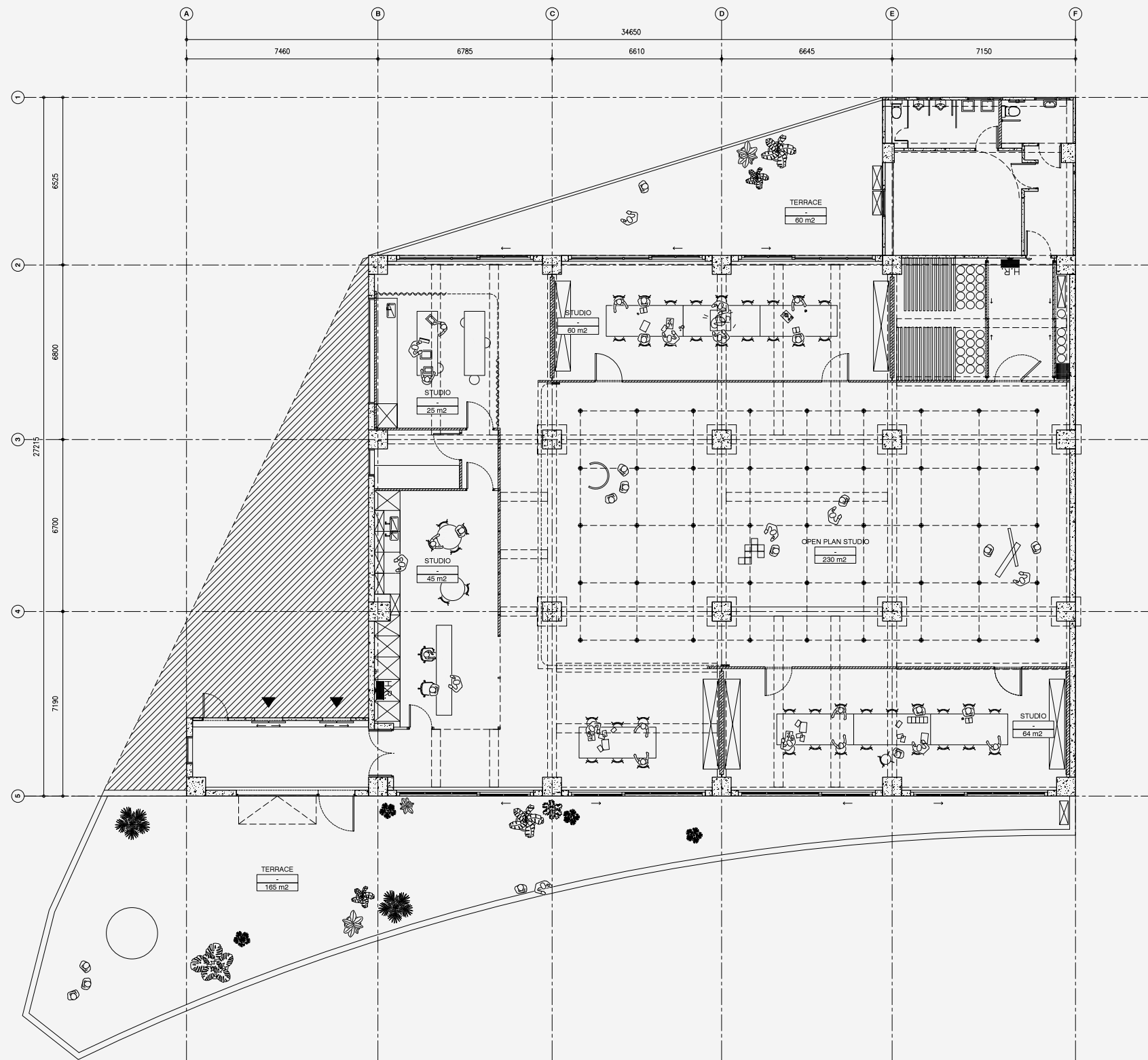


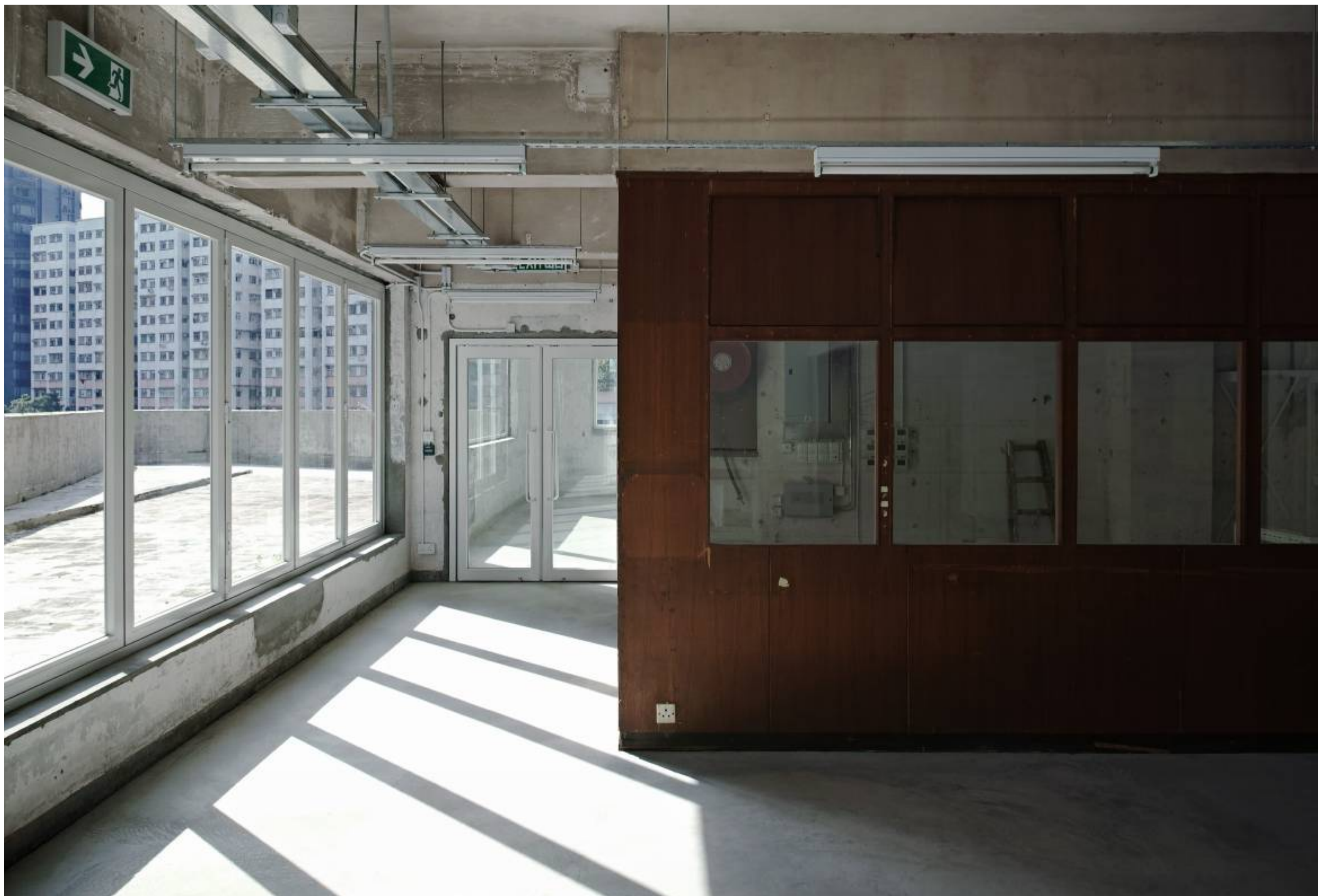














# CAO FEI: A HOLLOW IN A WORLD TOO FULL

## DESCRIPTION

Cao Fei's first large institutional solo show in Asia was triggered by a newly-commissioned film that engages directly with the history of Tai Kwun, a Hong Kong heritage building and former police station turned art space by Herzog & de Meuron in 2018. The artwork that unfolded, entitled "Prison Architect", was envisioned as a poetic dialogue across time between two characters, a prisoner and an architect, respectively representing the building complex's past as a judicial and penal institution, and its future as a cultural institution. The exhibition design intentionally blurred the distinction between the existing site, at the time still under construction, and the deployed stage sets, movie props or artworks, reinforcing the parallels evoked in the film. As the first collaboration between Cao Fei and BEAU, the project combined the artist's fascination with urban infrastructure, architectural elements, and ambiguous *blown-up models* together with the architect's overly material and construction-based language, a path that will be further explored in their subsequent joint efforts to challenge the stereotypical language usually deployed in museums.

## TYPE

Exhibition

## YEAR

8 September 2018 – 4 January 2019

## VENUE

Tai Kwun Contemporary  
10 Hollywood Road  
Central  
Hong Kong

## PRESENTED BY

UCCA

## CURATOR

Xue Tan  
Philip Tinari

## ARTIST

Cao Fei

## TEAM

Exhibition Architect: BEAU  
Graphic Designer: HATO  
Contractor: EXCEL  
Photographer: Xu Liang Leon

## PHOTO (ALL)

Installation view of Cao Fei:  
A Hollow in a World too Full,  
courtesy the artist,  
© Xu Liang Leon

## PLAN

Cao Fei: A Hollow in  
a World too Full,  
layout, scale 1/200

## ILLUSTRATION 1

Cao Fei: A Hollow in  
a World too Full,  
axonometric view of  
scenography objects

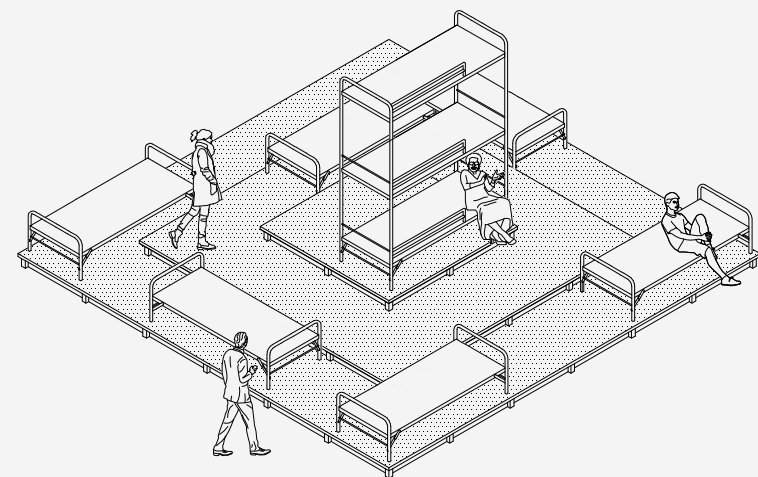
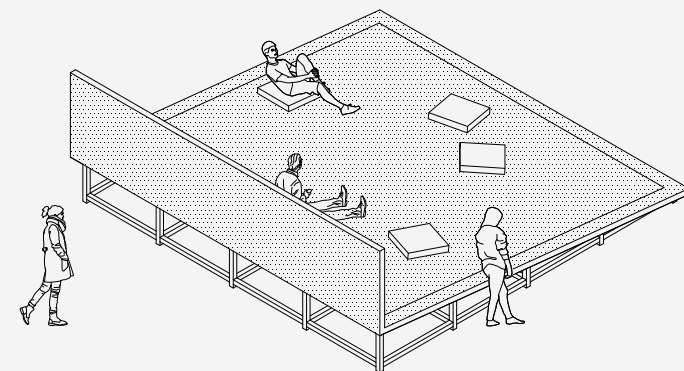
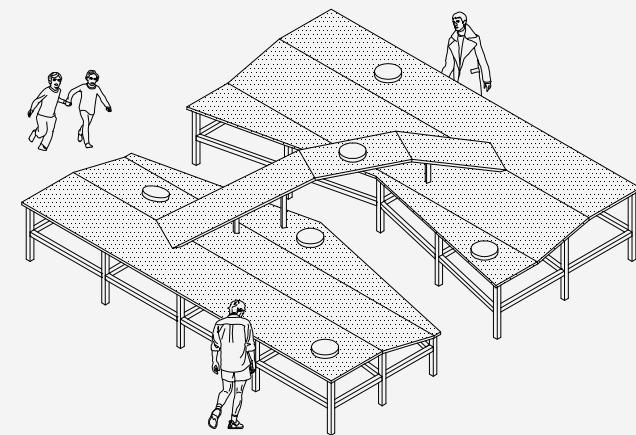
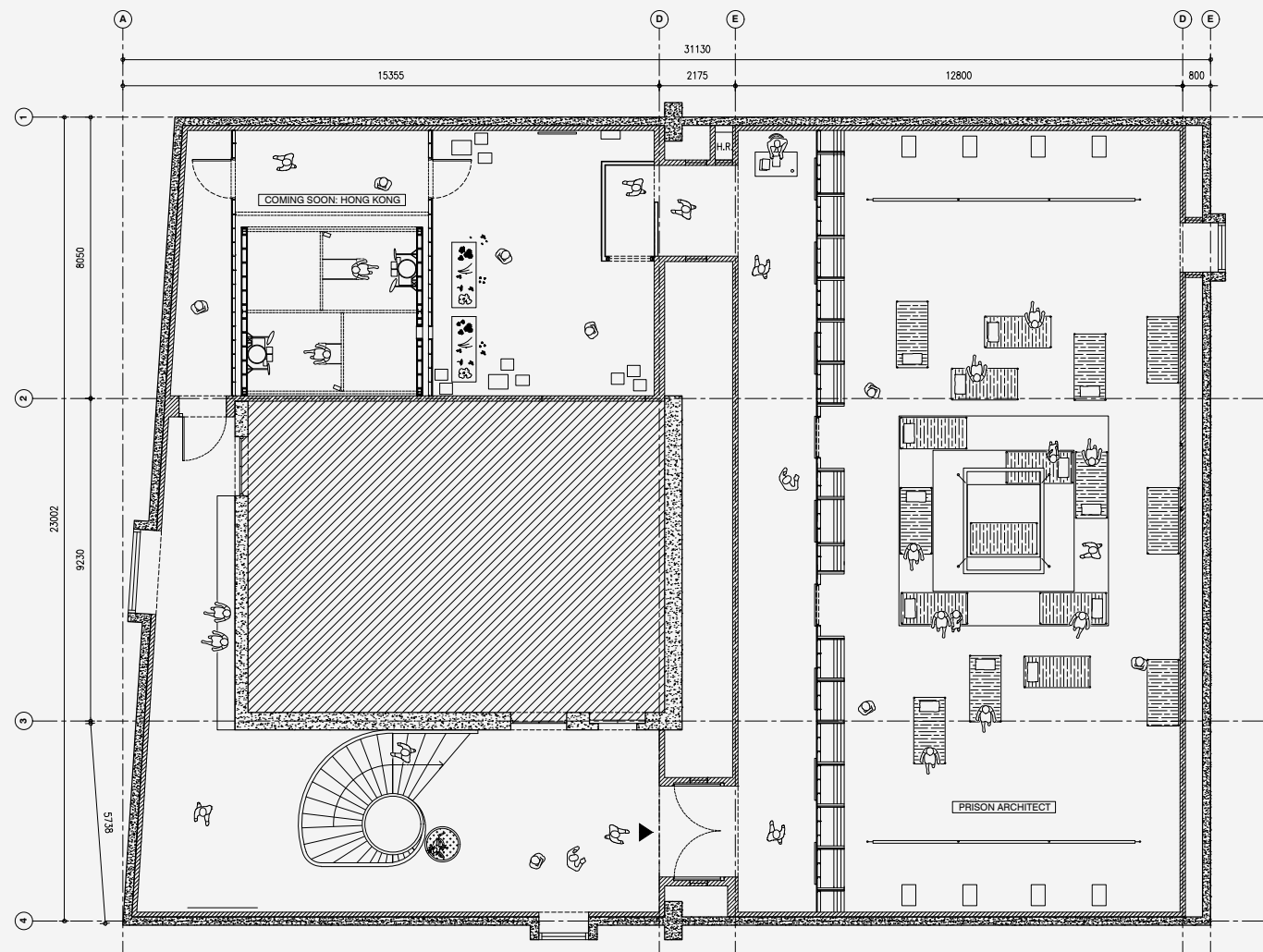
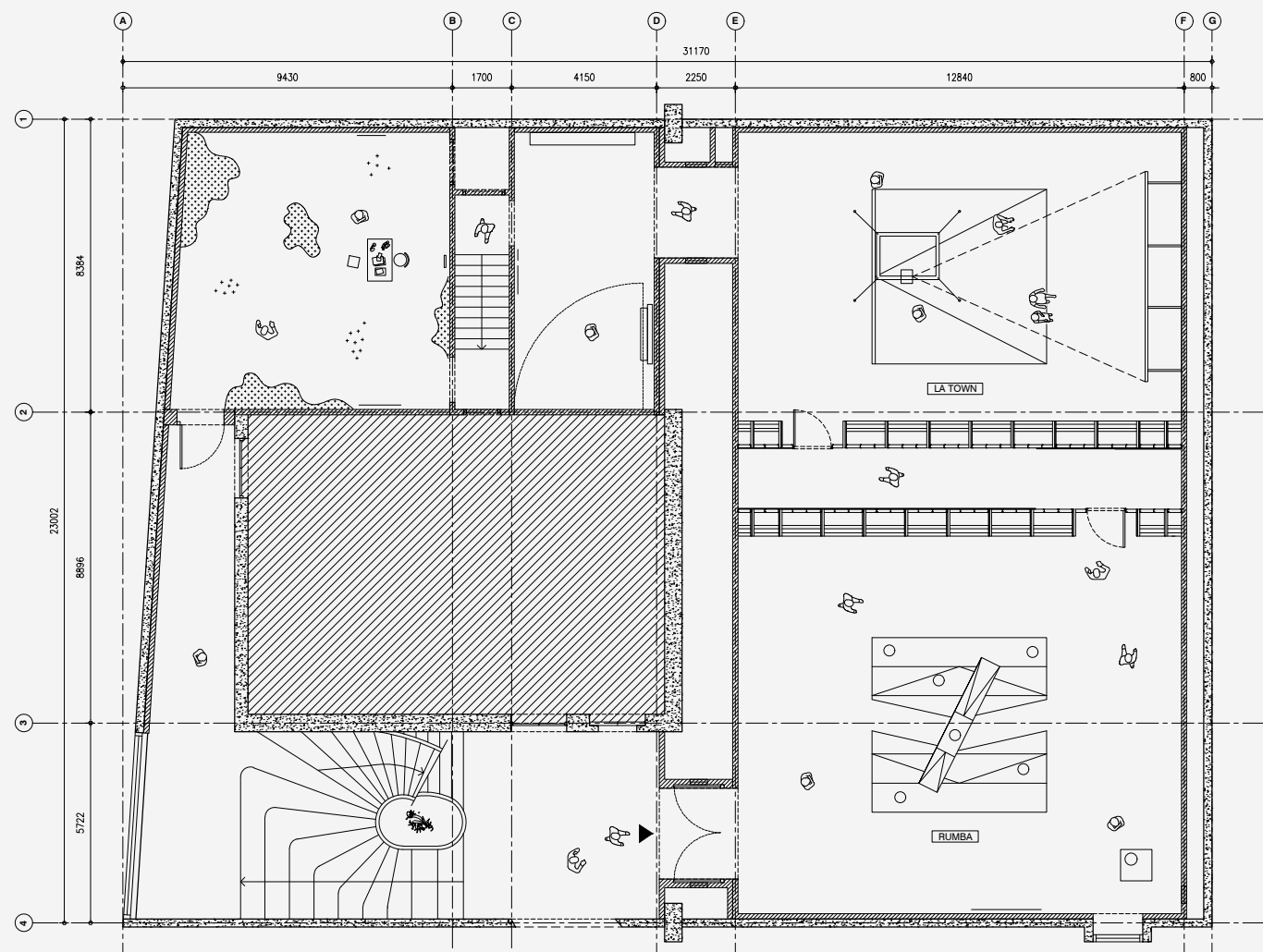
## ILLUSTRATION 2

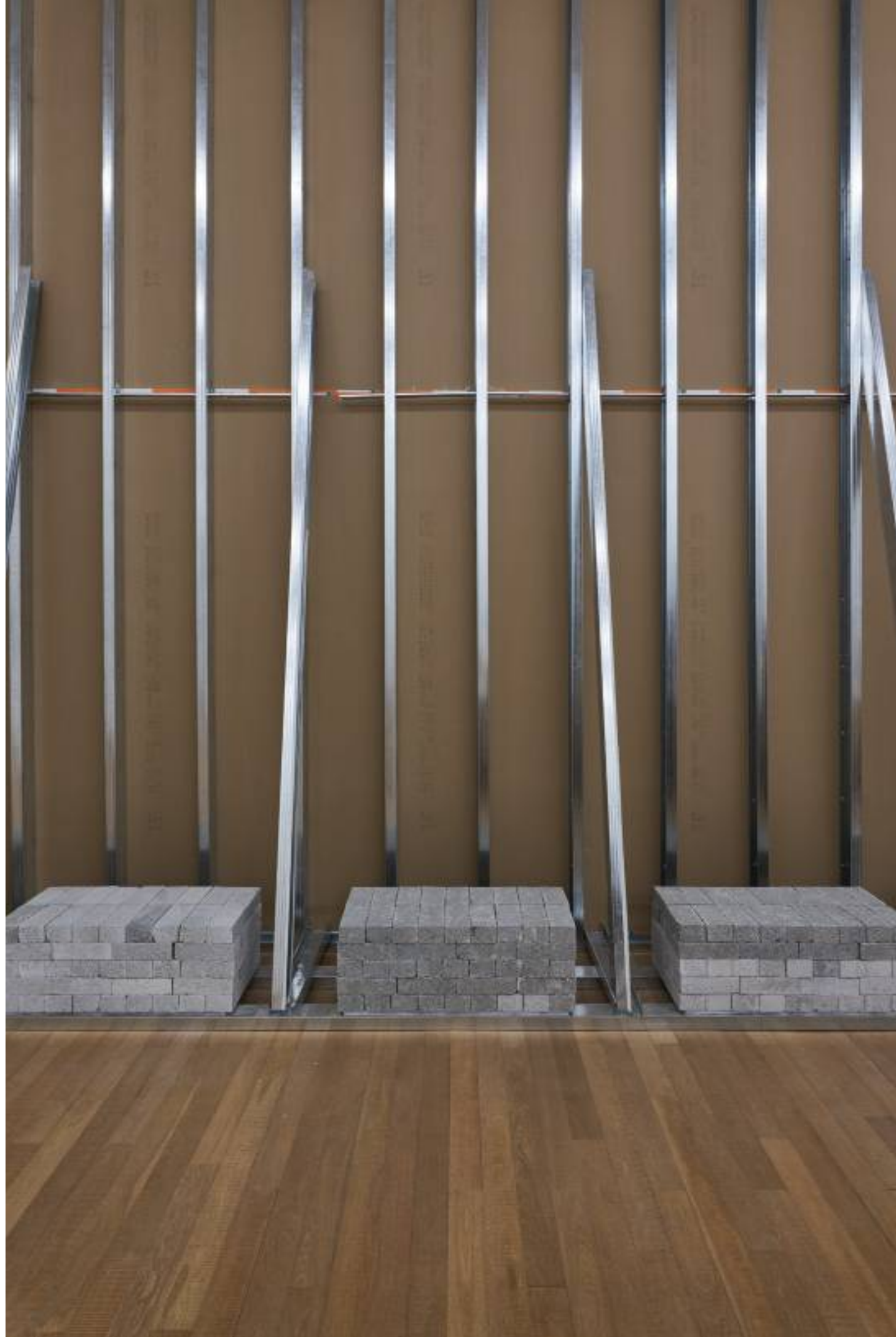
Cao Fei: A Hollow in  
a World too Full,  
axonometric view of  
scenography partition



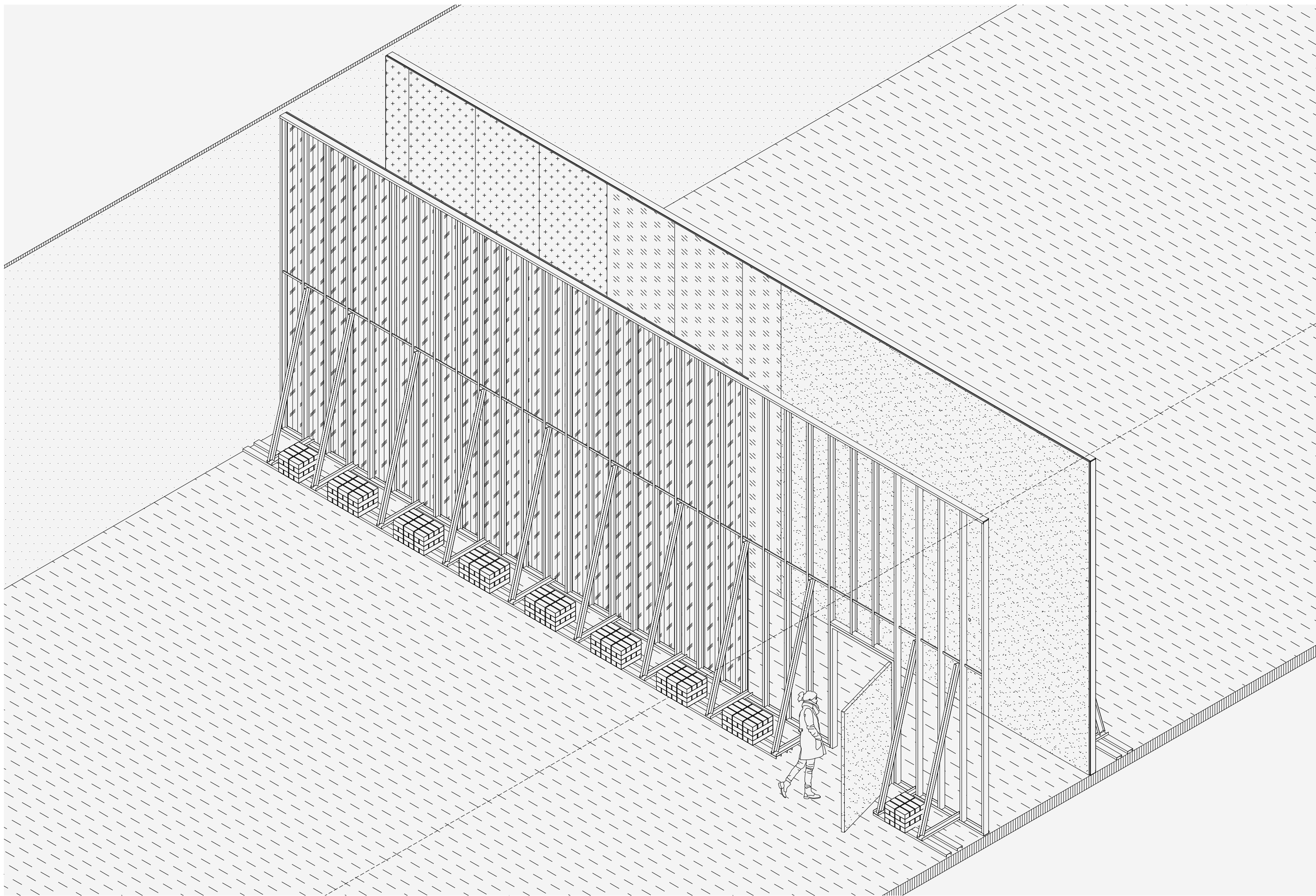












# CONTAGIOUS CITIES: FAR AWAY, TOO CLOSE

## DESCRIPTION

Taking place at Lower E Hall, one of the most impressive heritage infrastructures of Tai Kwun, this *exhibition device* was built in the context of “Contagious Cities”, an international collaborative project that aimed to support locally-grounded conversations around global challenges of epidemic responses. The main spatial intervention was based on the definition of a perimeter. As so, a temporary self-standing volume was inserted in the semi-covered area of the historical hall, providing a clear limit to the exhibition area and a flexible support for its content. Materialised as a semi-open fence balanced by buttresses, its construction involved standard components and materials partially reused from the previous installations “Cao Fei: A Hollow in a World too Full” and “Booked” that also took place at Tai Kwun Contemporary. The whole experimented on establishing a formal and tectonic relation with the site by echoing Lower E Hall’s rigid grid of columns and some of their ubiquitous features such as their capitols and pedestals.

## TYPE

Exhibition

## YEAR

26 January – 21 April 2019

## VENUE

Tai Kwun Contemporary & Lower E Hall  
10 Hollywood Road  
Central  
Hong Kong

## PRESENTED BY

Wellcome Trust

## CURATOR

Art exhibition curated by Ying Kwok  
Heritage exhibition curated by Tai Kwun  
Heritage Department

## ARTIST

Blast Theory, Oscar Chan Yik Long, Eastman Cheng,  
Enoch Cheng, Cheuk Wing Nam, Gayle Chong Kwan,  
Chou Yu-cheng, Firenze Lai, Angela Su, Wang Sishun

## TEAM

Exhibition Architect: BEAU  
Graphic Designer: HATO  
Contractor: EXCEL  
Photographer: Xu Liang Leon

PHOTO (ALL)  
Contagious Cities:  
far away too close,  
scenography view,  
© Xu Liang Leon

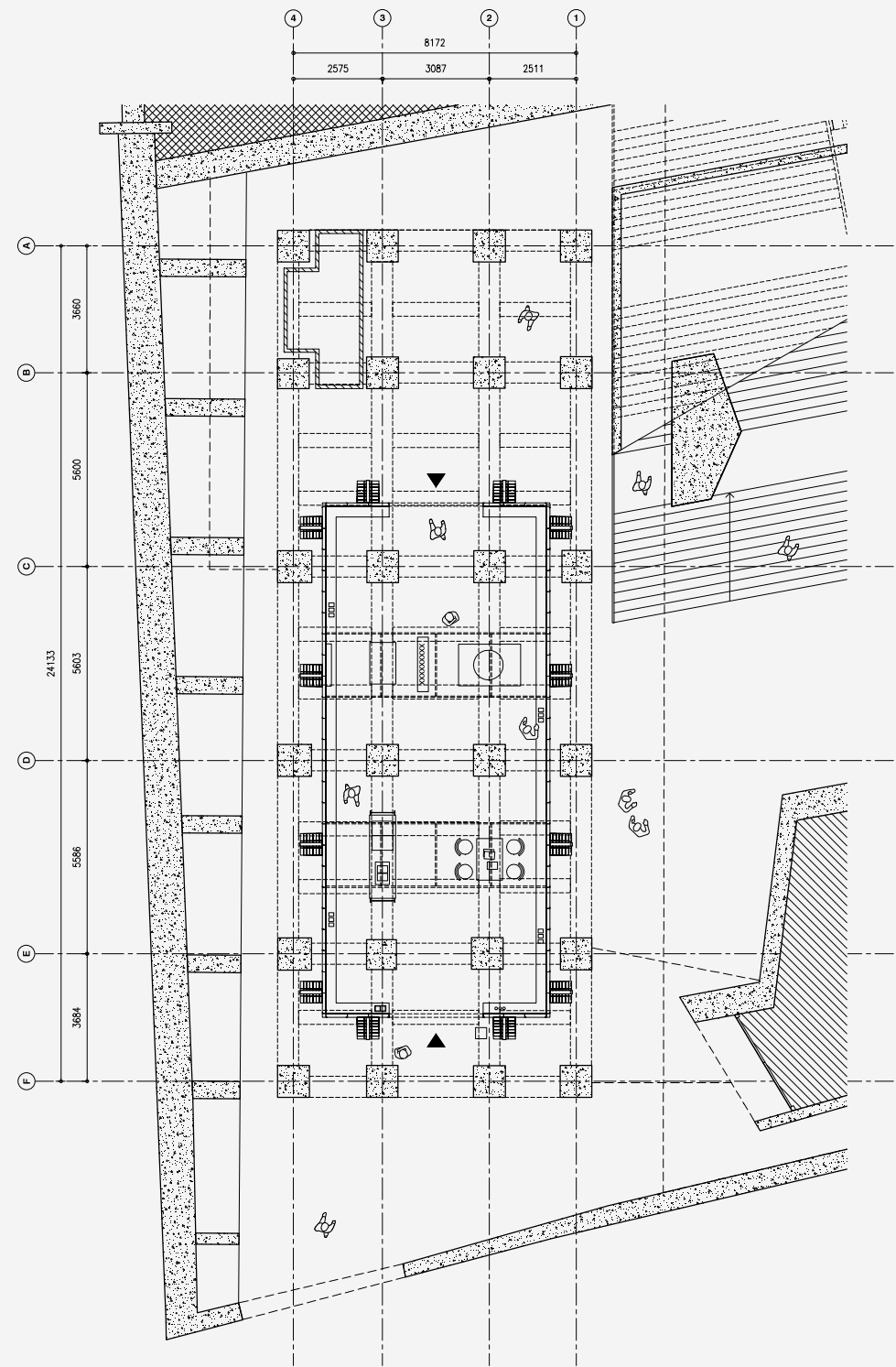
PLAN  
Contagious Cities:  
far away too close,  
layout, scale 1/200













# BOOKED: TAI KWUN CONTEMPORARY'S HONG KONG ART BOOK FAIR

## DESCRIPTION

One of the largest art book fairs in Asia, "Booked" underscores Tai Kwun Contemporary's dedication to presenting contemporary art programmes in support of the expanding cultural ecosystem in Hong Kong. Organised yearly, and occupying both the exhibition and public spaces of the venue; it provides a platform for local, regional, and international creative practitioners who use books as a medium of artistic expression. For its first edition, and in line with its avant-garde and experimental nature, the fair design was based on the combined notions of *non-extractive fabrication* and *generic functionality*. In this case, the exhibition preceding the fair "Cao Fei: A Hollow in a World too Full" was carefully dismantled and the obtained materials and elements recombined or slightly adjusted to produce tables, partitions, lights, lounge seating, etc., resulting in a playful *make-do* language. The additional furniture and plants were simply rented or, if purchased, given away after the event. The resulting spatial devices and display fixtures were neutral enough to absorb the various exhibitors' needs, yet strong enough to give the event its identity.

## TYPE

Art book fair

## YEAR

11 - 13 January 2019

## VENUE

Tai Kwun Contemporary & F Hall  
10 Hollywood Road  
Central  
Hong Kong

## PRESENTED BY

Tai Kwun Contemporary

## TEAM

Head of Art: Tobias Berger  
Project Director: Daniel Sze Hin Ho  
Project Manager & Associate Curator: Ingrid Pui Yee Chu  
Guest Associate Curator: Eunice Tsang  
Exhibition Architect: BEAU  
Graphic Designer: HATO  
Contractor: Excel & New Leaf Engineering  
Photographer: Xu Liang Leon

PHOTO (ALL)  
Booked,  
scenography view,  
© Xu Liang Leon

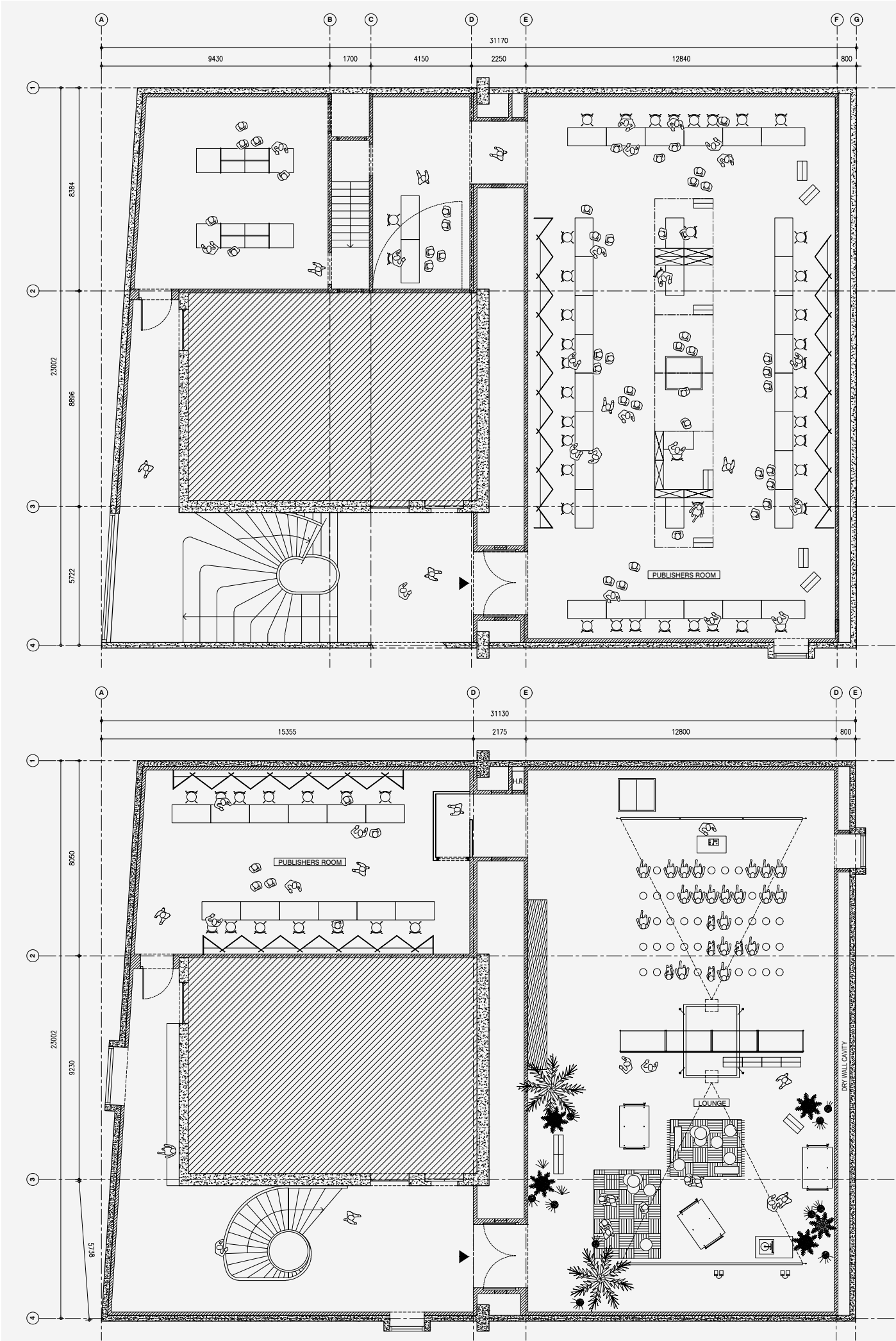
PLAN  
Booked,  
layout, scale 1/200













# KIANG MALINGUE (WAN CHAI)

DESCRIPTION

The Kiang Malingue headquarters is the fifth collaboration between the Hong Kong-based gallery and BEAU. As so, it embodies their common ambitions to critically deconstruct the identity and experience of art spaces while addressing challenges related to cultural and environmental sustainability. Located on a steeped street in the Wan Chai District, the project adapted a typical Hong Kong 1960s housing *tong lau* into a vertical art gallery. The building typology and its archetypal elements were retained and somehow celebrated. So was the building's original domestic nature, bringing a *human scale* to the exhibition spaces and helping to strike a balance between *homey* characteristics and the expressions or needs of an art gallery. The pre-existing organisation framed the new program: the former ground floor shop is now a front main gallery open to the public, the first floor features outdoor and indoor areas including a kitchen and a garden, and the upper floors provide two *exhibition cubes*, a spatial configuration made possible thanks to the most complex gesture deployed in the project: that is, the removal of entire slabs. If the cube on the second floor exaggeratedly plays with the codes of the white cube, the one on the fourth floor is in keeping with the global raw nature of the project. For all interventions, traces of transformation were assumed, rendered visible, and while expressive, also consciously and carefully *diluted* within the pre-existing context to form a consistent and balanced whole. The project is seen as an important *case study* in the architectural ecosystem of Hong Kong, introducing key notions of adaptative reuse, economy of means, and cultural preservation.

PHOTO 1 & 13  
Kiang Malingue,  
façade view,  
© Xu Liang Leon

PHOTO 2 TO 12  
Kiang Malingue,  
interior view,  
© Xu Liang Leon

PLAN  
Kiang Malingue,  
layout, scale 1/200

ELEVATION  
Kiang Malingue,  
layout, scale 1/200

SECTION  
Kiang Malingue,  
layout, scale 1/200

TYPE

Art gallery

YEAR

2019 - 2023

ADDRESS

10 Sik On Street  
Wan Chai  
Hong Kong

MISSION

Transformation of a 6 floors tenement  
house into an art gallery  
400 sq.m  
Built

TEAM

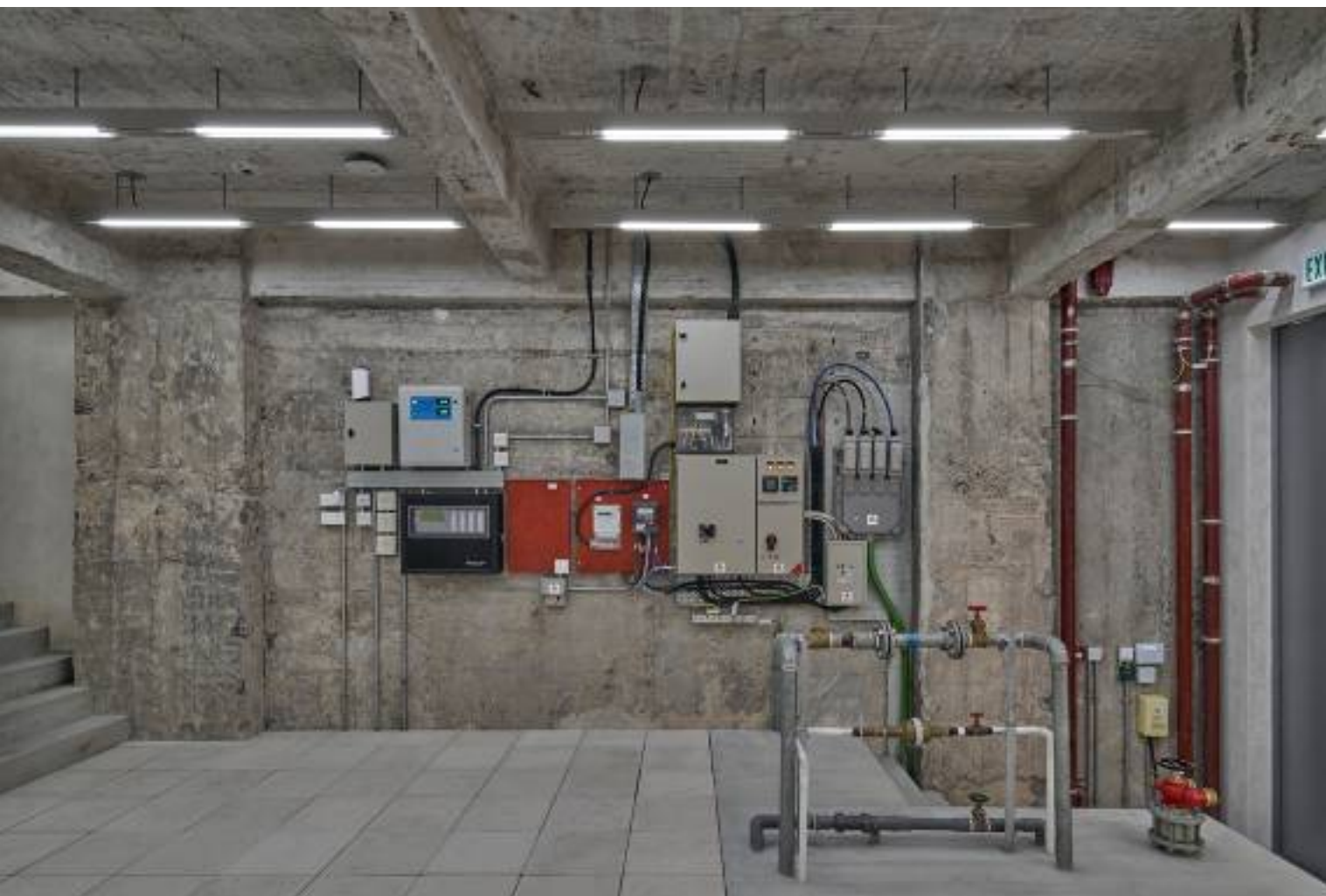
Client: Lorraine Kiang & Edouard Malingue  
Architect: BEAU  
Authorised Person & Registered Inspector: Matthew Wong  
Structural Engineer: Buro Happold  
Major Works Contractor: United Soundfair Engineering  
Fitting-out Contractor: POTT  
Window Contractor: MRW  
E&M Contractor: RNB  
Photographer: Xu Liang Leon



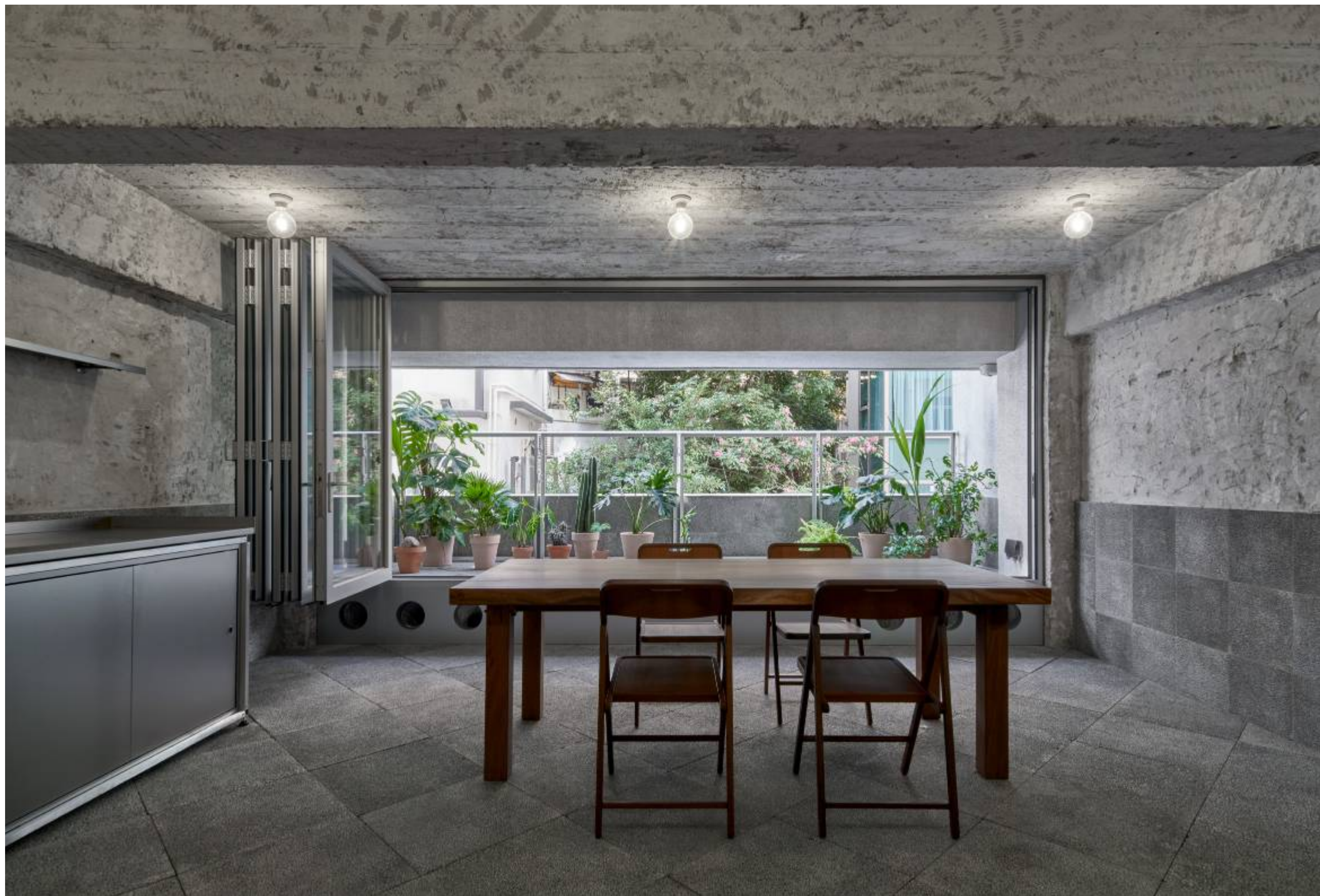
















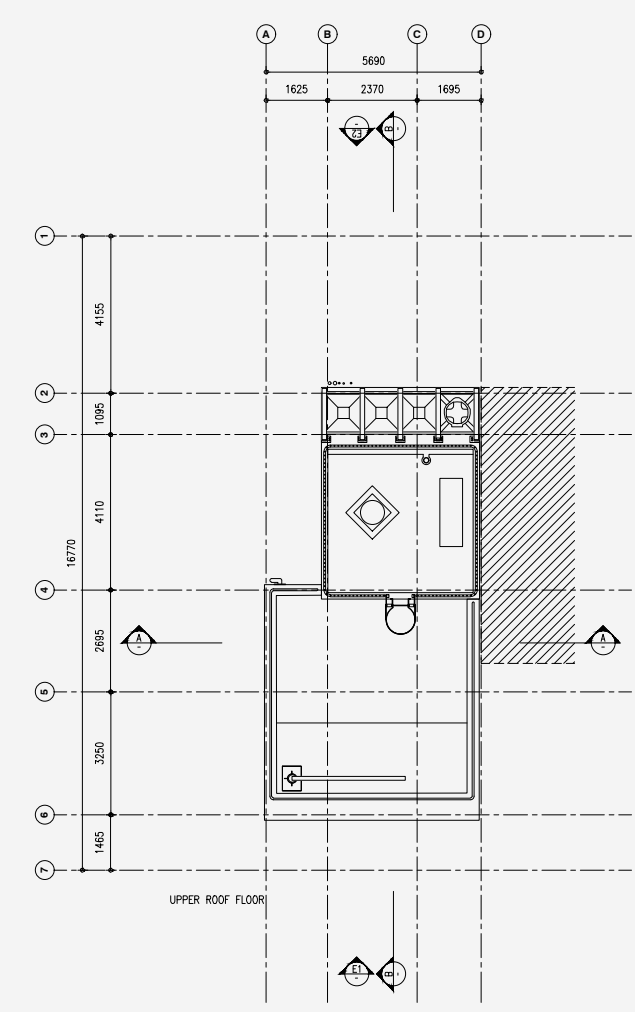
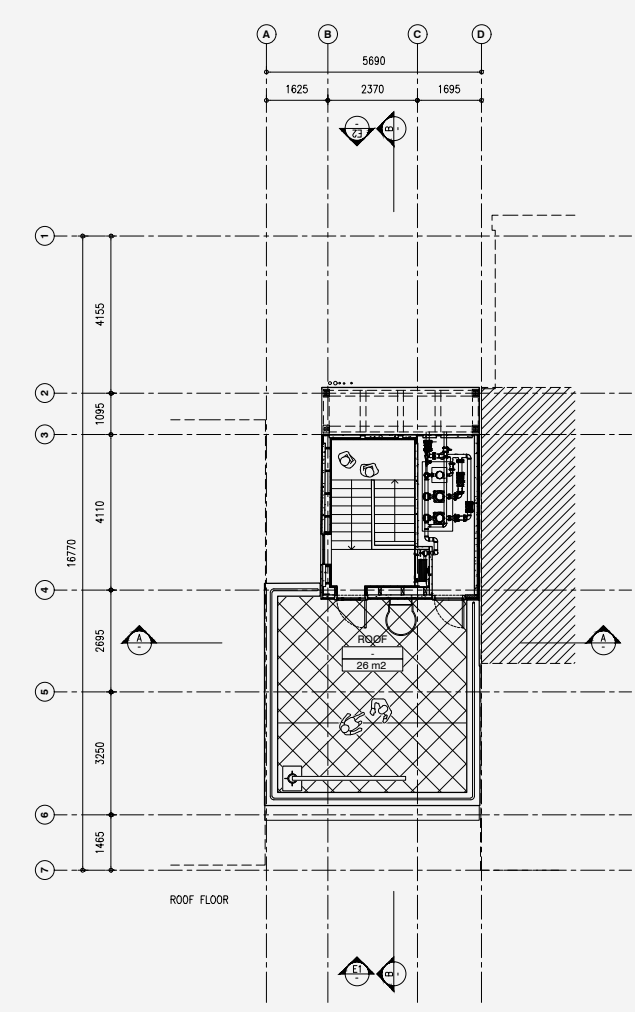
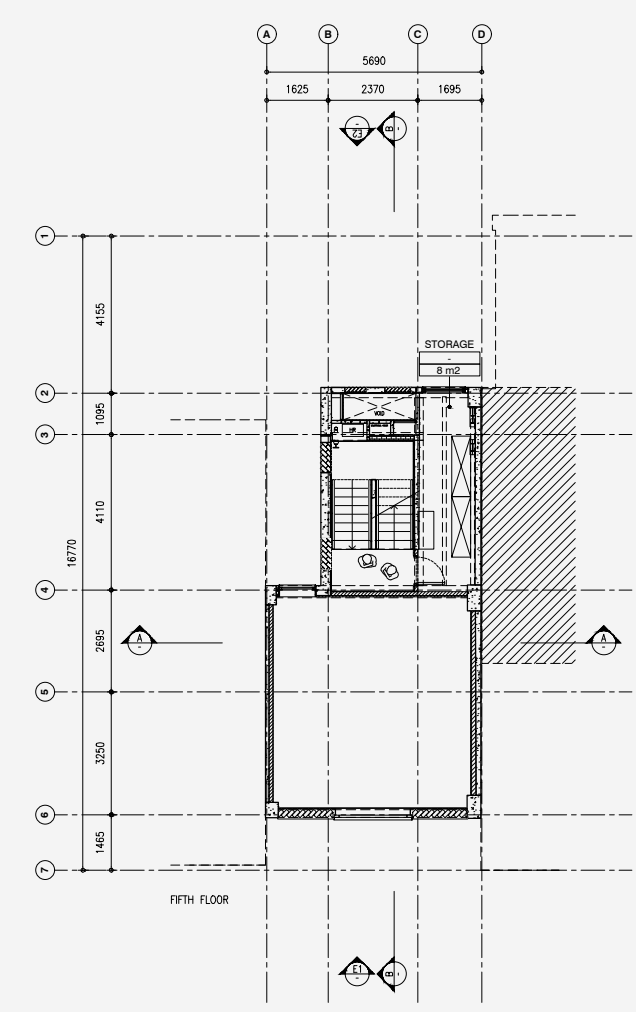
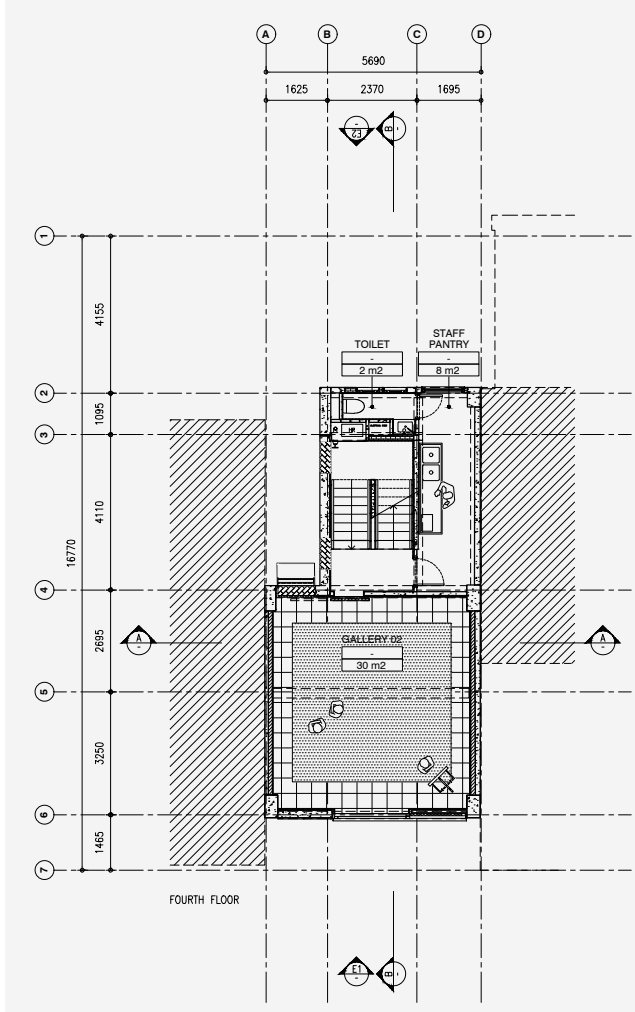
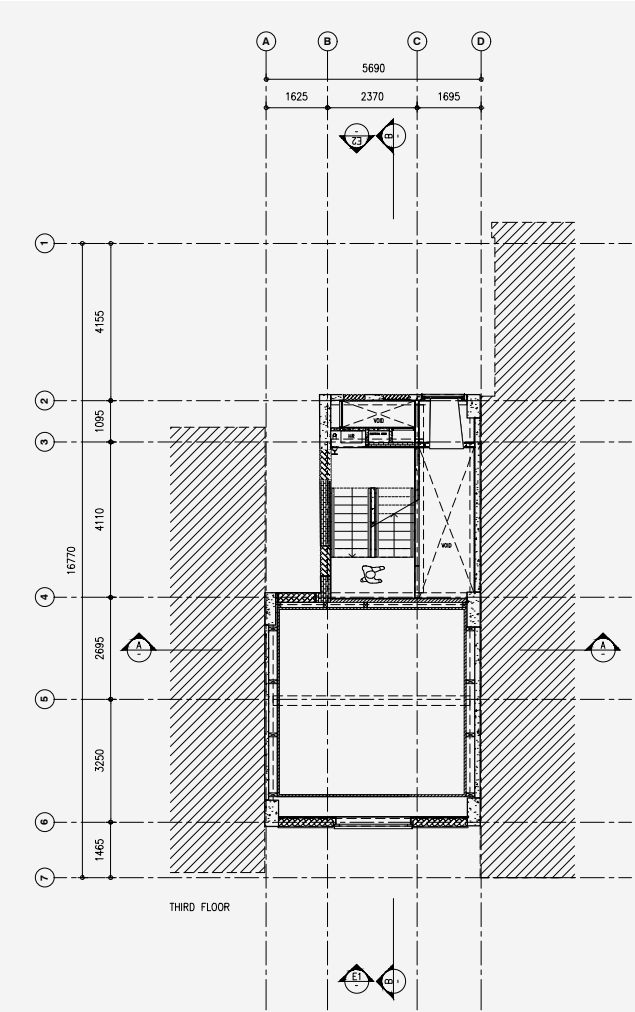
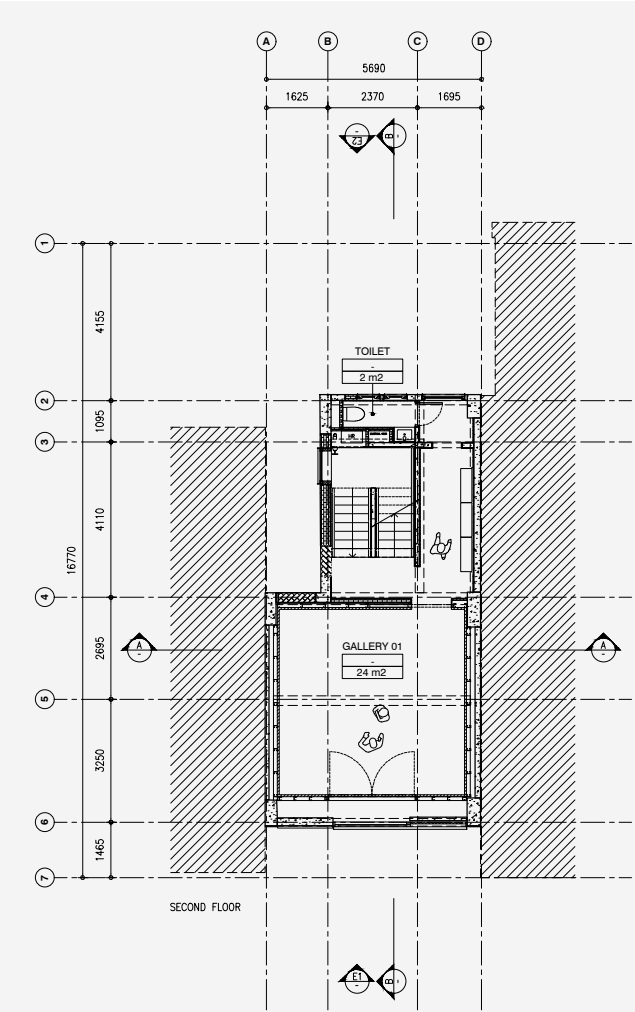
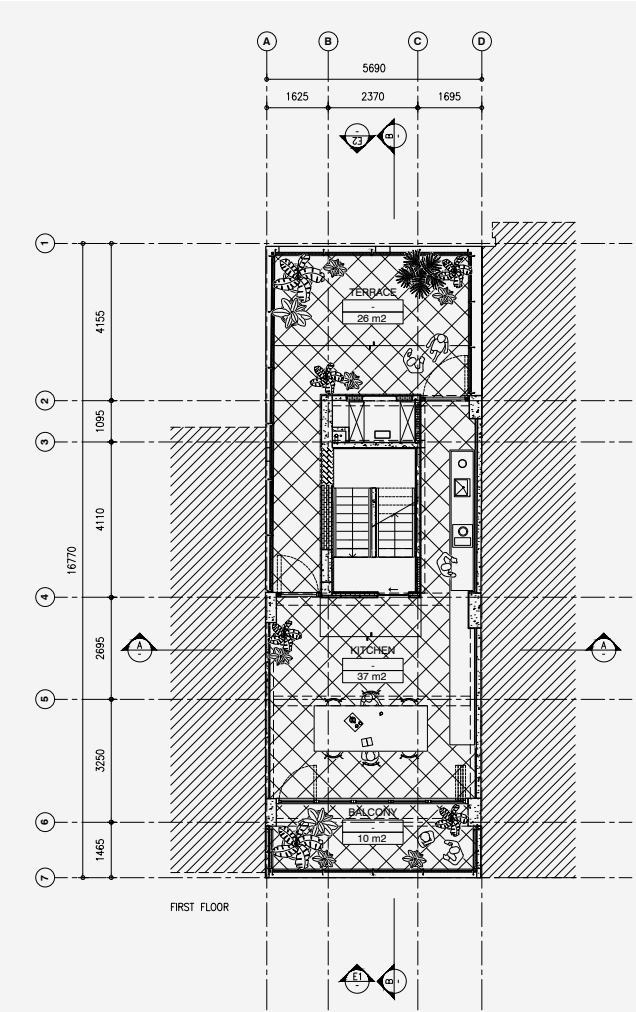
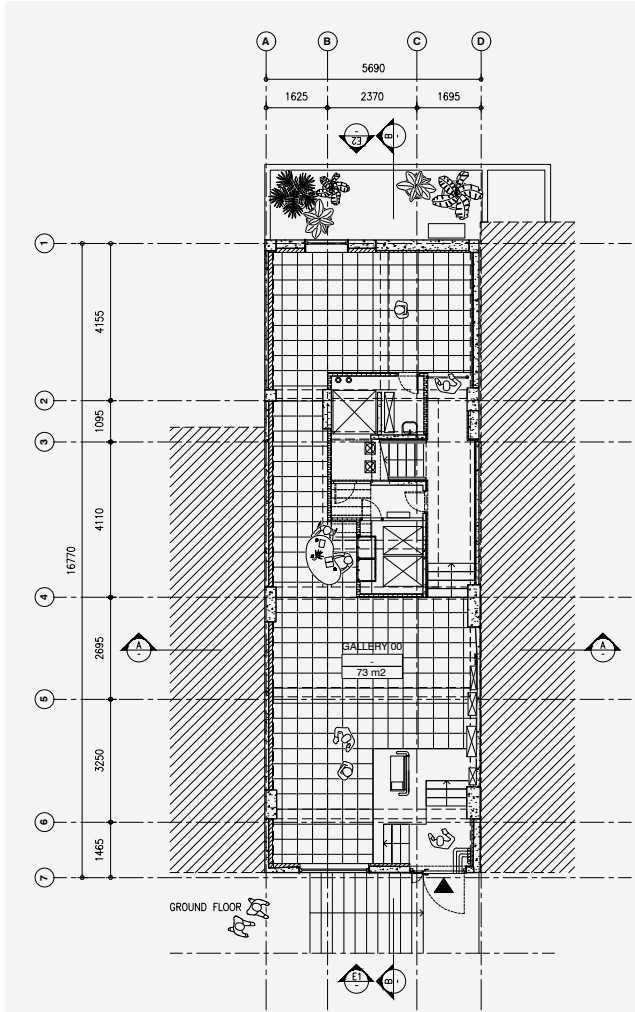


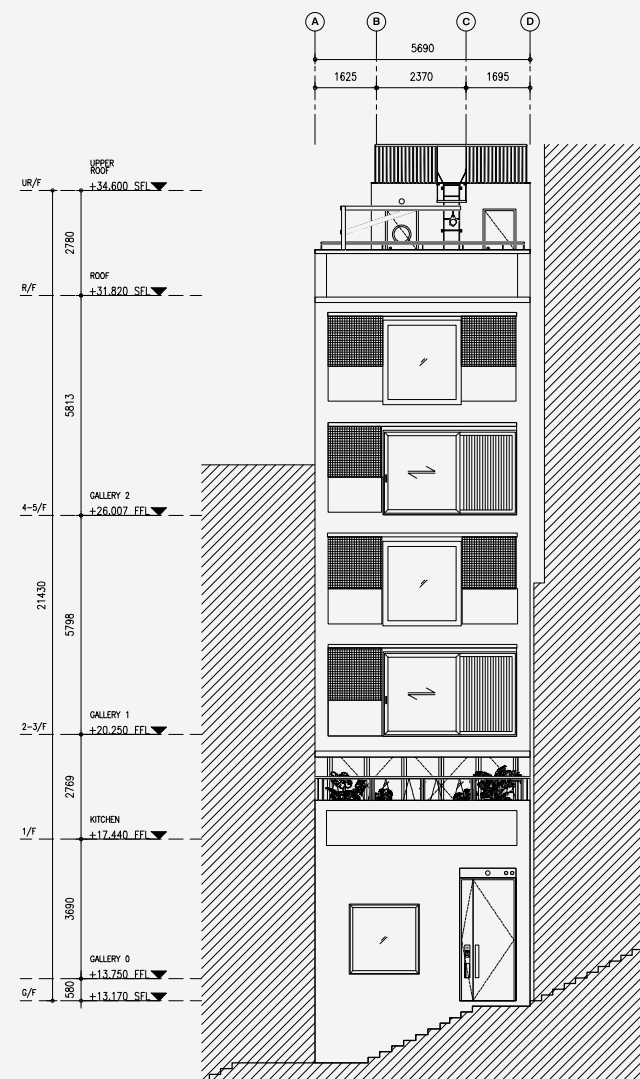




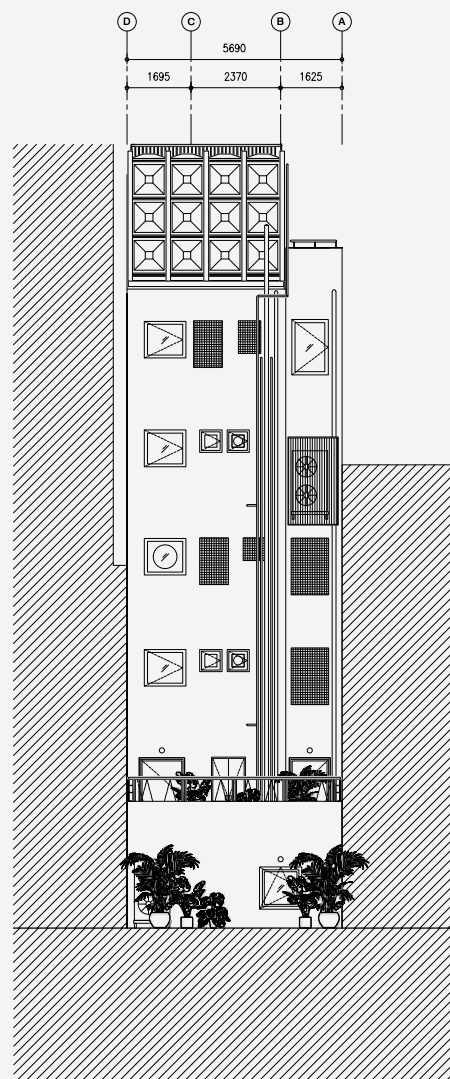




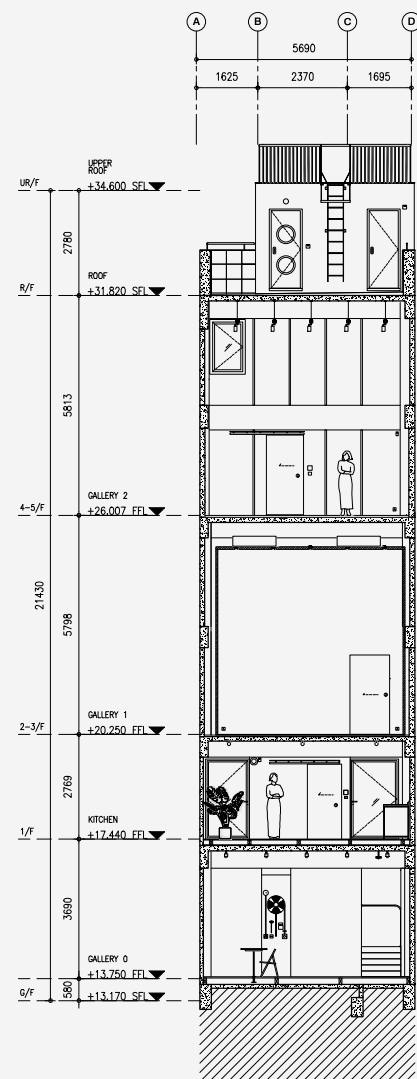




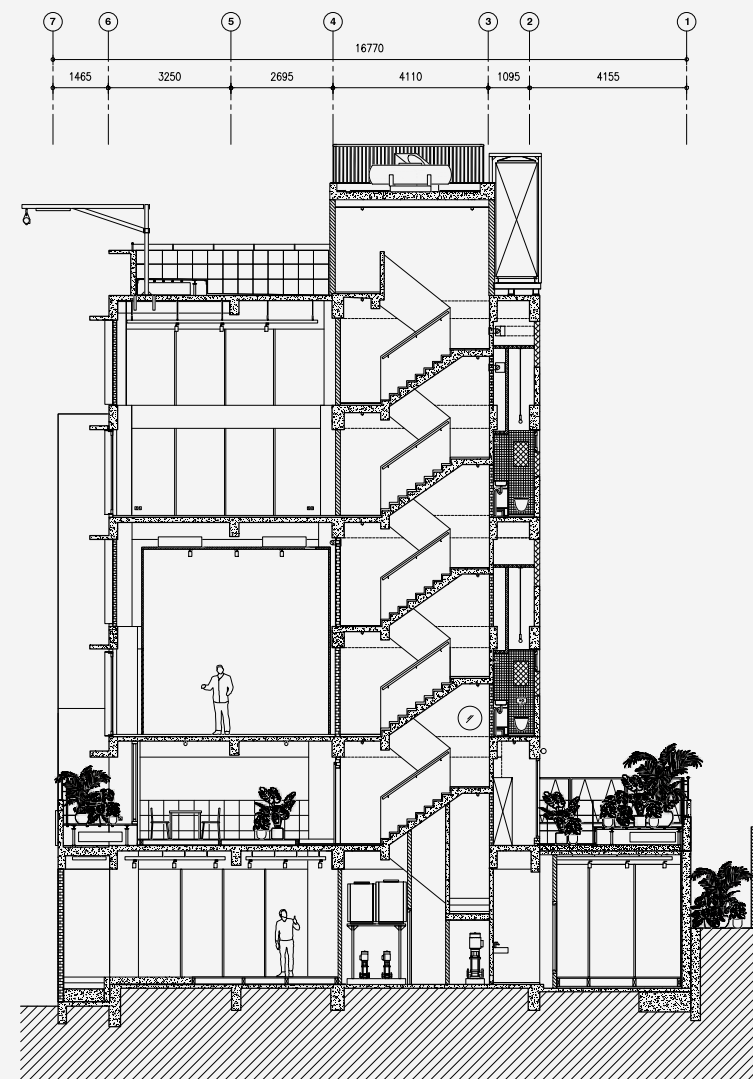
FRONT ELEVATION



BACK ELEVATION



SECTION A



SECTION B



# 39 KING'S ROAD

DESCRIPTION

Envisioned as an experimental project by the client, the office tower located at 39 King's Road was designed as a *non-iconic* building elaborating on the idea of *quiet innovation*. This motto, developed together with façade consultant VS-A, proposed the application of simple, archetypal solutions, already responding to specific challenges, yet leaving room for improvement. The main visible outcome of such a strategy is an architecture presenting a hyper repetitive façade pattern and purposely merging with its context, a series of typical developments from the 1970s and 1980s. Beyond its typological bias, the project introduced a reinterpretation of the mandatory *fully glazed* curtain wall, a system leading to numerous environmental issues, whether about fabrication or usage. As a counterproposal, it deployed a mostly solid, barely-perforated surface of pre-assembled panels entirely built in recycled aluminium. Made out of multiple layers, these panels took advantage of the material and its shape-forming process, namely extrusion, to present a corrugated profile on their outer side. This profile, besides reinforcing the vertical and industrial language of the façade, also creates light and shadow plays during the day. Most importantly, by increasing the area of the outer layer versus the inner one, the façade complex radiates accumulated heat in an outward direction, hence reducing the need for interior climate control. This effect is reinforced by a ventilated cavity right behind the corrugated layer and the integration of ventilation slots regularly distributed along the height of the building. Ultimately, the strict alternation of solid and glazed elements allows for greater flexibility *interior-wise* by enabling straight and clean subdivisions at every floor.

PHOTO 1, 2, 3  
39 King's Road,  
façade view,  
© Kris Provoost

PHOTO 4 & 5  
39 King's Road,  
façade view,  
© Xu Liang Leon

PHOTO 6  
39 King's Road,  
interior view,  
© Kris Provoost

PHOTO 7, 8, 9  
39 King's Road,  
façade view,  
© Kris Provoost

DETAIL  
39 King's Road,  
façade corner detail,  
scale 1/5

PLAN 1  
39 King's Road,  
ground floor layout,  
scale 1/200

TYPE

Office

YEAR

2019 - 2022

ADDRESS

39 King's Road  
Tin Hau  
Hong Kong

MISSION

Construction of a 26 floors office tower  
2560 sq.m  
Built

TEAM

Client: Henderson Land Development  
Architectural Designer: BEAU  
Authorised Person Architect: MCAA  
Façade Consultant: VS-A  
Technical Consultant: Inhabit  
Structural Engineer: Stephen Cheng  
Building Services Consultant: Leading  
Consulting Quantity Surveyor: Arcadis  
Carcasse Contractor: Win Lee Building  
Curtain Wall Contractor: GINCA  
MVAC Contractor: RNB  
FS Contractor: Mang Yip  
Fitting Out Contractor: Fruit design  
Photographer: Kris Provoost & Xu Liang Leon

PLAN 2 & 3  
39 King's Road,  
first to second floor  
& third to sixteen floor  
layout, scale 1/200











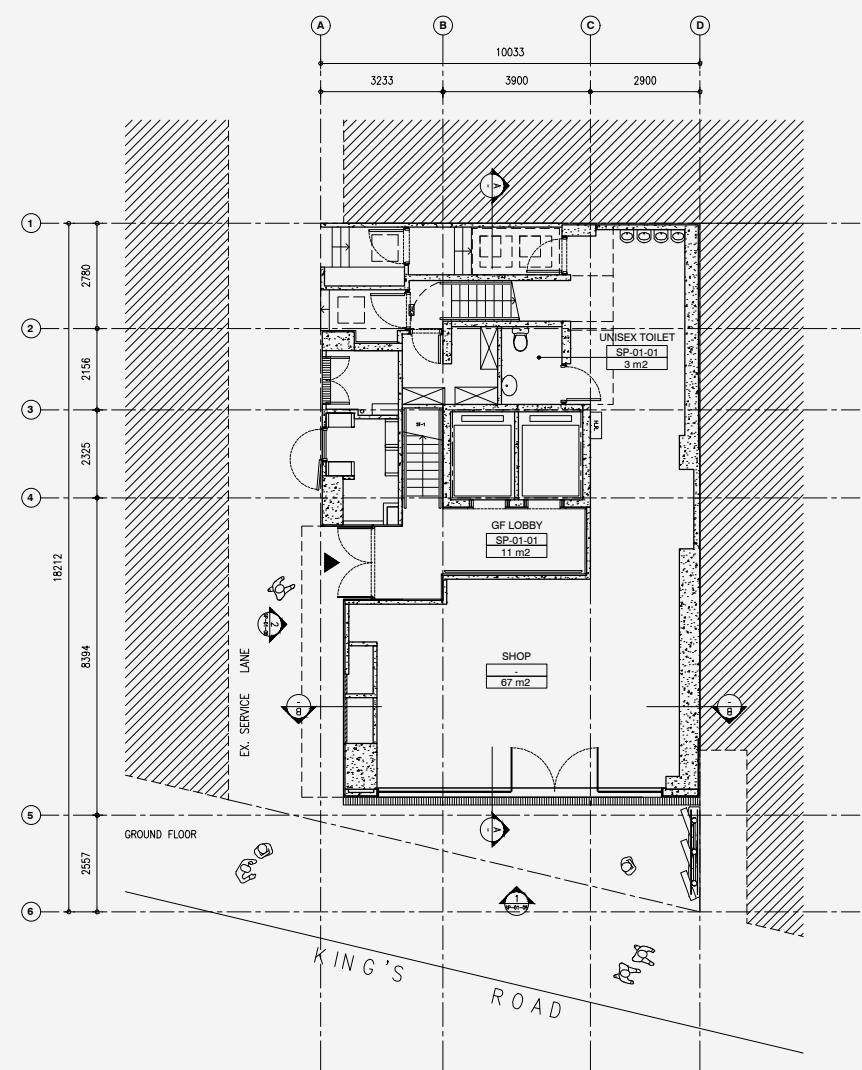




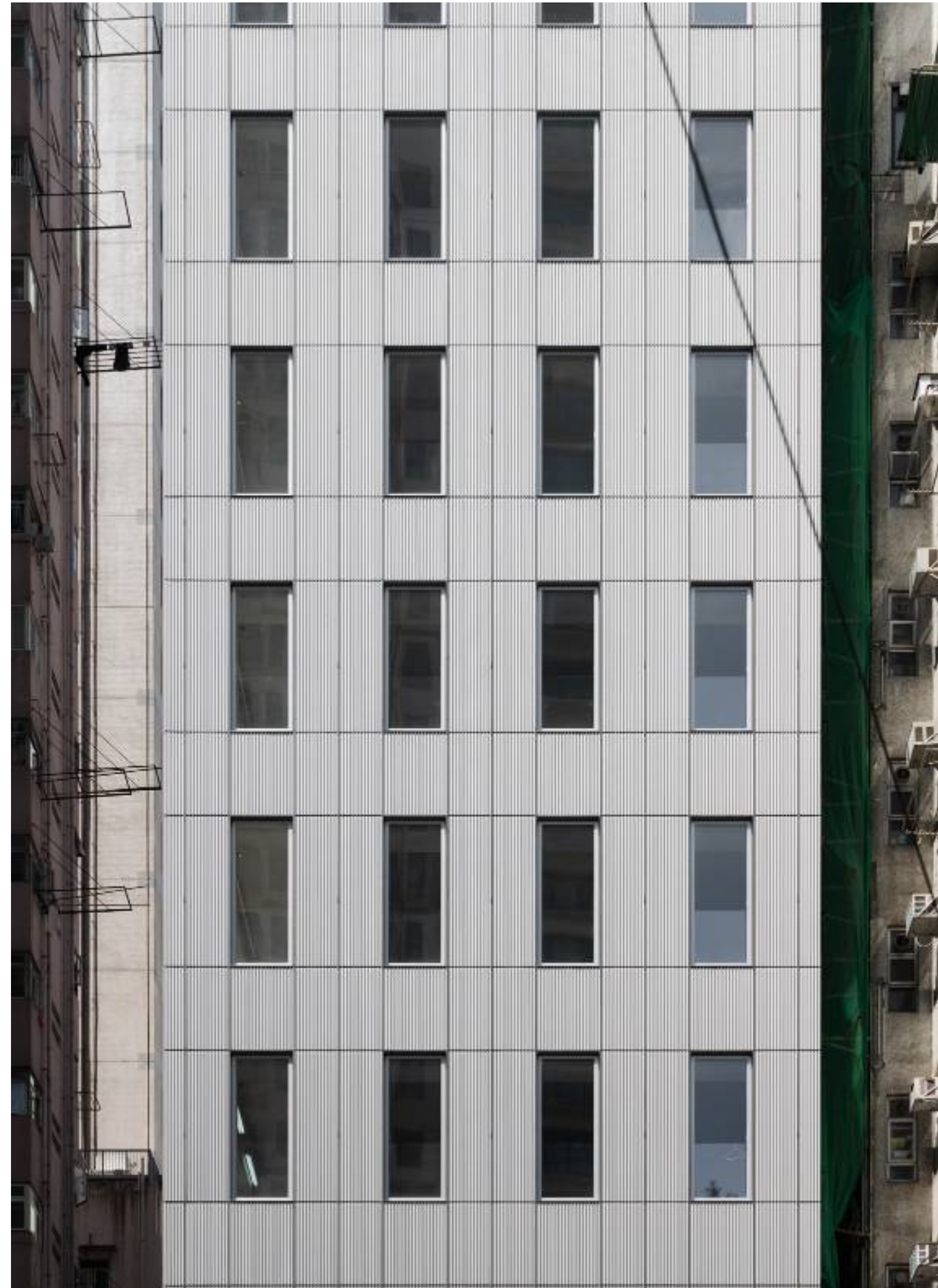
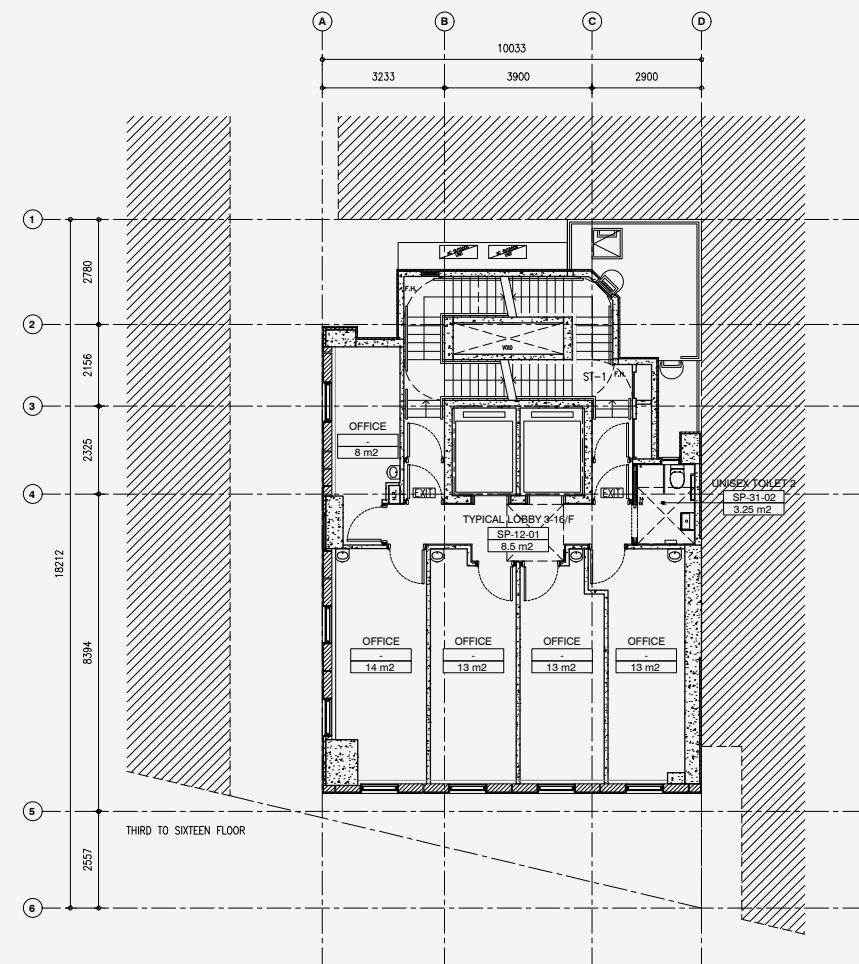
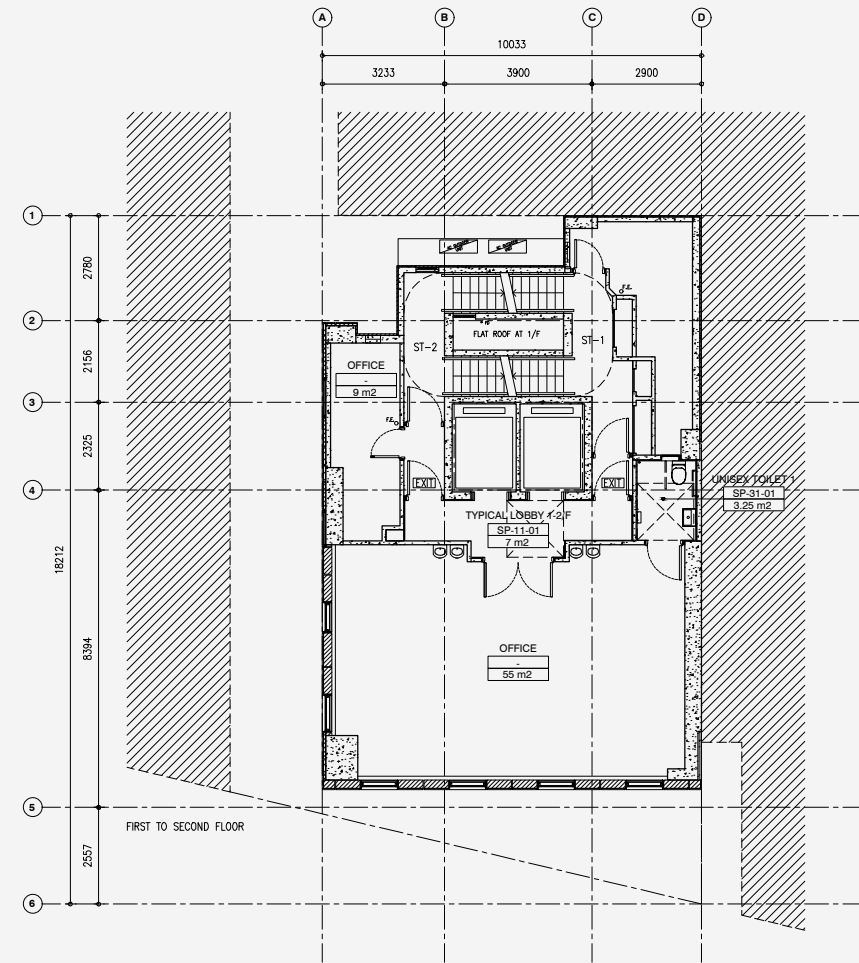














# CAO FEI: STAGING THE ERA

DESCRIPTION

Cao Fei’s solo show at UCCA was the first major retrospective of the artist in China. Assembling works from her two-decade-long career, the exhibition critically addressed the rapid transformation of contemporary Chinese society. The scenography design, the second collaboration between the artist and BEAU, explored their common fascination for urban infrastructure, architecture archetypes, movie sets, *fakeness*, and experimentations on how to deconstruct the classic dichotomy between artworks and their *display paraphernalia*. Several volumes, interconnected by an elevated walkway, were built in the main exhibition space, a former factory hall. Each room hosted an art installation; each volume was designed in relation with the artwork it received. The resulting open space was treated as an *in between exterior-interior* typology, itself invaded by numerous artworks and archetypal fixtures or elements. The amount of interconnections and paths was purposely overwhelming, offering the possibility to experience the show multiple times and over multiple temporalities. The material and constructive language, ambiguous in nature, referenced a *giant city model* by deploying a mix of fake *plastic* gardens, *Meccano-like* urban pathways, and *cardboard-like* buildings.

PHOTO 1  
Installation view of  
Cao Fei: Staging the Era,  
courtesy the artist,  
© Peng Jing & Xu Liang Leon

PHOTO 2 TO 8  
Construction view of  
Cao Fei: Staging the Era,  
© Peng Jing & Xu Liang Leon

ILLUSTRATION  
Cao Fei: Staging the Era,  
axonometric view

PHOTO 9  
Installation view of  
Cao Fei: Staging the Era,  
courtesy the artist,  
© Peng Jing & Xu Liang Leon

TYPE

Exhibition

YEAR

12 March – 6 June 2021

VENUE

UCCA  
4 Jiuxianqiao Road  
Chaoyang, 798 Art Zone  
Beijing

PRESENTED BY

UCCA

CURATOR

Philip Tinari  
Guo Xi  
Patrick Rhine  
Huang Jiehua

ARTIST

Cao Fei

TEAM

Exhibition Architect: BEAU  
UCCA Exhibition Coordinator: Liu Kaiyun  
UCCA Senior Exhibition Manager: Edward Guan  
UCCA Technical Manager: Shi Yao  
UCCA Exhibition Designer & Executive:  
Anna Yang Cao Fei Studio  
Exhibition Designer: Xu Zheng  
Audio Equipment: Genelec  
Video Equipment: BenQ  
Stage Lighting: Golden Sea  
Virtual Reality Equipment: VIVE Arts  
Virtual & Augmented Reality Artworks Collaborator: Acute Art  
Photographer: Peng Jing & Xu Liang Leon

PLAN 1  
Cao Fei: Staging the Era,  
level 1 layout, scale 1/200

PLAN 2  
Cao Fei: Staging the Era,  
level 2 layout, scale 1/200

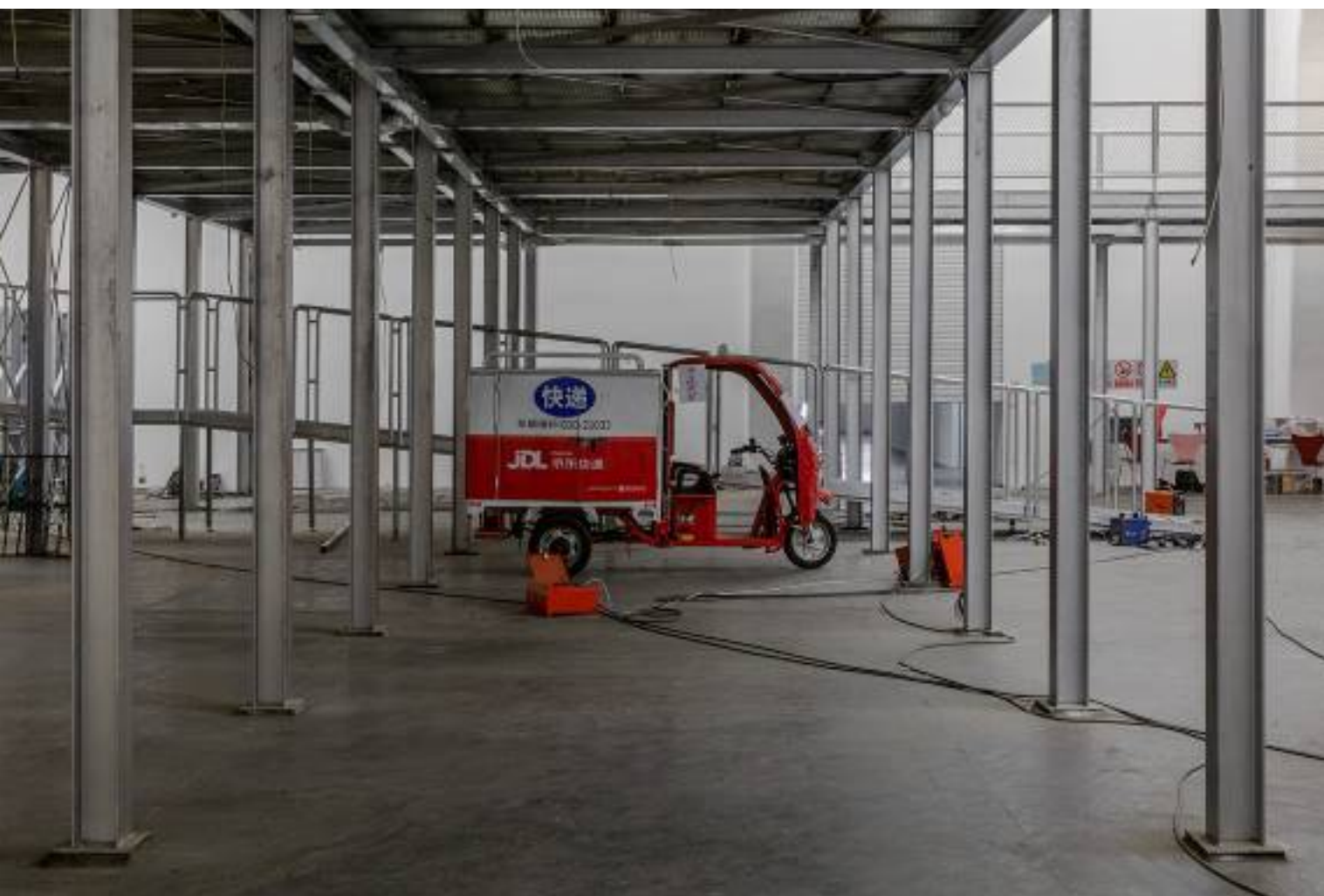
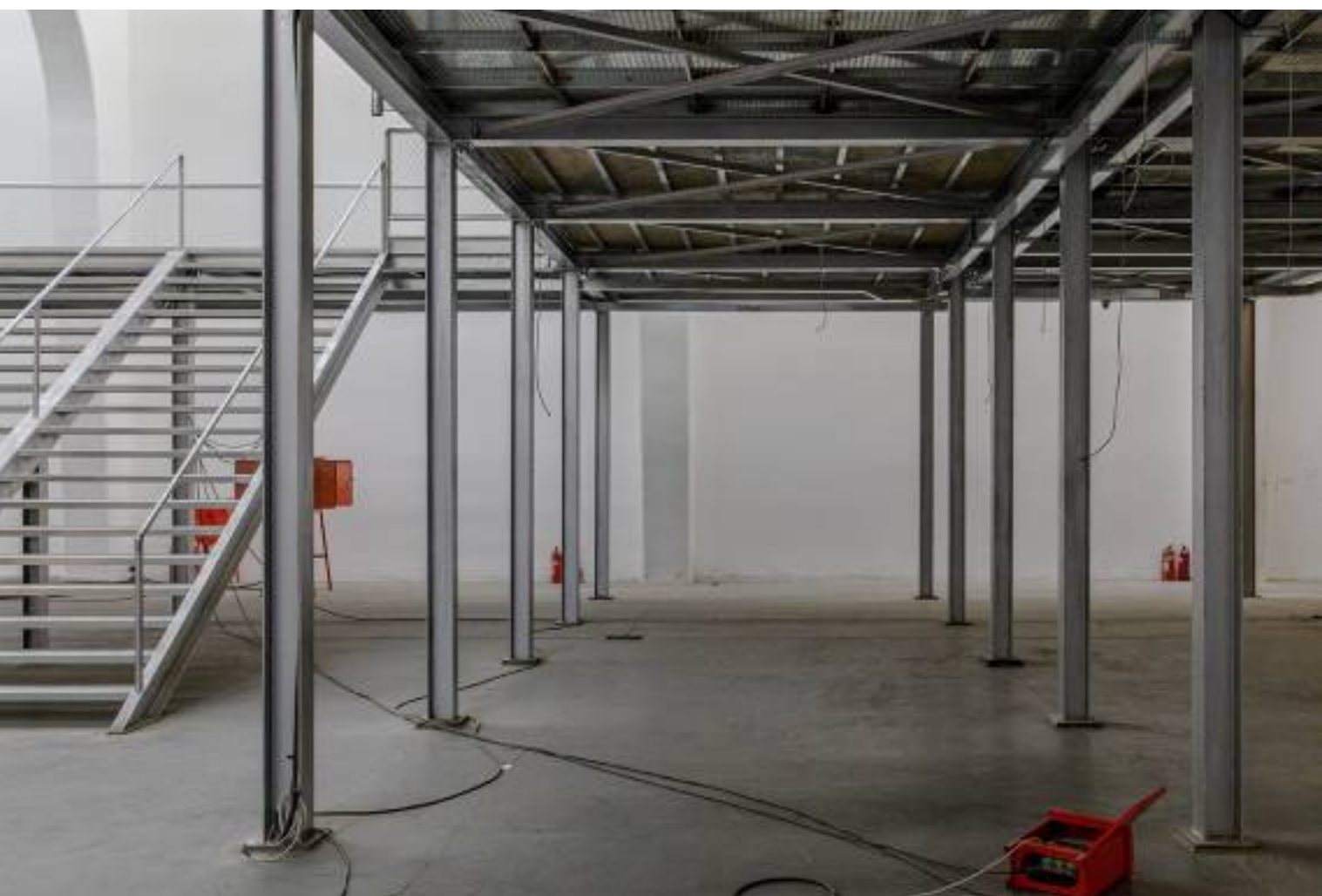
PHOTO 10 TO 13  
Installation view of  
Cao Fei: Staging the Era,  
courtesy the artist,  
© Peng Jing & Xu Liang Leon



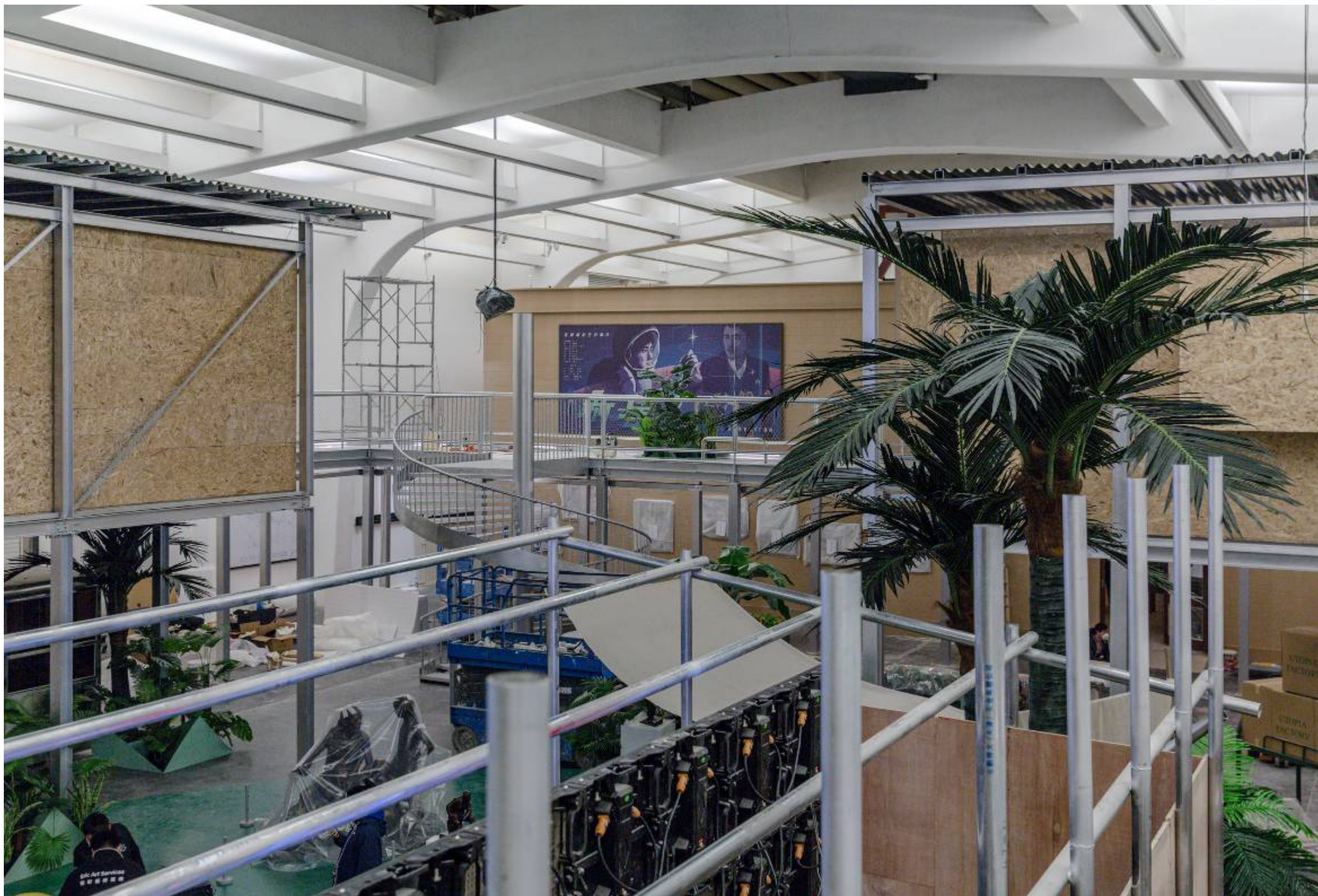




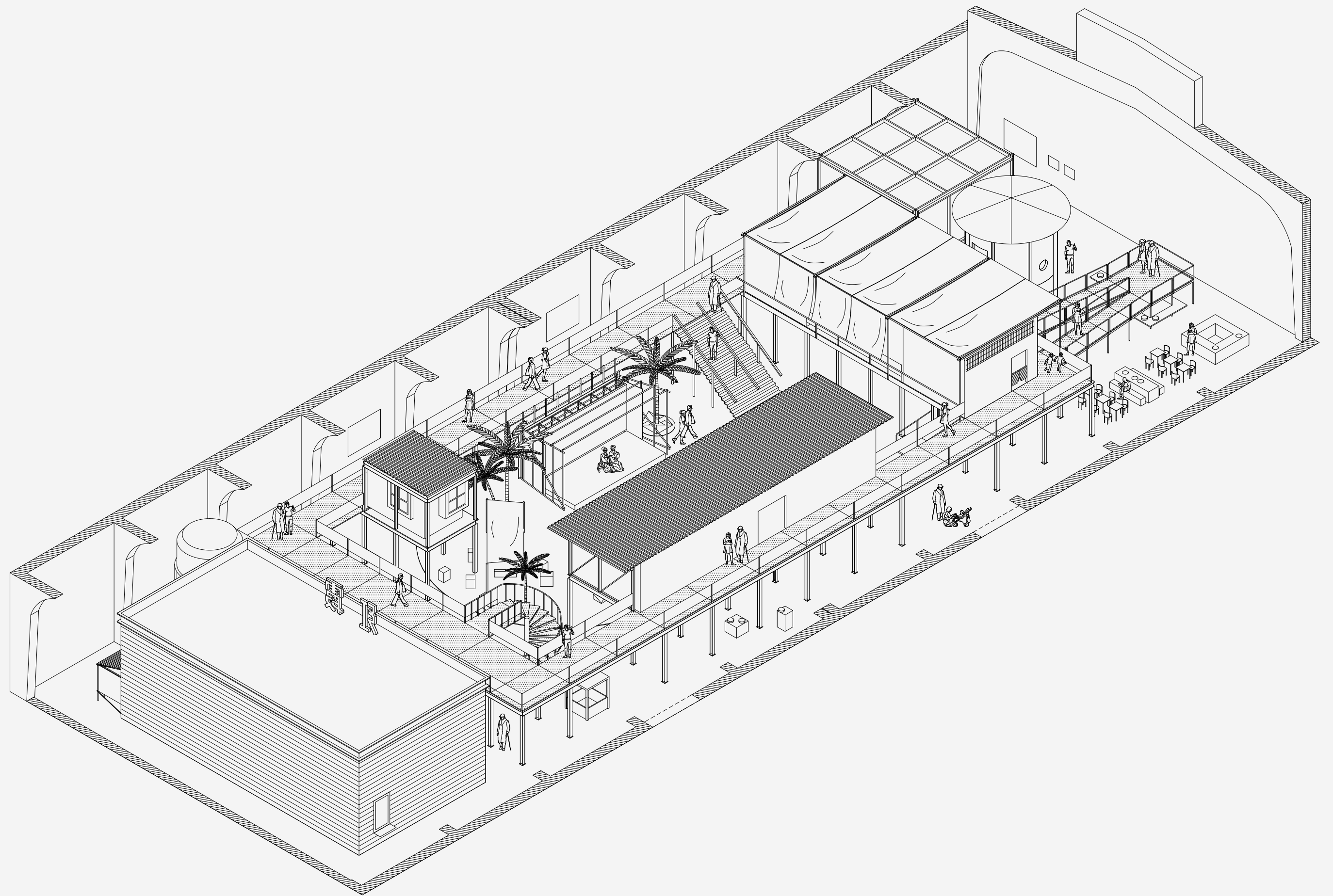






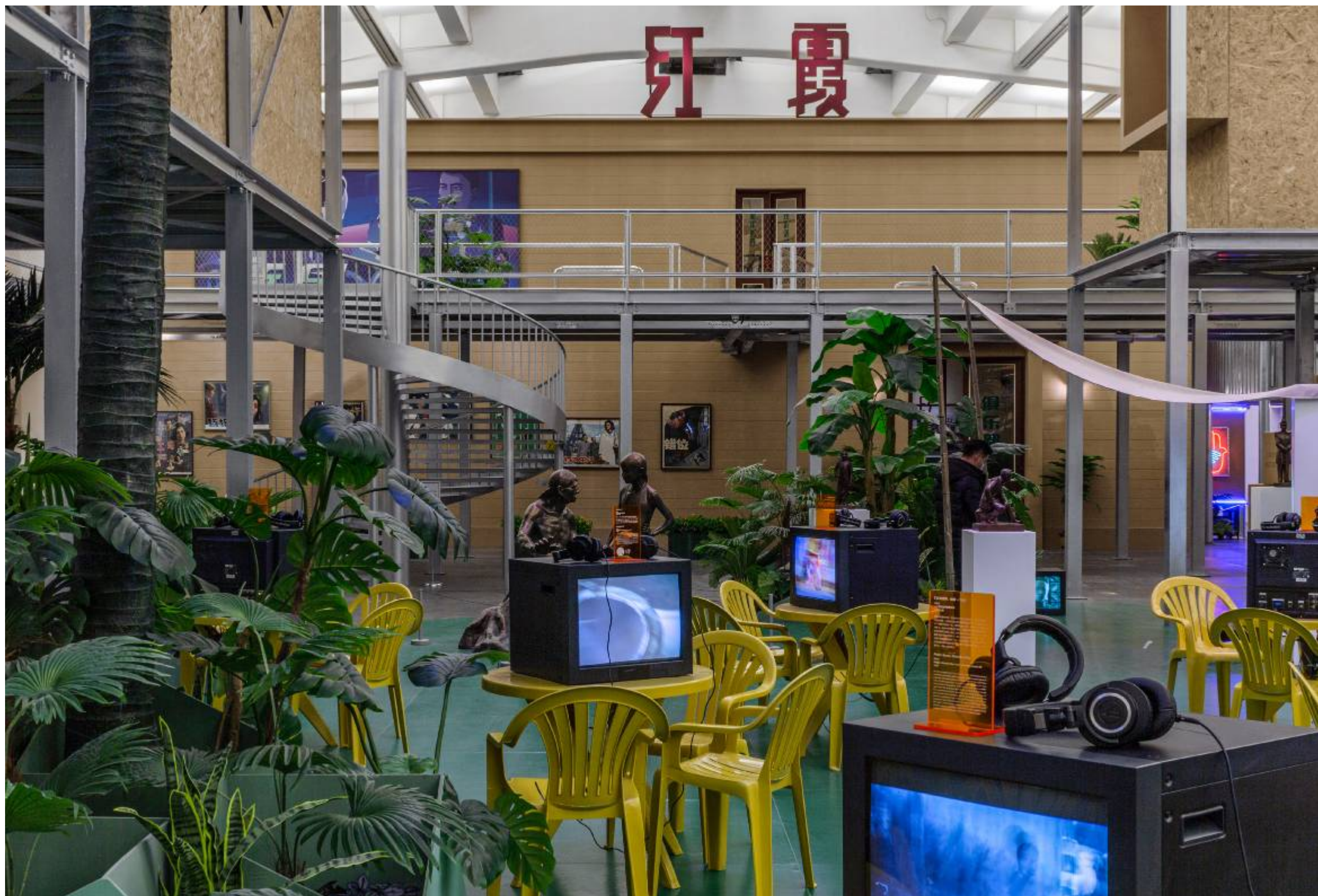




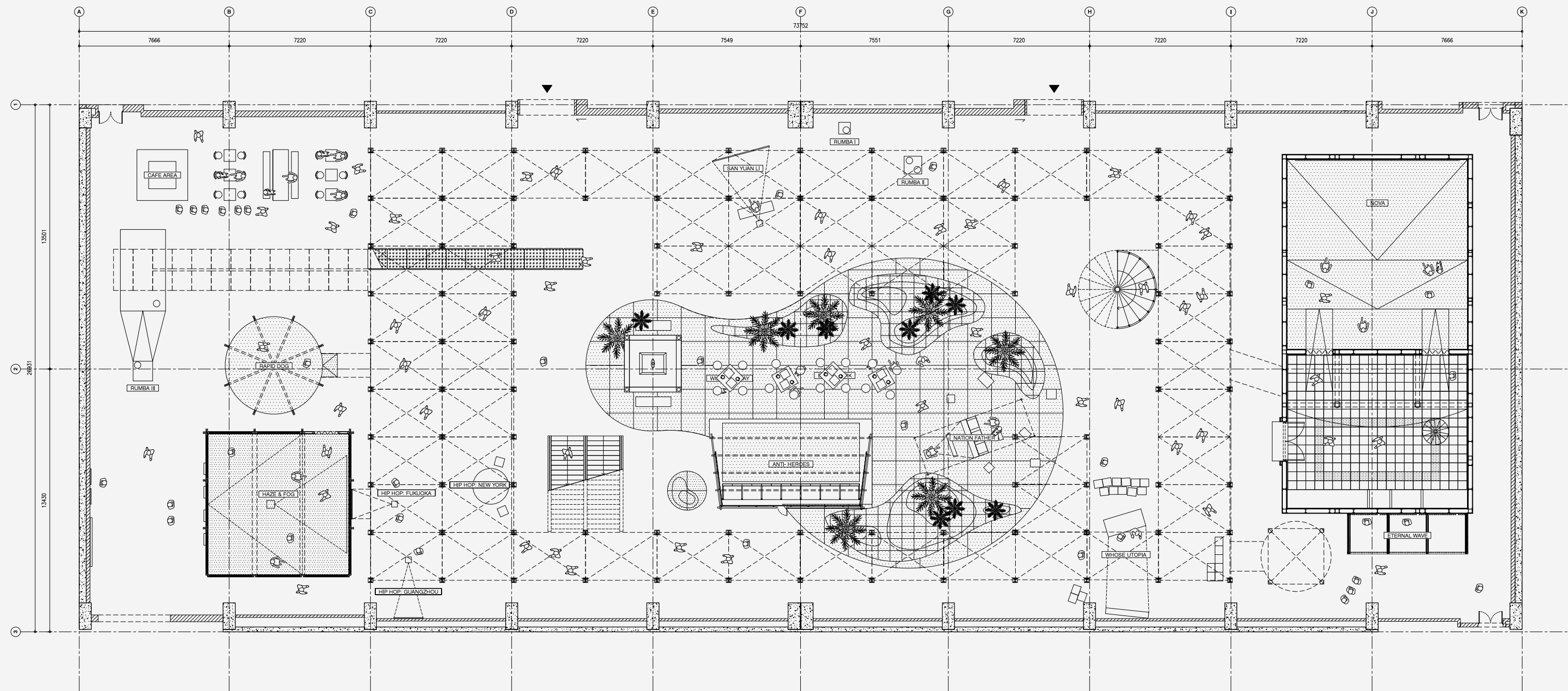




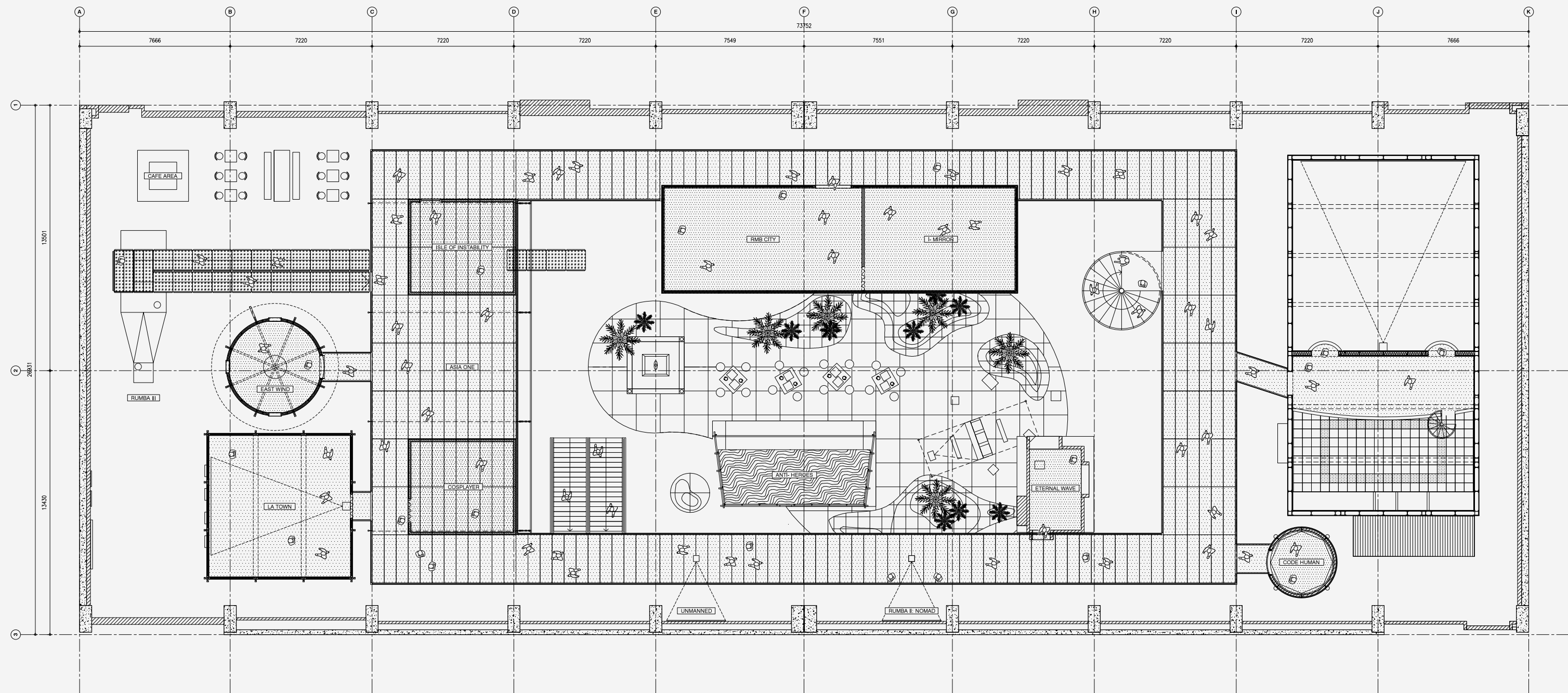
# 紅霞

















# CAO FEI ARTIST STUDIO

## DESCRIPTION

Cao Fei's studio, located in the 798 Art District of Beijing, is a project designed and built in three months in parallel with the development of the artist's exhibition at UCCA "Staging the Era". Somewhat informal in essence, it was mostly based on exchanges, collaboration, and appropriation by its users. Appropriation of spatial and functional logic, but most importantly appropriation of the construction process as the client literally built it. By inventing methods on how to materialise mere directions, this *modus operandi* progressively, and excitingly, developed a dual-minded formal and constructive language infusing the whole project. A general strategy consisting in the hijack of standard and proprietary components was particularly deployed, such as the redundant basic shelving system given different functions depending on the level of customisation it was subjected to. The notion of appropriation was itself supported by global programmatic flexibility, the only stable functions being, in the end, a *curtain-defined* projection room, an office area, and an open archive space.

## TYPE

Artist atelier

## YEAR

2020

## ADDRESS

798 Art District  
Beijing

## MISSION

Implementation of an artist atelier in  
a former factory building  
230 sq.m  
Built

## TEAM

Clients: Cao Fei & Lim Tzay Chuen  
Architect: BEAU  
Builder: Lim Tzay Chuen  
Photographer: Peng Jing & Leon Xu Liang

PHOTO (ALL)  
Cao Fei artist studio,  
interior view,  
© Peng Jing & Xu Liang Leon

PLAN  
Cao Fei artist studio,  
layout, scale 1/200

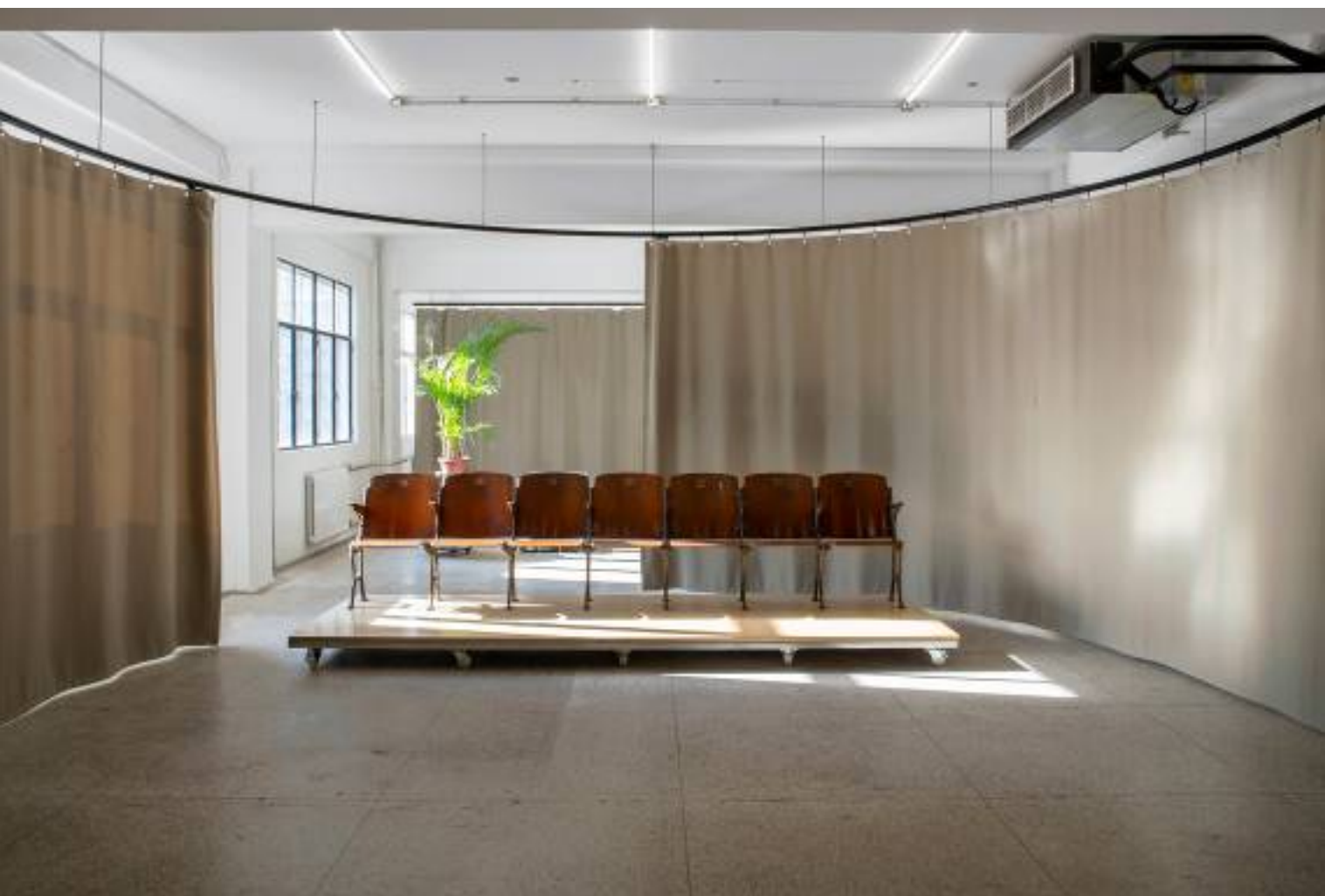
SECTION  
Cao Fei artist studio,  
layout, scale 1/200







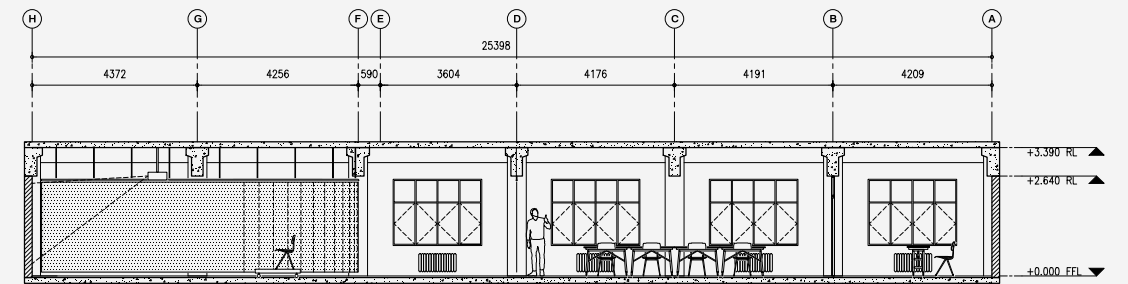
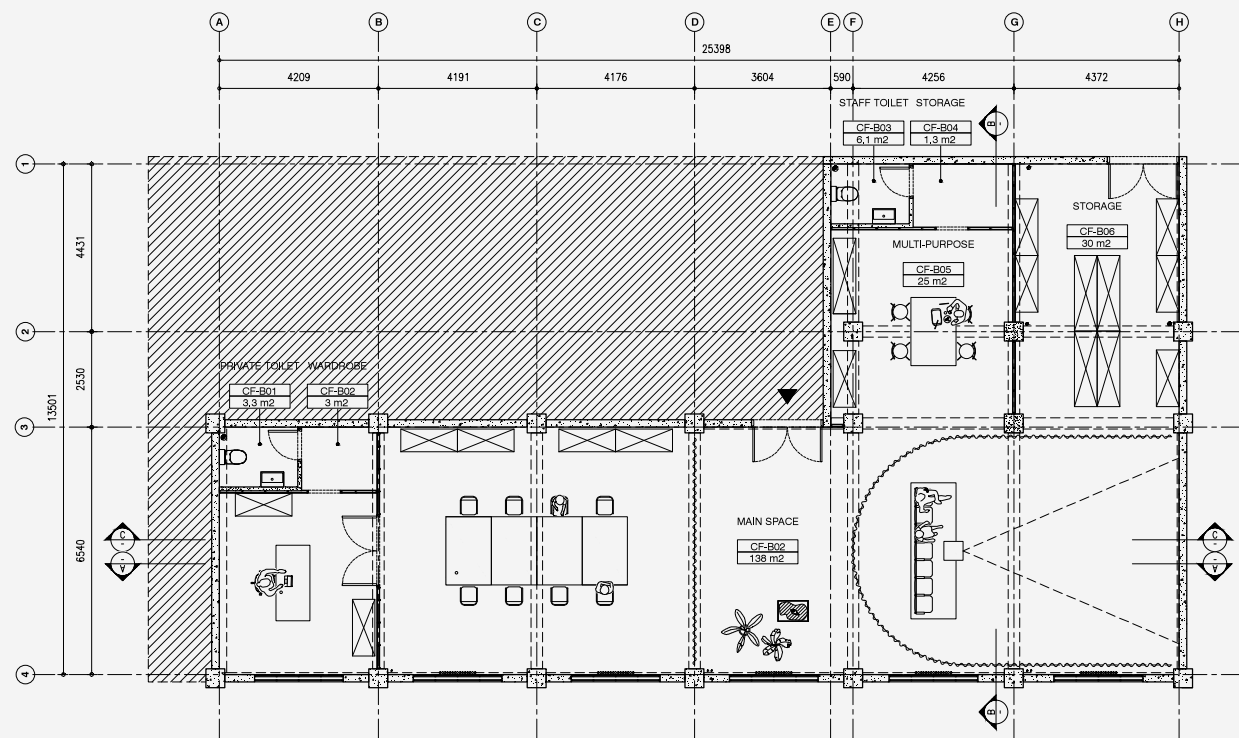




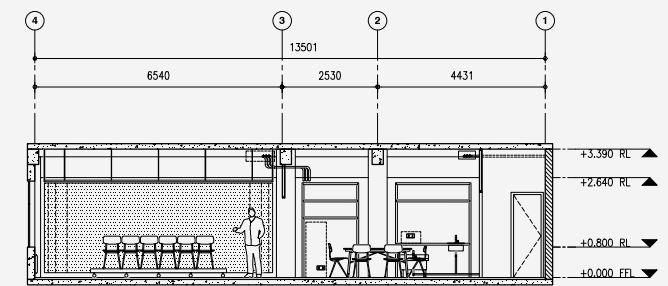




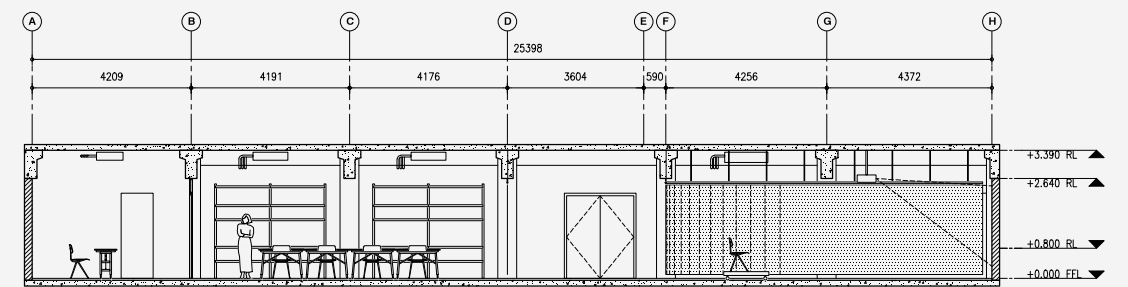




SECTION A



SECTION B



SECTION C



# 2019 UABB

DESCRIPTION

Commissioned for The 2019 Urbanism and Architecture Bi-City Biennale (UABB) of Shenzhen and Hong Kong, the project is the result of discussions between the curators and BEAU on the creation of a surgical and contextual urban intervention that would survive beyond the event. The selected site, located in the Qiaotou Village, presented several complex conditions: two programmatically and physically unrelated open piazzas next to each other; a traditional domestic area progressively turned into a contemporary metropolis; and an unfinished project still in search of its identity, scale, and use. The proposal was articulated around three main ideas. The first one focused on *stitching back* together the two open spaces by overlapping two objects on the literal border. The second idea experimented with merging within a given context; the two objects were positioned and dimensioned in the continuity of existing lanes and deployed *material mimicry* by being made with the exact same bricks. The third idea explored the formal aspects of archetypes of public devices, such as the atrium or the pedestal, while avoiding any preconceived usage or program, hence offering complete freedom of appropriation to the public.

PHOTO (ALL)  
2019 UABB,  
exterior view,  
© Xu Liang Leon

PLAN 1  
2019 UABB,  
site, scale 1/500

PLAN & SECTION  
2019 UABB,  
layout, scale 1/200

TYPE

Public art

YEAR

2019

ADDRESS

Qiaotou Village  
Baoan District  
Shenzhen

MISSION

Construction of urban infrastructure  
Built

TEAM

Organiser: Bao'an Administration Bureau, Planning  
& Natural Resources Bureau of Shenzhen Municipality  
Co-organizer: Overseas Chinese Town Group  
Curator: Yang Yong  
Curatorial Team: Shangqi Art  
Architect: BEAU  
Photographer: Xu Liang Leon



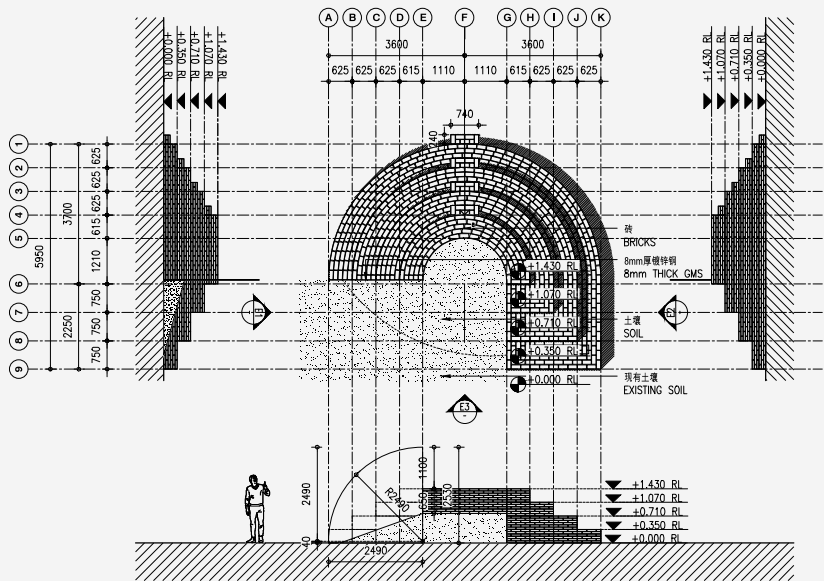
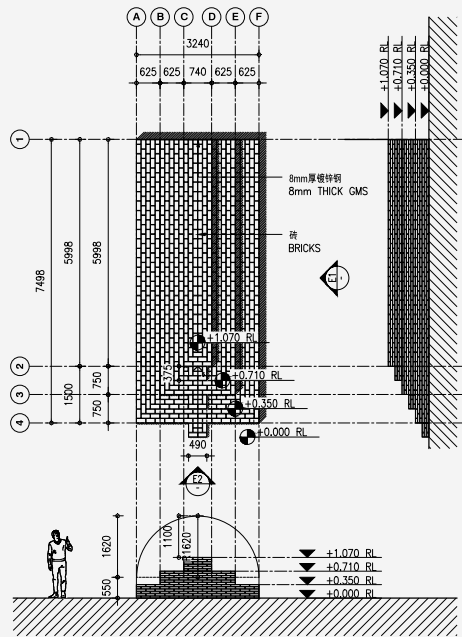
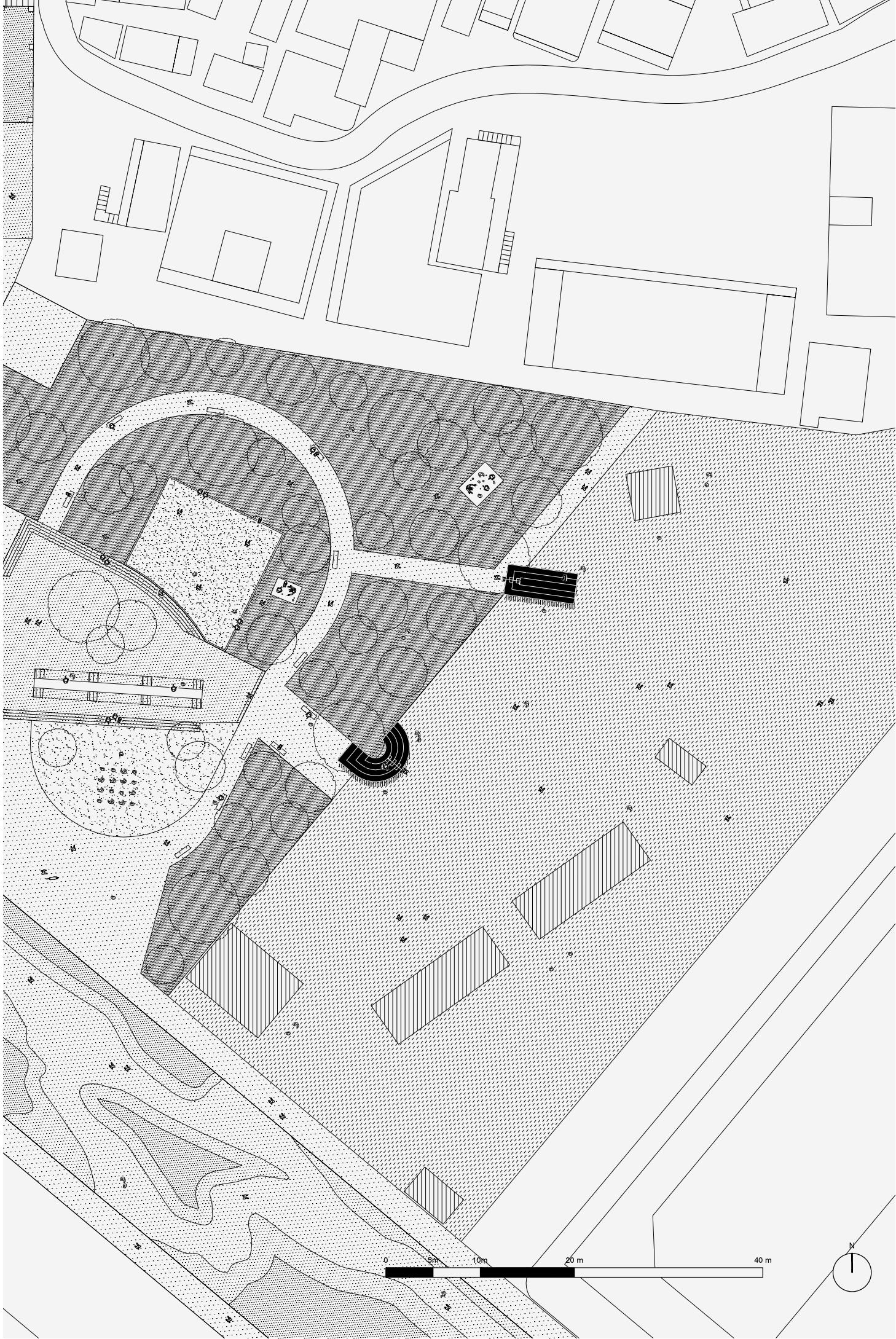














# UNSCHEDULED

DESCRIPTION

In the words of its organisers, “Unscheduled” was neither a generic, alienating art fair nor a museum exhibition; it was a platform. Taking place in two distinct heritage rooms of Tai Kwun, the project deployed as a main strategy the application of a generic spatial grid and its confrontation of pre-existing tectonic conditions, assuming the given background as a *generator* rather than a constraint. This *constants versus variables* principle gave each installation its singularity while promoting principles of democratic equality across the whole project. The first gesture, resulting in a series of *gridded* subspaces, was followed by the abandonment of the typically *linear aisles along white walls* experience in favour of a labyrinthine one, emphasising ideas of connection, confrontation, and immersion. These aspects materialised as *cross gate* openings, inspired by the site’s formal identity, especially in the first room, and the dematerialisation of the display wall in the second room, progressively revealing the existing context as the real background of the show. The resulting *device* was then given to the exhibitors and curators, who had complete freedom on how to use it.

PHOTO (ALL)  
Unscheduled,  
scenography view,  
© Xu Liang Leon

PLAN  
Unscheduled,  
layout, scale 1/200

ILLUSTRATION  
Unscheduled,  
axonometric view

TYPE

Art fair

YEAR

17 – 27 June 2020

VENUE

Tai Kwun Duplex Studio  
10 Hollywood Road  
Central  
Hong Kong

PRESENTED BY

Hong Kong Art Gallery Association (HKAGA)

TEAM

HKAGA Representative: Willem Molesworth & Fabio Rossi  
Curator: Ying Kwok & Sara Wong  
Exhibition Architect: BEAU  
Graphic Designer: Aspect Works  
Contractor: Area37 Studio  
Photographer: Xu Liang Leon











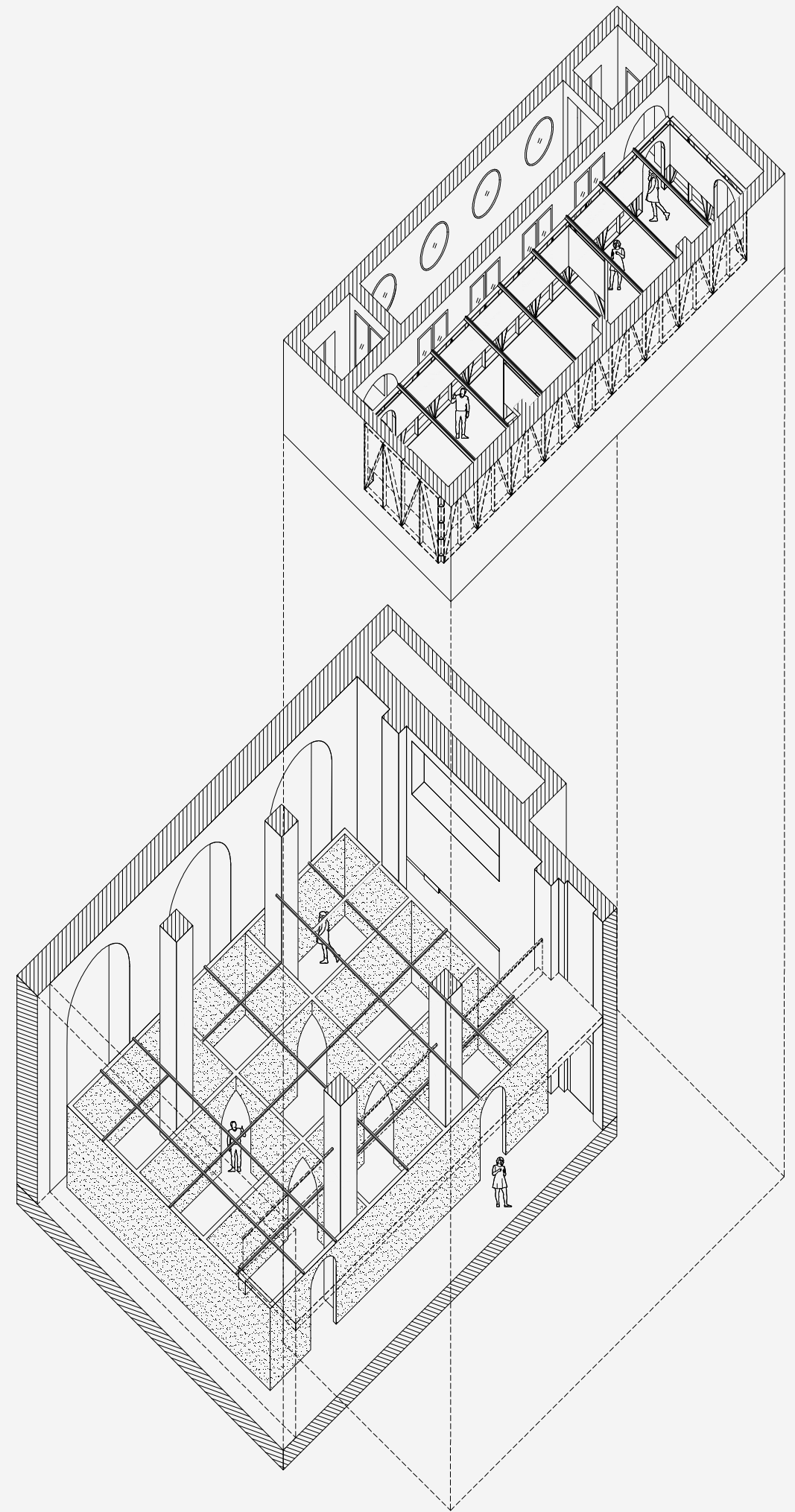
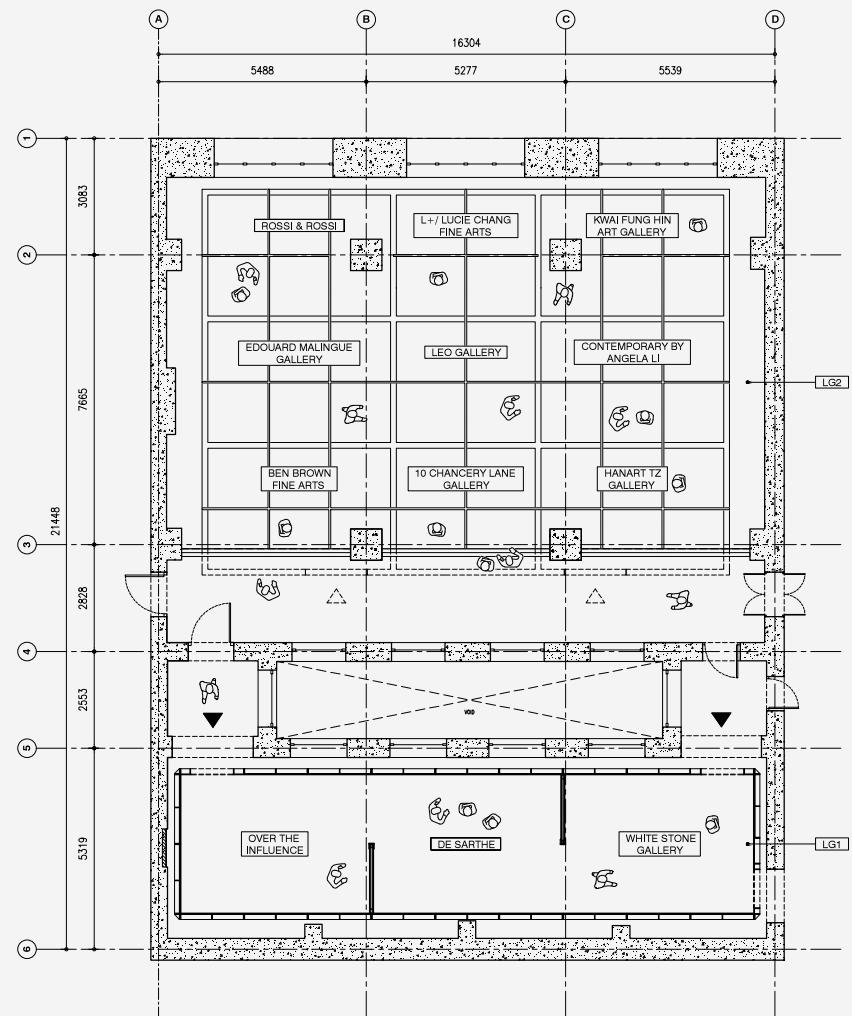














# BAY WALK ART PROJECT

## DESCRIPTION

The Bay Walk installation is part of a larger art program invading one of the massive pedestrian bridges overarching Bao'an, an area of Shenzhen still undergoing development when the project started. As difficult as it was to respond to an unrealised environment, the proposed *urban object* aimed at complementing, amplifying and even contradicting the essence of such infrastructure: that is, a purely functional device designed for the efficient circulation of thousands of pedestrians. By proposing a *staircase to nowhere*, essentially adding an extra layer on top of the foreseen bridge, it both exaggerates and kindly mocks these structures' excessively utilitarian role. Paradoxically, it also allows one to *split* from the public flow and appreciate, as an isolated individual, a moment of stillness while overlooking the entire area. Finally, it reverses the logic of the *only-to-look-at* artwork, as it becomes a behavioural experiment where people interact and improvise with the installation in performative ways. Tectonically, the design plays with the aggregation of various elements: a staircase; a rain-activated *waterfall device*; a connecting tube; all of them being articulated by an overly structural spine. This blunt assembly process, very mechanical in its formal and constructive language, is what gives the piece its uncanny yet completely structurally sound appearance.

## TYPE

Public art

## YEAR

2021

## ADDRESS

Bay Walk  
Baoan District  
Shenzhen

## MISSION

Construction of urban infrastructure  
Built

## TEAM

Client: Shenzhen Bao'an District Bay Area  
Development Affairs Center  
Developer: City Urban Administrative  
& Law Enforcement Bureau of Bao'an District  
Bay Walk Design: James Corner Field Operations & AUBE  
Curator: Yang Yong  
Curatorial Team: Shangqi Art  
Architect: BEAU  
Photographer: Hu Kangyu & Xu Liang Leon

PHOTO (ALL)  
Bay Walk Art Project,  
exterior view,  
© Hu Kangyu & Xu Liang Leon

PLAN 1  
Bay Walk Art Project,  
site, scale 1/500

PLAN & SECTION  
Bay Walk Art Project,  
layout, scale 1/200



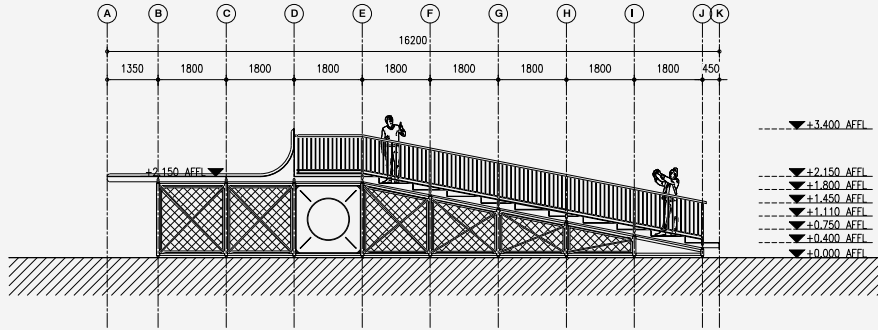
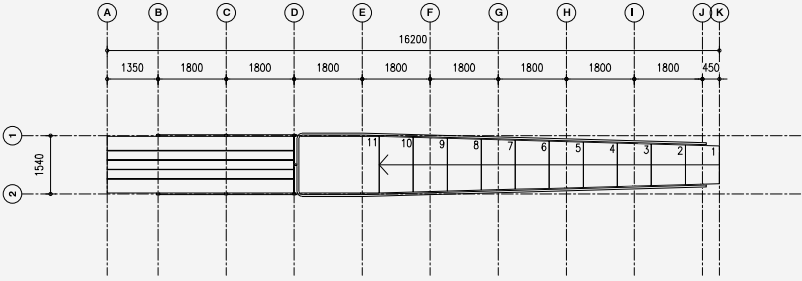
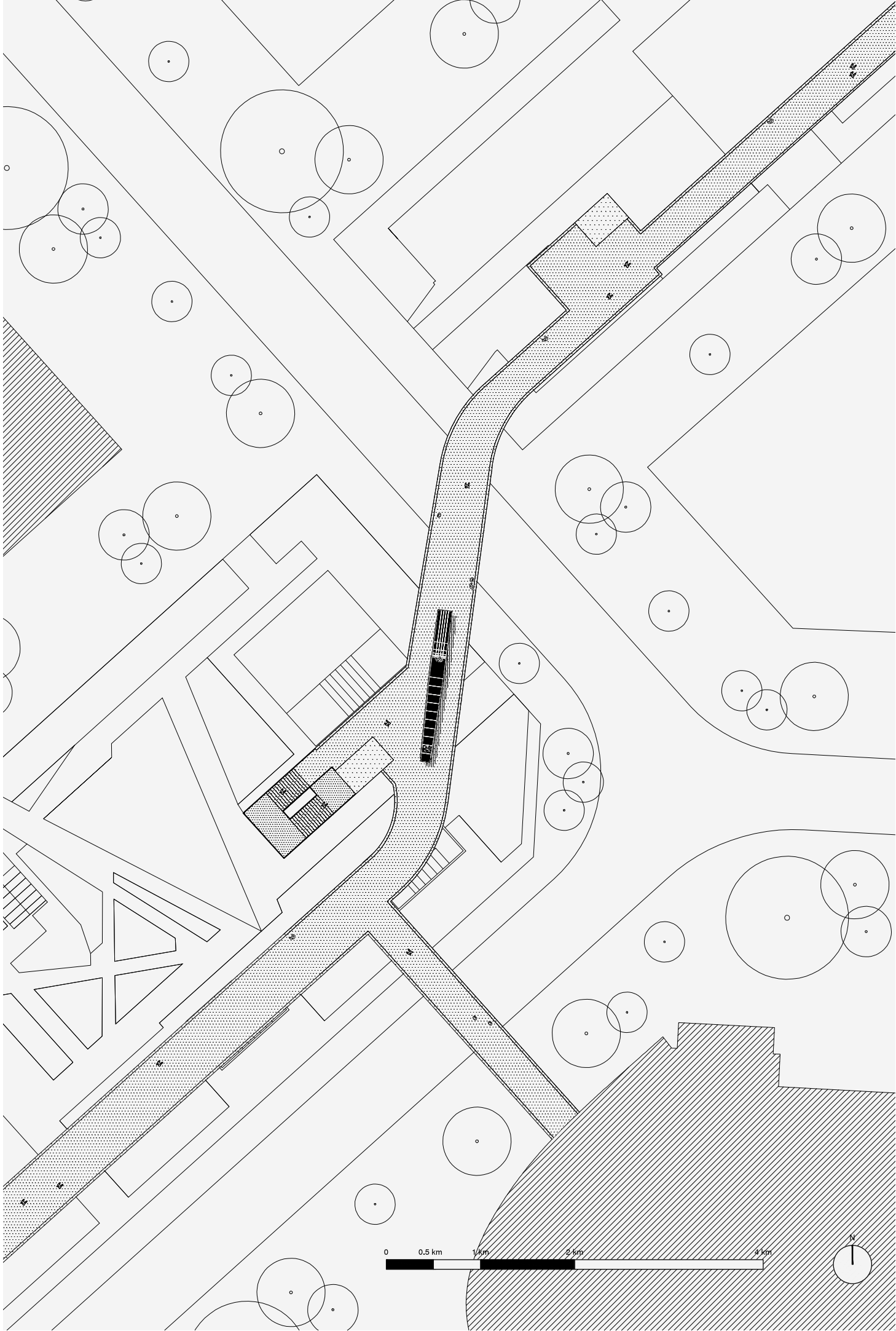














# PROJECT OASIS

DESCRIPTION

Project Oasis, co-signed with Bureau Bas Smets, comprised the revitalisation of two public spaces within Tai Kwun, an emblematic Hong Kong heritage building and former police station turned art space by Herzog & de Meuron in 2018. Intentionally quiet in its expression and means, its main strategies were not based on design intentions *per se* but on pragmatic yet sensitive analysis of the context. The first intervention was articulated around preservation issues of the four historic trees within Prison Yard. As an answer, large circular planters were built, providing generous shaded seating and giving the trees' roots room to grow. The polished concrete they are made of includes aggregates of salvaged stones from the historical prison. The outcome blends with the context, as if it has *always been there*. The second intervention, at Lower E Hall, one of the most impressive infrastructures of the site, confronted its problem of public desertion. More than 200 plants in pots were implemented to generate human-scale sub-spaces that echo the pre-existing grid of columns; the whole was then refurbished with generic tables and chairs, allowing free appropriation by the public. The result offers somewhat of a *vibrant conservatory*, balancing the quiet openness and mineral nature of the Prison Yard's intervention.

PHOTO (ALL)  
Project Oasis,  
exterior view,  
© Xu Liang Leon

PLAN 1  
Project Oasis,  
site, scale 1/500

PLAN & SECTION 1  
Project Oasis,  
prison yard layout,  
scale 1/200

TYPE

Public space

YEAR

2021

ADDRESS

Tai Kwun Contemporary  
10 Hollywood Road  
Central  
Hong Kong

MISSION

Transformation of public space  
1574 sq.m  
Built

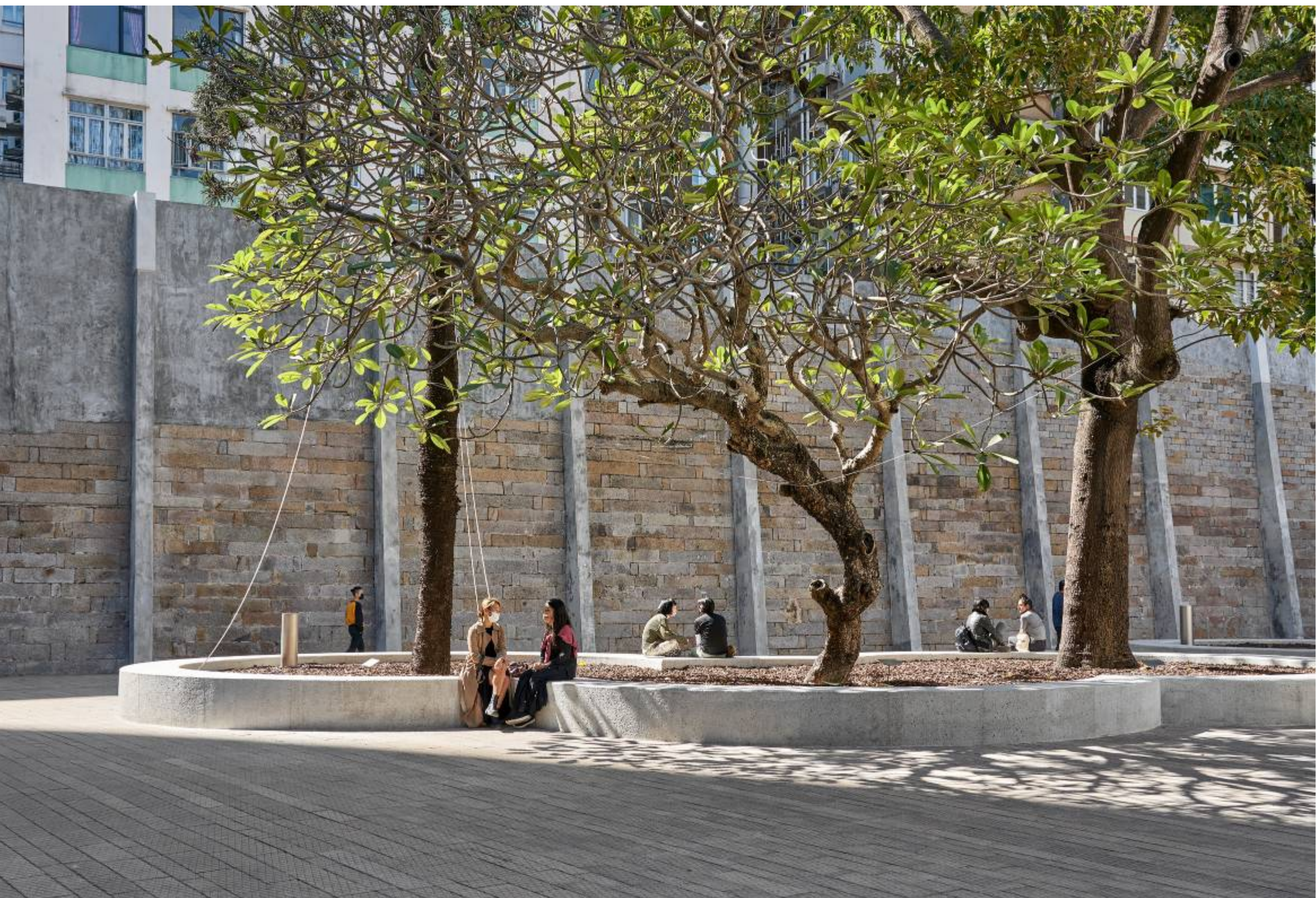
TEAM

Client: The Jockey Club CPS Limited (JCCPS)  
JCCPS Director: Chin Chin Teoh  
JCCPS Senior Project Manager: Kenneth Lee  
Architect: BEAU + Bureau Bas Smets (BBS)  
Artist Consultant: Nadim Abbas  
Authorised Person and Registered Structural Engineer:  
WING consulting  
Contractor: United Soundfair Engineering  
Landscape Contractor: Bluet Garden  
Photographer: Xu Liang Leon

PLAN & SECTION 2  
Project Oasis,  
lower E hall layout,  
scale 1/200

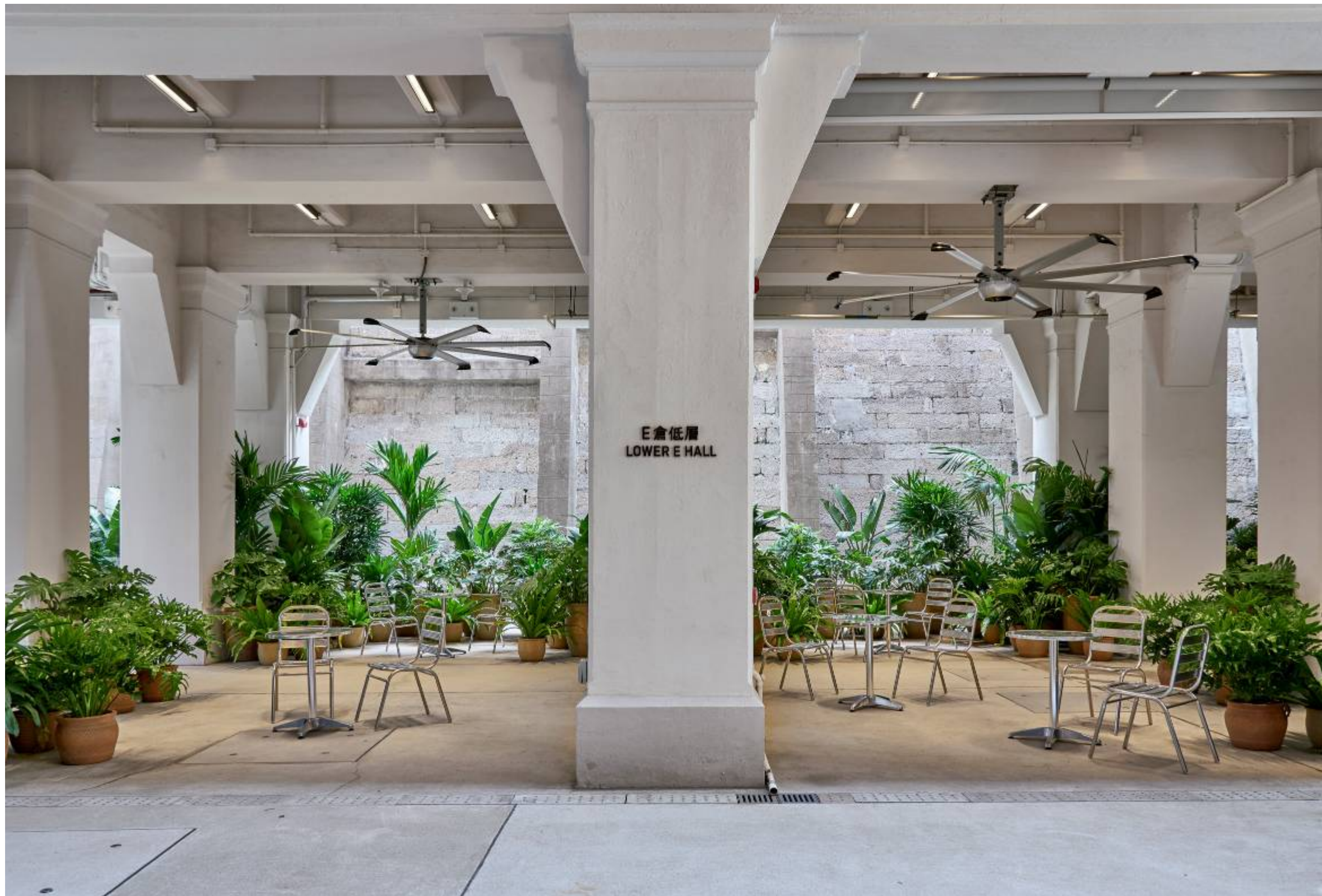




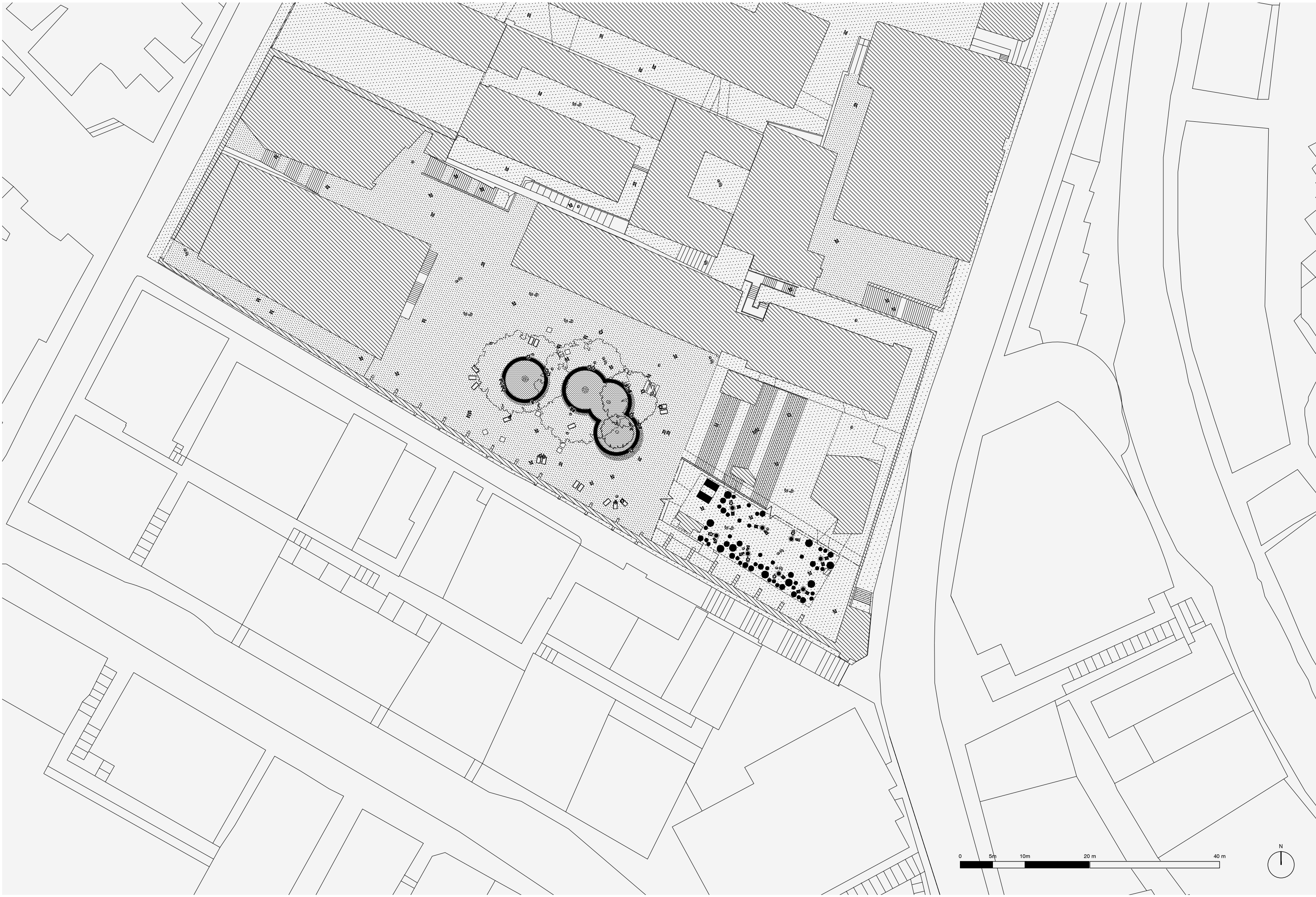




E倉低層  
LOWER E HALL











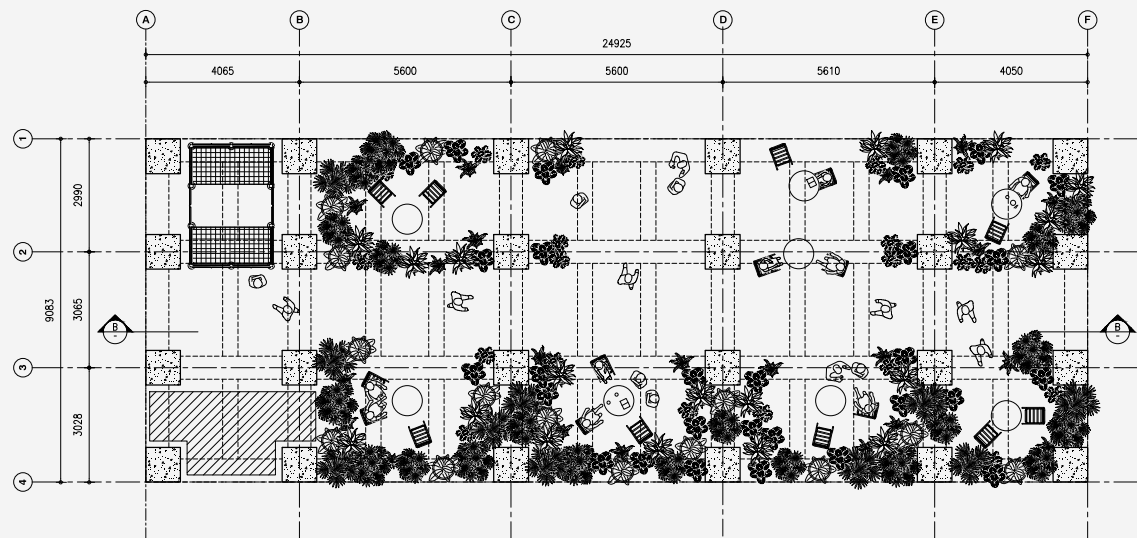




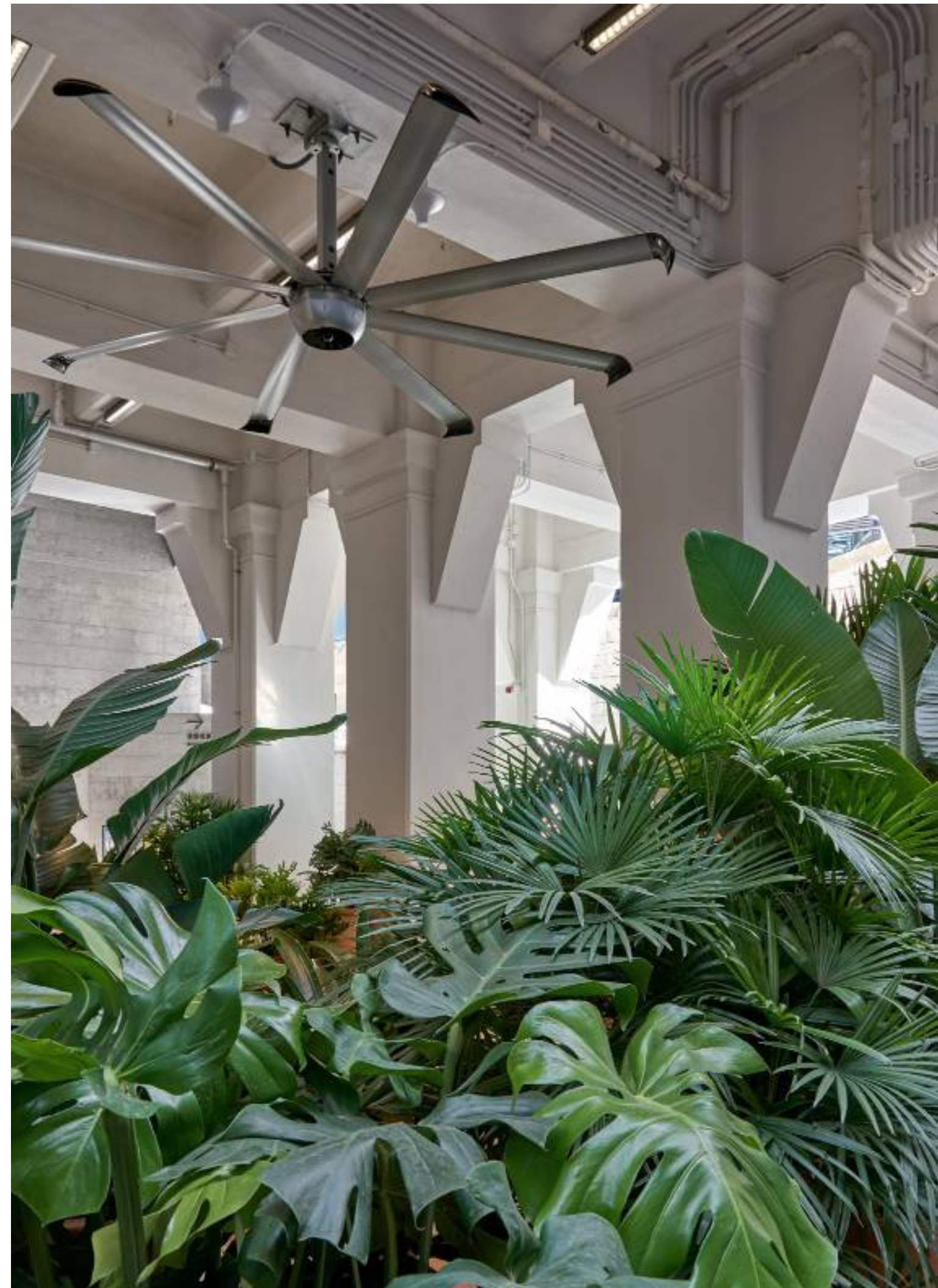
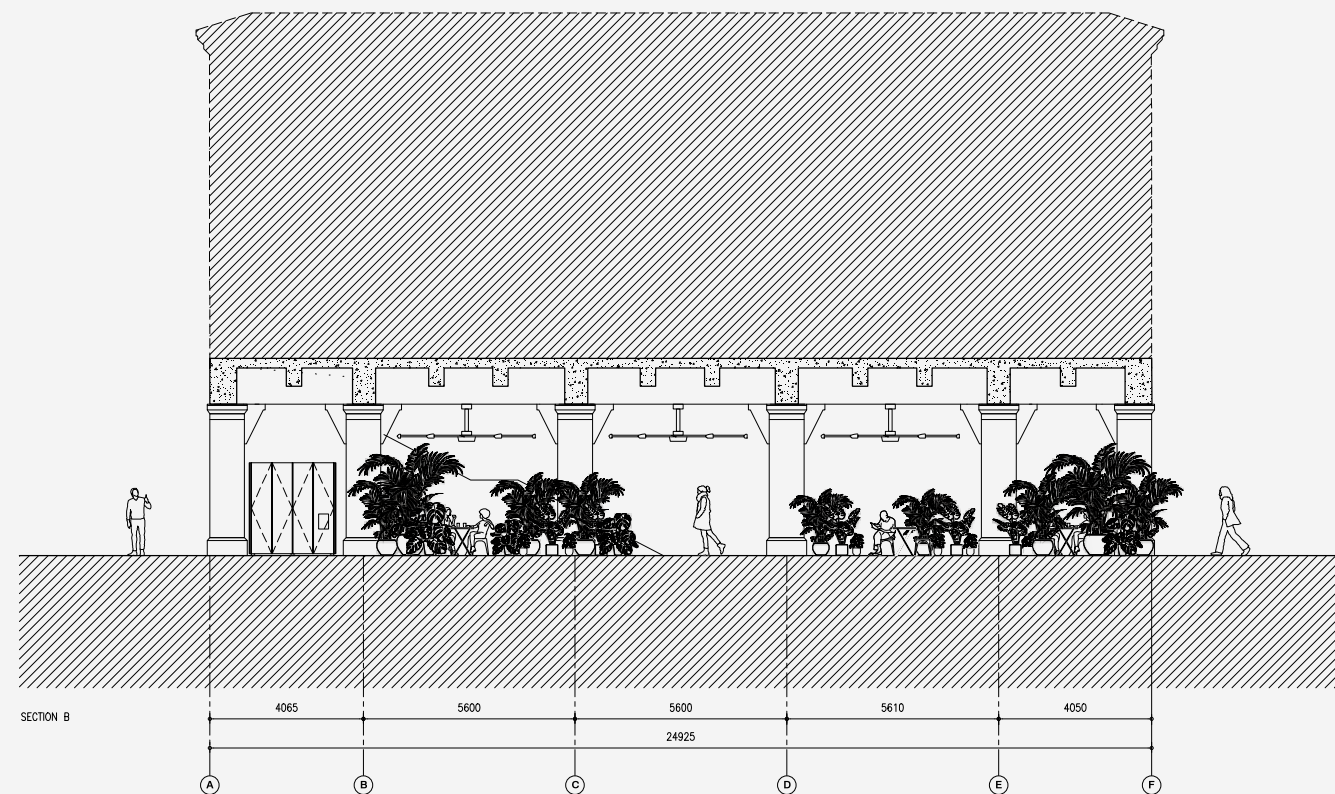








PLAN





# PHD GROUP

DESCRIPTION

Envisioned as a tiny *masterplan*, PHD Group gallery is set within a former 1970s clubhouse hidden at the very top of a typical Hong Kong tower. Its various phases will see the space evolving organically with its program. For the first stage, the space was reduced to its bare infrastructural condition and equipped with the minimum to perform as a gallery, with the addition of domestic spaces in the form of a salon and meeting room. Following the logic of *context as generator*, the few added elements were literally sampled from the host building and implemented through a collaborative process where the clients themselves built the major parts with the help of friends and supporters. Constructively speaking, the project explores the notion of *expressive austerity* that is the elaboration of a formal and aesthetic language through the very act of implementing raw and purposely simplistic components. A second phase will explore the interstitial space between the gallery volume and the main building's perimeter.

PHOTO 1 TO 5  
PHD Group,  
interior view,  
© Xu Liang Leon

SECTION 1  
PHD Group,  
layout, scale 1/200

PLAN  
PHD Group,  
layout, scale 1/200

PHOTO 6  
PHD Group,  
exterior view,  
© Xu Liang Leon

SECTION 2  
PHD Group,  
roof floor layout,  
scale 1/500

TYPE

Art gallery

YEAR

2022

ADDRESS

N/A

MISSION

Implementation of an art gallery in an office tower  
197 sq.m  
Built

TEAM

Client: Ysabelle Cheung & Willem Molesworth  
Architect: BEAU  
Photographer: Xu Liang Leon



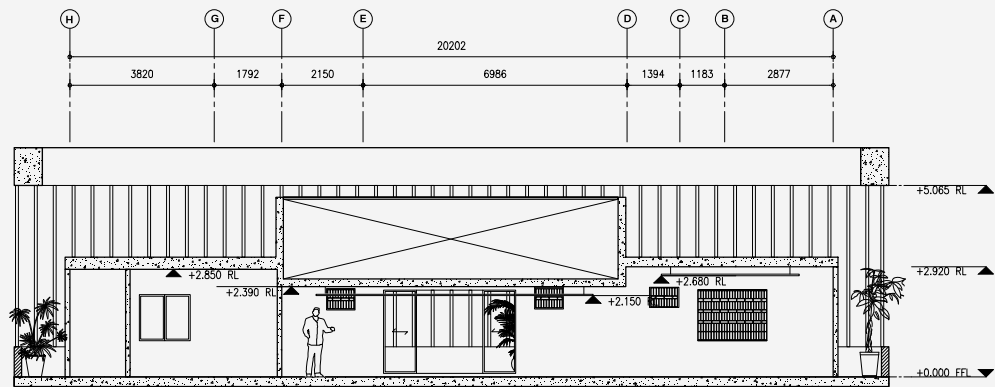




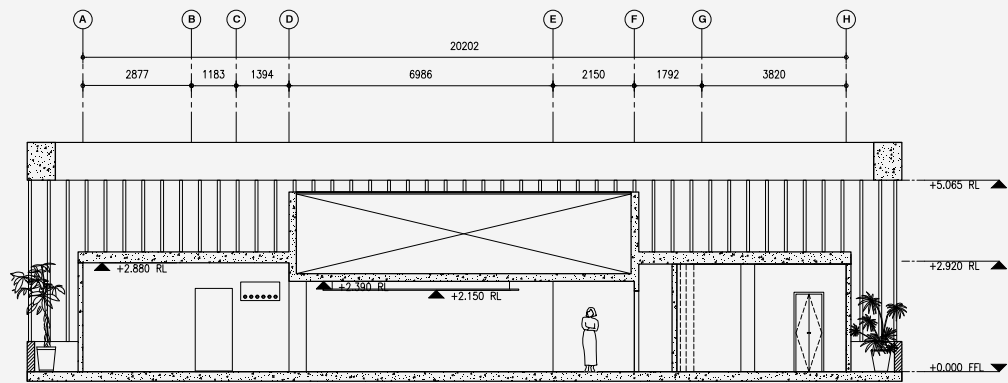




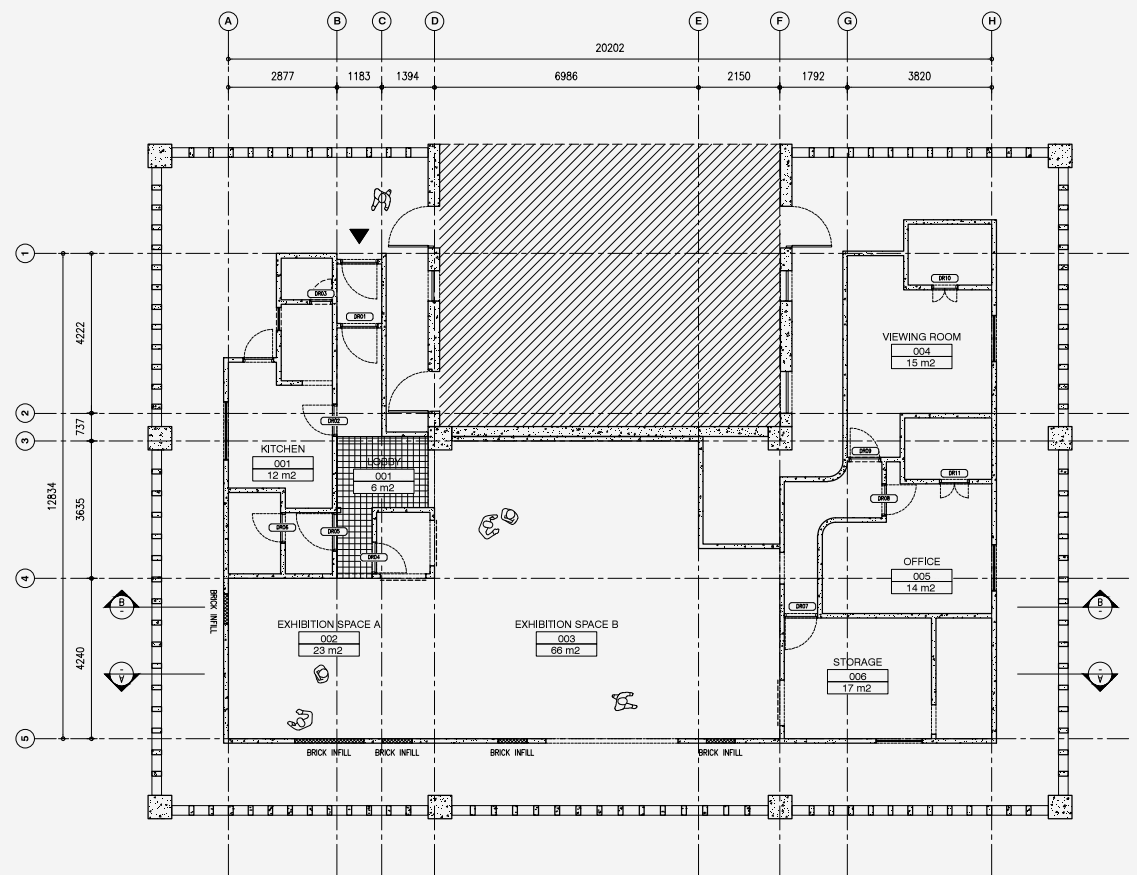




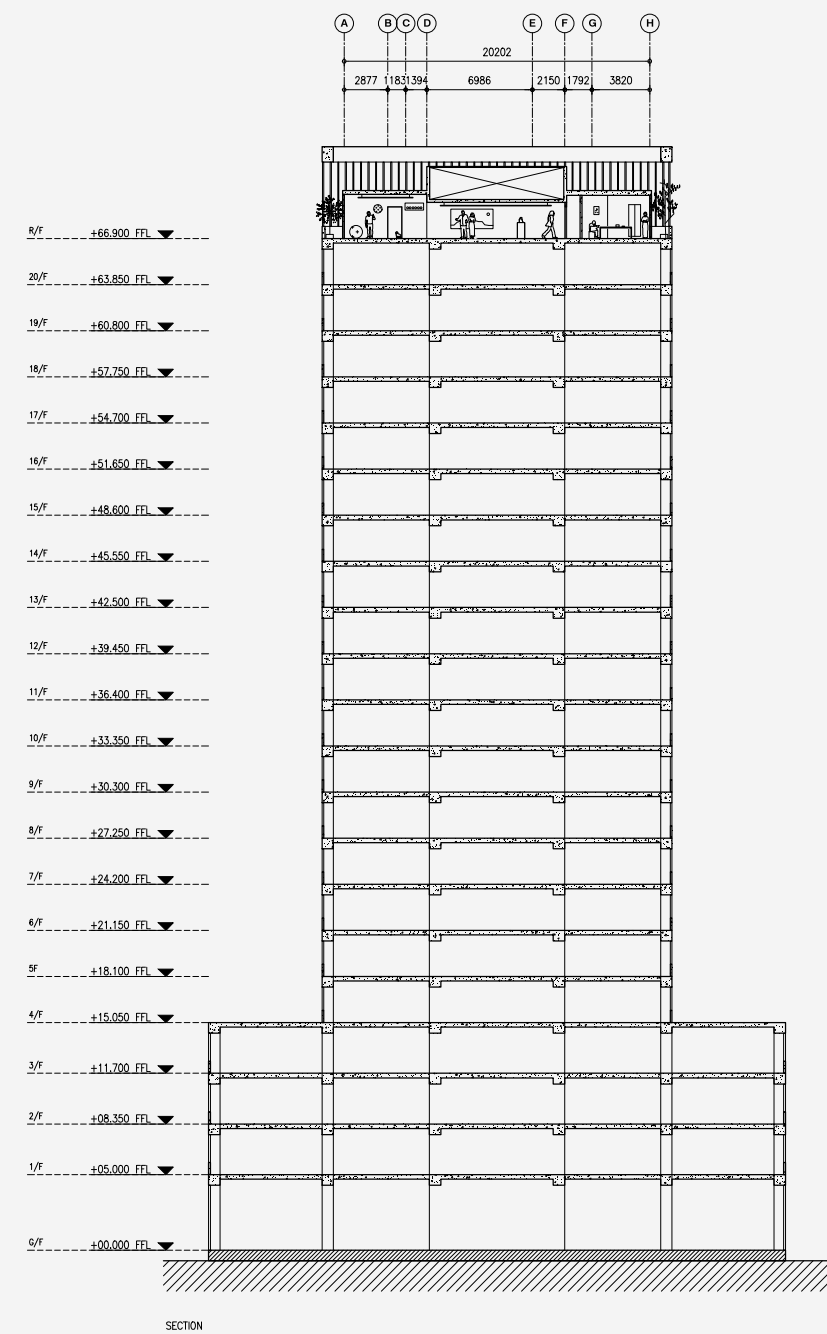
SECTION A



SECTION B









# KIANG MALINGUE (TIN WAN)

DESCRIPTION

Kiang Malingue’s space in Tin Wan District is the fourth collaboration between the Hong Kong-based gallery and BEAU. Developed in parallel, it acts as a satellite space complementing their main gallery. Seen as more radical in nature, it addresses how to transform a typical industrial space using absolute, minimal means and gestures: improve acoustic, control lighting and climate, formalise a threshold/reception, and implement a small pantry. The main central space’s distinct features were carefully retained, from the glossy *canary* floor coating and numerous permeable windows, to the overarching, spatially compressing concrete ceiling. The space, mostly untouched, widely open and *appropriable*, aims at accommodating artistic projects that are playful and experimental in essence. Elaborating on the notion of *expressive austerity*, all materials are plain and obvious, yet were implemented in a controlled and precise way. Combined with a legible construction process, this resulted in a *mechanical*, almost *neo-constructivist* architectural language, where everything is what it needs to be and where it needs to be.

PHOTO (ALL)  
Kiang Malingue,  
interior view,  
© Xu Liang Leon

ILLUSTRATION 1  
Kiang Malingue,  
entrance axonometric view

ILLUSTRATION 2  
Kiang Malingue,  
pantry axonometric view

PLAN  
Kiang Malingue,  
layout, scale 1/200

TYPE

Art gallery

YEAR

2022

ADDRESS

Unit B1, 13/F, Blue Box Factory Building  
25 Hing Wo Street, Tin Wan  
Aberdeen  
Hong Kong

MISSION

Implementation of an art gallery in a former factory building  
387 sq.m  
Built

TEAM

Client: Lorraine Kiang & Edouard Malingue  
Architect: BEAU  
Main Contractor: KY Design & Engineering  
Photographer: Xu Liang Leon



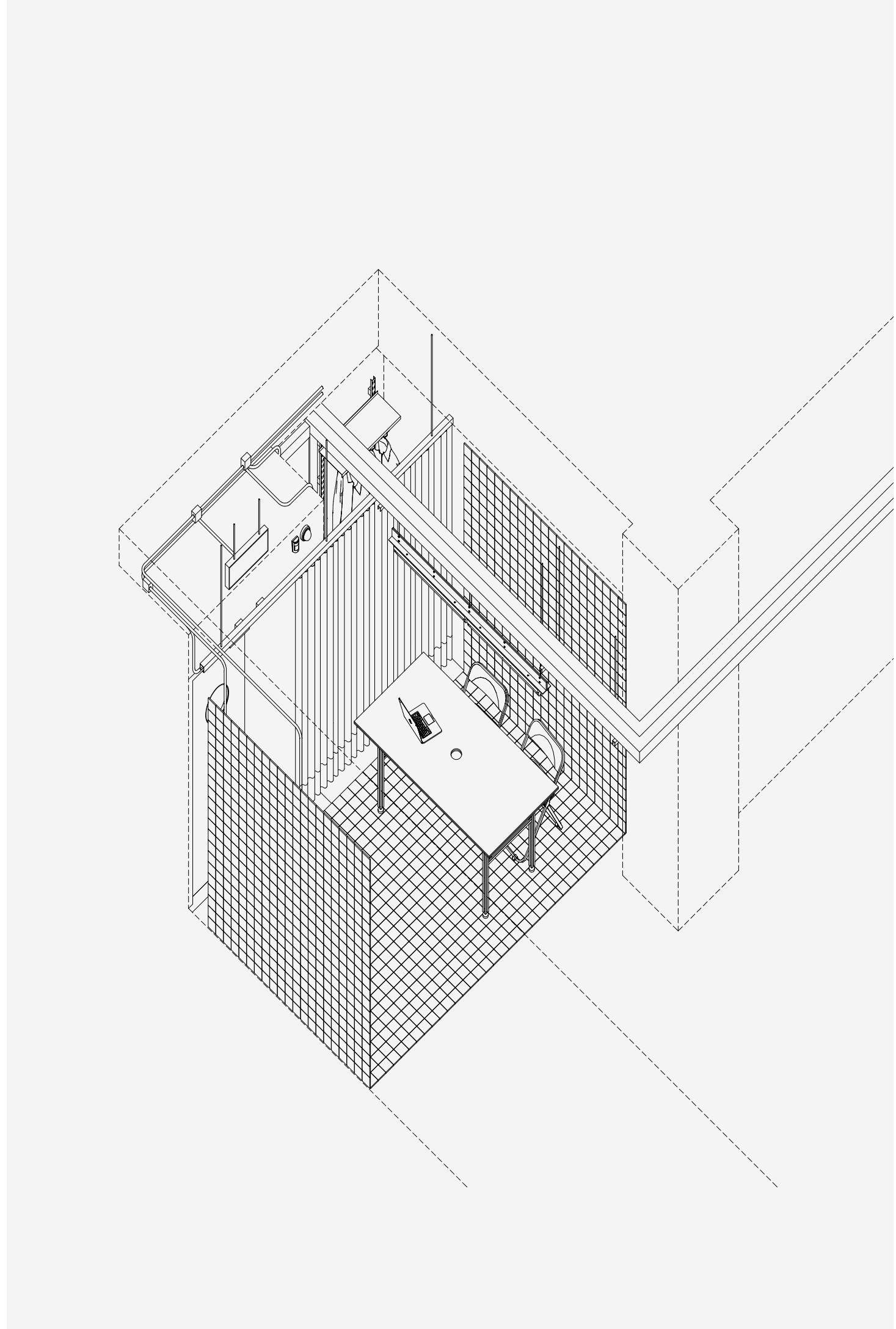




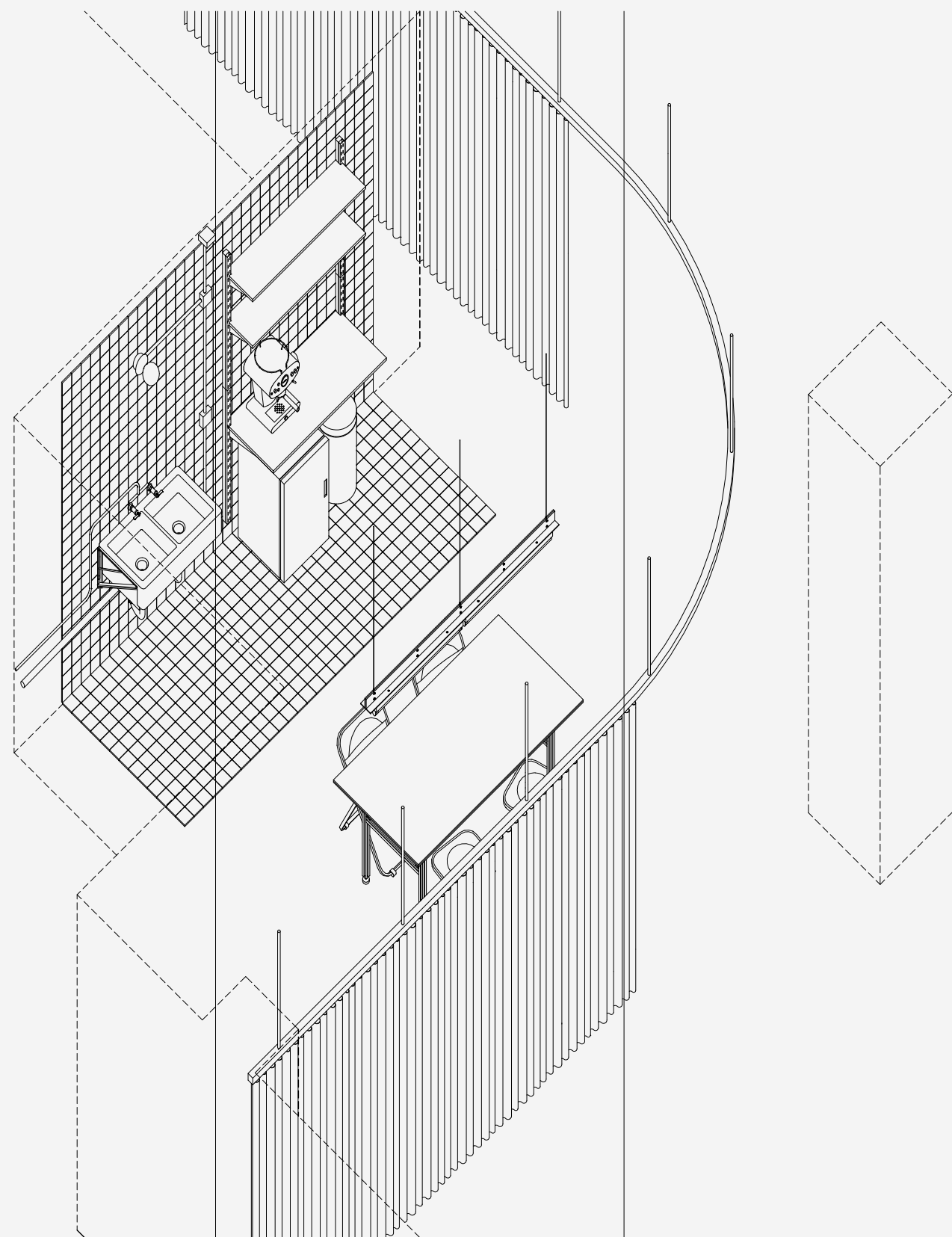








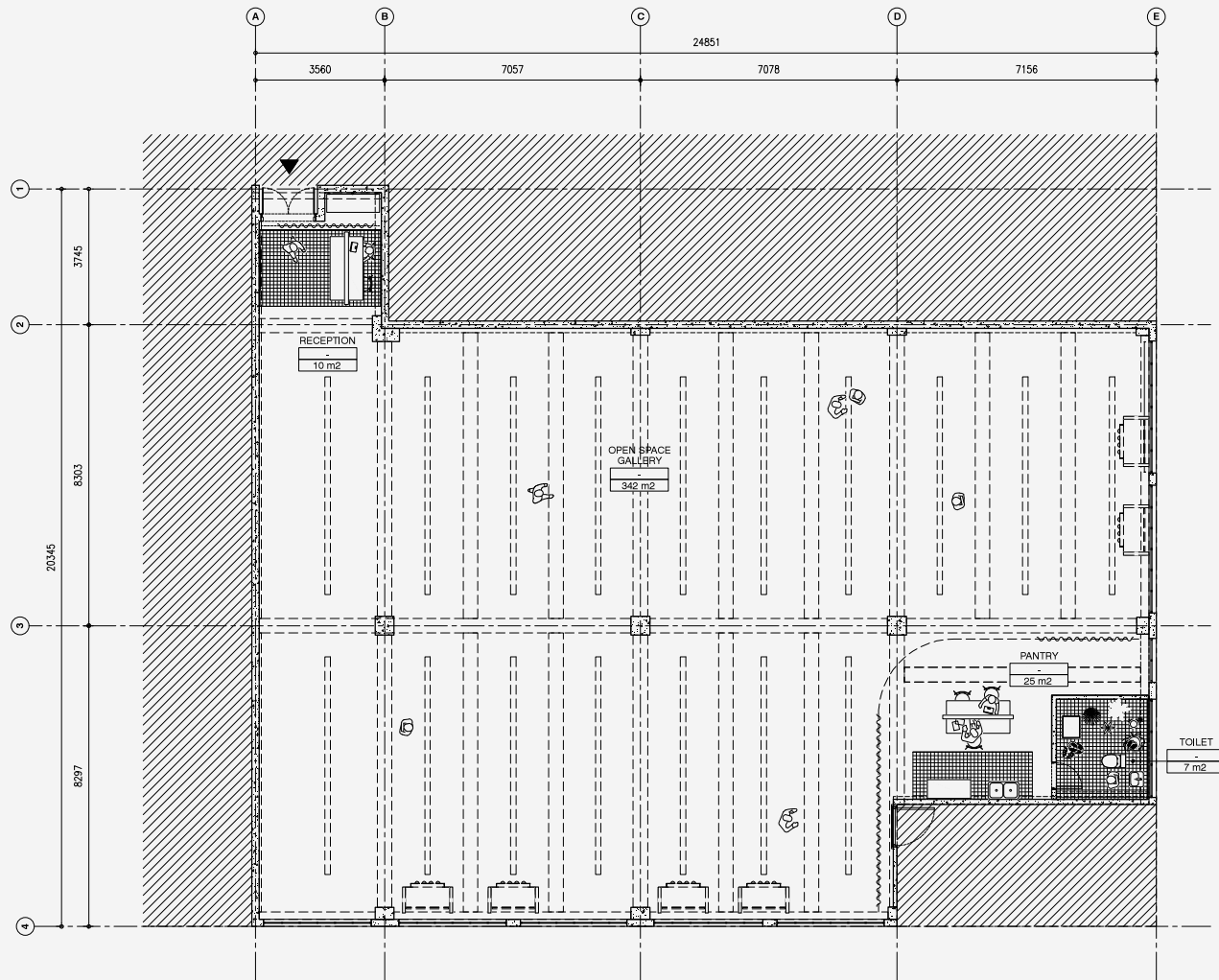














# CAO FEI: TIDAL FLUX

## DESCRIPTION

Cao Fei's solo show at the Museum of Art Pudong, Shanghai, took shape as a massive retrospective assembling works from the artist's two-decades-long career. The exhibition design, the fourth collaboration between the artist and BEAU, continued to elaborate on their common fascination for urban infrastructure, architectural language, movie sets and spatial/material experimentation. While major themes or chapters were identifiable, the main objective was to create a sense of organic looseness in terms of spatial and display experience. To do so, a couple of main strategies were deployed: the implementation of corridors that cancelled the original disconnection between the various exhibition rooms; the subdivision of these rooms into relatively homogeneous sub-spaces; and the multiplication of physical connections among them by an almost absurd amount of doors and openings, all of this leading to the progressive disappearance of any obvious or logical structure. As the result of an intense two-hands design process involving the artist and architects, all artworks, installations and projections then merged with the above spatial intervention, blurring even more the traditional dichotomy between art and display infrastructure. This permeability between content and container was ultimately reflected in the overly varied and playful palette of materials and colours, purposely opposite to the tamed and minimal language usually deployed in museums.

## TYPE

Exhibition

## YEAR

22 June - 17 November 2024

## VENUE

Museum of Art Pudong  
No.2777 Binjiang Avenue  
Pudong New Area  
Shanghai

## PRESENTED BY

Museum of Art Pudong

## CURATOR

Nancy Spector  
Xue Tan  
Yang Beichen

## ARTIST

Cao Fei

## TEAM

Exhibition Architect: BEAU  
Graphic Designer: Studio Pianpian He & Max Harvey  
Contractor: Shanghai Lujiazui  
Development (Group) Company Limited  
Photographer: Xu Liang Leon

PHOTO (ALL)  
Installation view of  
Cao Fei: Tidal Flux,  
courtesy the artist,  
© Xu Liang Leon

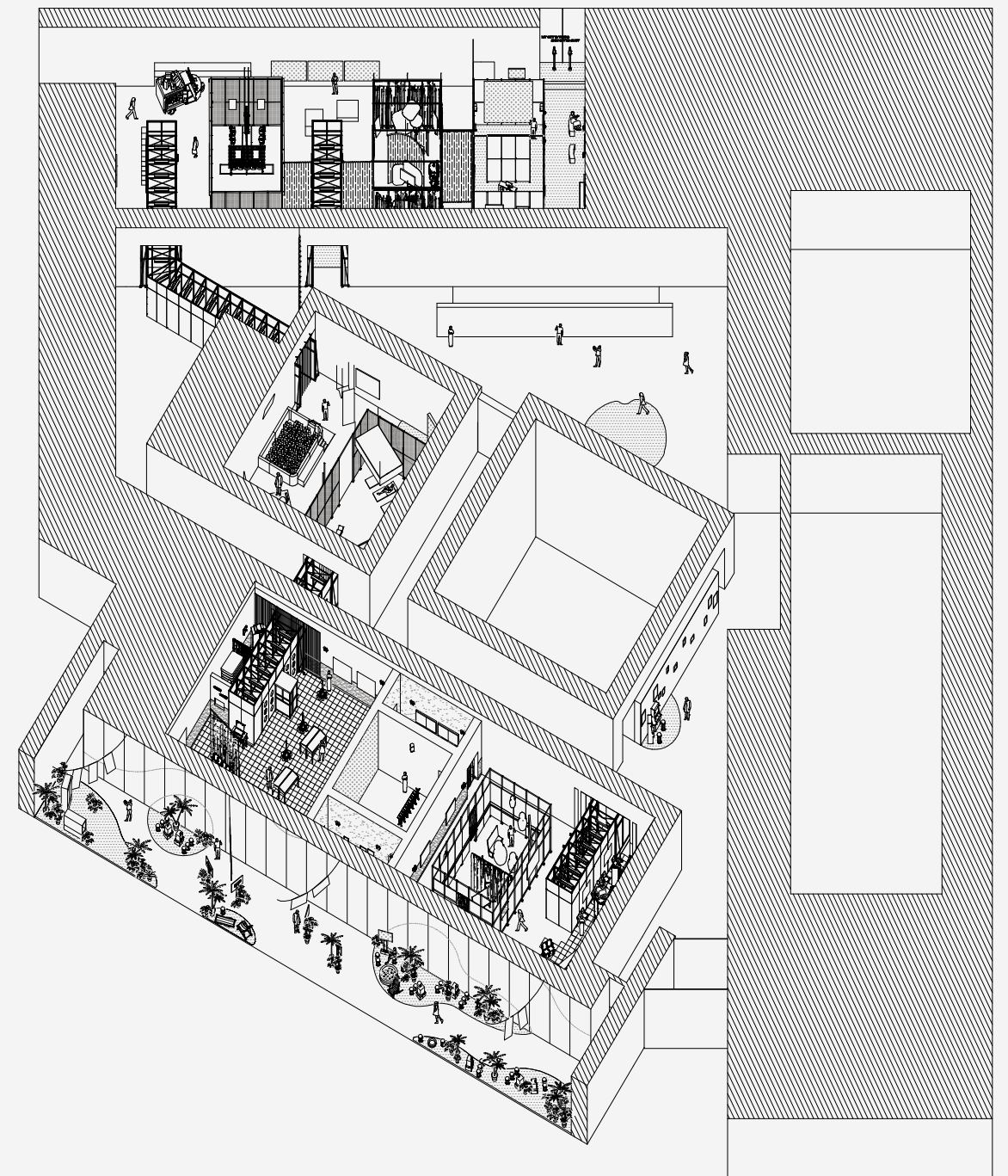
ILLUSTRATION  
Cao Fei: Tidal Flux,  
axonometric view





















# SUPPER CLUB

DESCRIPTION

Developed as a response to traditional art fair models, the weeklong Supper Club project hosted artworks from 22 international and regional galleries alongside nightly events and discussions. Highly critical of the approach that is the standard for such temporary events, it advocated for alternative strategies to *fully-designed* and *newly-built* infrastructures. As so, it first relied on the invasion of an iconic heritage building, the 1890s-era Old Dairy Farm Depot, leaving it as untouched and unmodified as possible, and seeing its strong characteristics as potentials more than constraints. Secondly, the project embraced the idea of *non-extractive design* that aimed for a *near-zero-brought-to-site-materials* objective, deploying multiple playful reinterpretations of readily-available objects or elements, and turning them into artwork displays or spatial generators. Additionally, a couple of entirely transposable interventions were built, in consideration of potential reuse after the event. The result was economical, fast to install and deinstall, environmentally responsible, and most importantly, in line with the radical spirit of the people involved.

PHOTO (ALL)  
Supper Club,  
scenography view,  
© Xu Liang Leon

PLAN  
Supper Club,  
layout, scale 1/200

TYPE

Art fair

YEAR

25 – 30 March 2024

VENUE

Fringe Club  
2 Lower Albert Road  
Central  
Hong Kong

PRESENTED BY

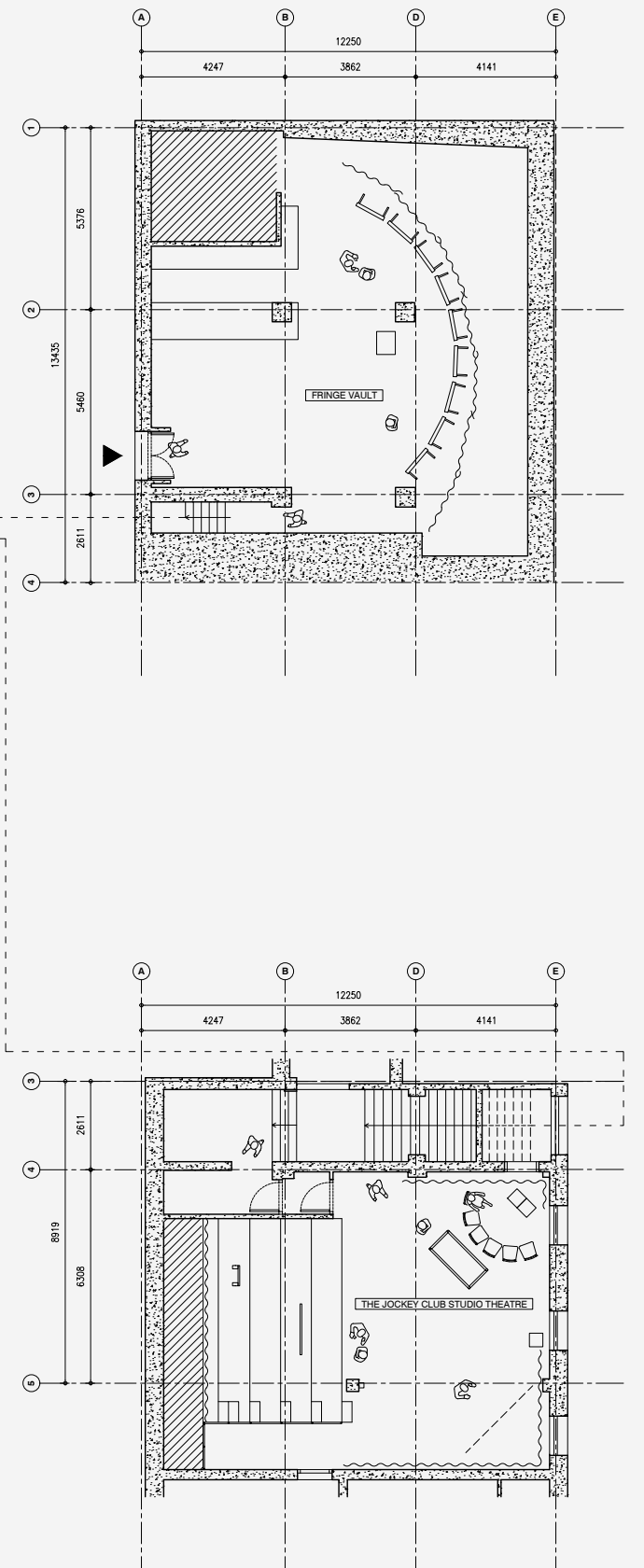
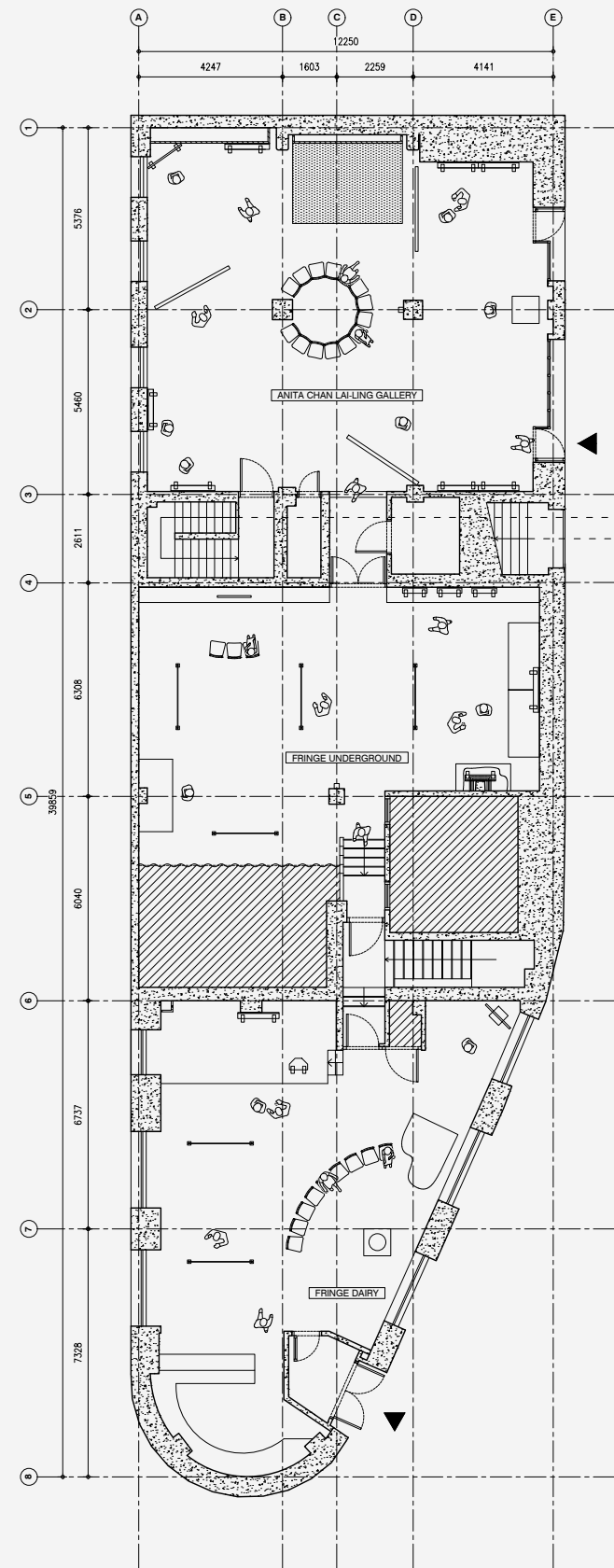
PHD Group and The Shophouse

TEAM

Founder: Alex Chan, Willem Molesworth & Ysabelle Cheung  
Curator: Anqi Li  
Advisory to Supper Club & Fringe Club: Guoying Stacy Zhang  
Project Manager: Sophia Lam  
Press & VIP Relations: Charlotte Raybaud  
Exhibition Architect: BEAU  
Contractor: Screw-up Studio & KY Design & Engineering  
Photographer: Xu Liang Leon













# QUIET INNOVATION

*Architect and founder of VS-A ROBERT-JAN VAN SANTEN<sup>[RJvS]</sup>, together with CHARLOTTE LAFONT-HUGO<sup>[CLH]</sup> and GILLES VANDERSTOCKEN<sup>[GV]</sup>, discuss their project at 39 KING'S ROAD<sup>[P.82]</sup>, moderated by architect NATASZA MINASIEWICZ<sup>[NM]</sup>.*

In 2022, a new, slender building emerged on 39 KING'S ROAD in TIN HAU, HONG KONG. Recognisable as an iconic *pencil tower* (a term used to describe the world's slimmest buildings) designed within the context of intense urban density, the newly-built project exemplifies the extreme parameters of HONG KONG's architectural landscape, ruled by unyielding building regulations and exacting client requirements. Within these extreme parameters, BEAU and VS-A, a company specialised in designing custom-made building façades and envelopes all around the world, were tasked with developing its façade. In the below discussion, held in September 2023, they revisited a dilemma that reflects the rapid modernisation of cities like HONG KONG: how to create something new, singular, and specific to its context, while working with the most common of building façade systems, the curtain wall?

**NM** We are now looking at a contextual photograph, showing *old style*, solid façades on the one hand, and more contemporary, curtain wall façades on the other hand<sup>[01]</sup>. This might be a good starting point.

**GV** This image reflects one of the most important topics we faced when we started the project. For most of it you can see a somehow *chaotic* HONG KONG, where you have all these typologies and all these façade types... there's a multitude of things to see, from solid to curtain walls. We used this multiplicity to address the question: how do you deal with something which is very specific, very singular, like HONG KONG, the way that they're designing towers, especially their façades, while grappling with how the landscape has changed in pursuit of modernism? Essentially asking: by applying the same technique, do you inevitably end up with the same appearance everywhere?

This was also fuelled by a very simple requirement from the client: a curtain wall. Developers only work with this system because at some point in time the BUILDINGS DEPARTMENT adjusted the regulation that made it almost the only answer when it comes to developing a tower in HONG KONG. Basically, if the developers were to use a curtain wall system, they would be able to get 25 cm for

free on the perimeter by not including the wall thickness into the GFA (Gross Floor Area). This is too tempting for them; adding 25 cm to the perimeter, multiplied by 30 stories, adds dozens of square metres, if not more... it's simply irresistible, especially considering the square metre value!

Of course, one could question why curtain walls were proposed. We had various answers, including underlining the desire to embrace modernity, and the will to make HONG KONG look more like a metropolis, such as MANHATTAN. Secondly, there is the idea of performance; basically, curtain walls perform better, in accordance with modern construction techniques. One of the main topics in discussions with ROBERT regarding this project was figuring out how to work with this seemingly already defined technique, thinking about how we could bridge this idea of having something specific and singular whilst still having a curtain wall. Also, to be honest, we always preferred the old-school solid towers.

**RJvS** I have another opinion about curtain walls. HONG KONG is a very dense city, and when you have to demolish and rebuild, there is not a lot of land around the construction site where you can build in a traditional way. Most of the buildings in HONG KONG are prefabricated, allowing for quick construction and low footprints. For example, the high-rise building in front of my office in TAI KOK TSUI was built in one year. They first demolished the previous building, very quickly, then erected the new one. They arrived early in the mornings, with all the materials laid out along the street, and they proceeded. All the while the city was functioning as usual. In FRANCE, when a high-rise is built, it disrupts the whole area. In HONG KONG, it doesn't. It's extremely well organised; prefabricated, unitised curtain walls play a crucial role in this efficiency. Being able to build fast with a low footprint is certainly one of the reasons curtain walls were mandated; it serves the city while also being less noisy, which is especially important in a dense urban area.

**GV** That indeed is part of what makes the curtain wall an inescapable method of construction. From the start, we knew we had to deal with it, so we had to consider how to reconcile singularity and a context-specific façade with the curtain wall technique; that's what ignited the debate. This is one of the first drawings we made after debating various options<sup>[02]</sup>; I remember we were thinking about using canopies to protect the façade, or using more solid materials...

*But in the end we came up with this axonometric drawing<sup>[03]</sup>, purposefully superimposed against this minimal background, illustrating a notion that ROBERT calls quiet innovation. Because there was indeed intelligence in the way façades were made before.*

Even if they were noisier to construct, they were cheap and easy to build, employing relatively low-tech materials, all the while using basic strategies to deal with the environment. In HONG KONG the issue is mostly about protection against the heat and the sun. A common answer was to reduce the size of the windows, even though other more complex examples exist, especially from the late modernist era: beautifully shaped schools, hospitals... but when it came to housing or generic office towers, architects mainly used blank walls and tiny windows.

*Brainstorming sessions were directed towards merging this solid façade archetype with the technical principles of the curtain wall, trying to improve on both without forcing a difference.*

**RJvS** Many things can influence a project. Of course, the context, but also sometimes we should be thinking about the project on its own, finding its own logic. Prefabrication, or unitised curtain walls, isn't automatically related to glass. You can have *opaque curtain walls*; indeed, a curtain wall, by definition, is a wall hanging in front of the structure. Given this, it can basically be anything. The many fully-glazed curtain walls in CHINA are due to the fact that it's the cheapest technique yet. I remember very early discussions about common contextual references, in MONG KOK; office buildings with small canopies above each window, a place to put the air-conditioning, whilst also providing solar protection. Those buildings are great, although the intelligence of their façades cannot be transposed onto new projects, because of regulations.

*It's nice to be able to start a project by reconsidering all its aspects from scratch, to then see which directions things could go, instead of coming in and enforcing a preconceived idea upon the site. We share that with BEAU, the idea that any choice must be backed by a reason.*

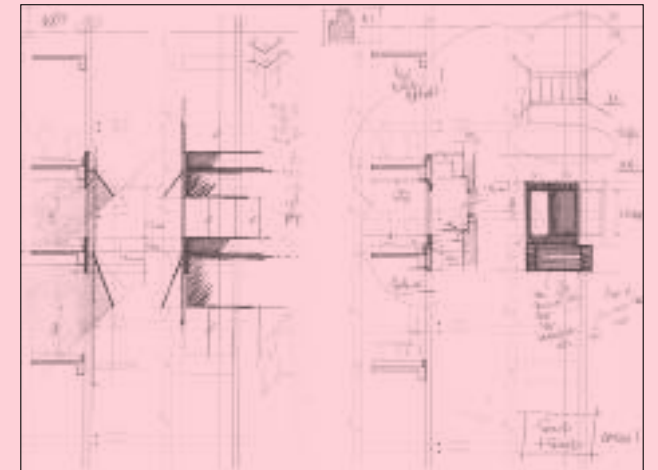
In a sense, this project's construction could seem a bit uninteresting without knowing the reasons behind all the decisions we made, but that's what makes this building outstanding to me, the reasons and the stories that shaped it.

**GV** At BEAU we always develop projects based on three main aspects. One is indeed the

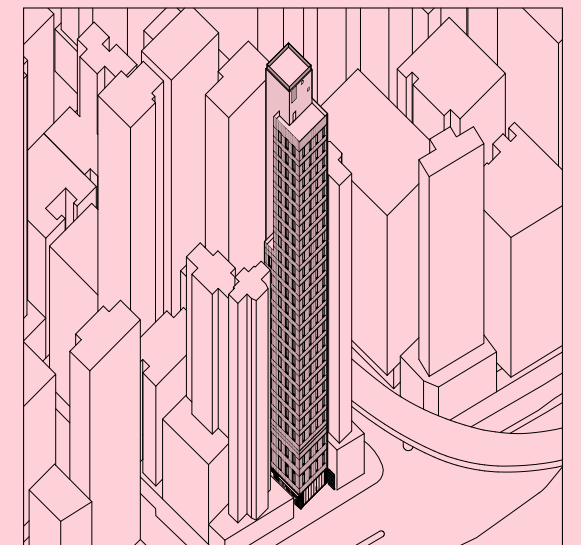
[01]  
AERIAL VIEW OF HONG KONG  
© RUSLAN BARDASH  
2018



[02]  
SKETCH  
© GILLES VANDERSTOCKEN  
2019



[03]  
AXONOMETRIC VIEW  
2019





*context.* We are also attracted to the *anti-icon* approach, which is perfectly illustrated by this project. We posted pictures of the building on social media, and many people asked us where it was as they could not identify it against the urban background. We really did manage to merge the new building with its context by using the same sense of scale, all the while working with new materials<sup>[04]</sup>. The only intention we had from the start, which could count as a preconceived and formal choice, was to aim for a solid, monolithic façade. Since the idea conformed with regulations, we only had to focus on the façade’s rhythm; the dimensions and the repetition of the windows and figuring out the materials for the curtain walls. We knew that this choice would lead to more costs, but found tricks to mitigate it, such as the obsessive multiplication of similar components.

*It was always a balance between decisions and what they implied in terms of regulations, and their cost: a process-based design, constantly evolving.*

CLH In this picture<sup>[05]</sup>, if you imagine a glass tower instead of this project, you can see it would have clashed with the surroundings, quite drastically.

NM The way you’ve managed to innovate against and through the multiple constraints seems to have led you to an aesthetic that is quite different from what one would expect, which is why you probably get these comments asking ‘*Where’s the project?*’. But it is indeed an indicator of its success. I’m interested in hearing more about the concept of *quiet innovation*. What does it mean for you?

GV ROBERT came up with the word one day, and it clicked instantly. The concept resonated with us; in a way, it encapsulated the idea of not dealing with the usual *tabula rasa*.

*Basically, quiet innovation is about keeping a sense of all that has been done before, through observation, and by learning from previous buildings. The goal is to identify what is working, what could be improved, and to reflect on that.*

This is a building with small windows and a solid façade, which in itself isn’t that unique, but usually, similar façades have very

poor performance, no insulation, visibly aging. So it made sense to work on how to make this solid façade *better*, which sparked debates to find solutions. The client was eager to follow our intuitions, provided that we manage to make it as cheap, if not cheaper, than a common glazed façade. As one of the main developers in the city, they considered it to be an *experimental* project; that’s why they commissioned us, a smaller office, and asked for propositions, for our insights and solutions. The budget was limited from the start. *Quiet innovation* was also an answer to these constraints, and the term was used to present the project to them.

*In the end, the experimental aspect of our proposition lay less in its globality and more in the addition of specific details.*

RJvS *Quiet innovation*, in another context, simply could have been called being *reasonable*, the process of developing a project step by step, in increments. I worked on a project 25 years ago where the client commissioned a double-skin glass façade. We ended up with brick walls and windows. The client was overjoyed, because the cost was extremely reduced, and we coincidentally had a huge budget for windows. From that point on, the focus was to produce a window that had all the qualities of a double-skin façade. It was supposed to create this relationship of comfort on the inside and reactivity to exterior changing conditions. Basically, one simple window had to perform like a double-skin façade, which we managed. The design phase produced 21 versions and the windows were repeated about 200 times throughout the project. Although the client was pleased with the result, the external perception was that it seemed quite ordinary, because the public wasn’t aware of all these occurrences, all these prototypes. On these details, the conversations can get quite technical and precise, which also applies to projects with BEAU, who thankfully are eager to delve deep into the specifics. Here it’s similar, all the projects’ parts are questioned; but contrary to the big gestures common to projects built by ZAHA HADID, for example, everything here stays reasonable.

*Reasonable innovation, and quiet architecture may be the keys.*

Big gestures seem unnecessary, especially in HONG KONG, where the building can’t be seen from far away. It should *a contrario* merge with the surroundings, all the while having its own qualities that might be perceptible only by the user, from the inside, and linked to comfort, a lower energy consumption, and an interesting relationship to daylight.

GV These ideas of *reasonable innovation* and *quiet architecture* are perfect descriptions. This picture<sup>[06]</sup> shows our willingness to avoid the disruption of the surroundings. In HONG KONG, you have a very vibrant horizontal strip

on the ground floor, populated by shops and restaurants, in perpetual evolution, in contrast to the rather generic and repetitive upper floors. This picture was taken only a couple of weeks after completion, so the ground floor wasn’t active yet; but we were very careful about respecting the overarching functional layers already present throughout the city.

This care can also be found on other scales, in other details. For example, although the upper façade is entirely made out of aluminium, and has this kind of grey, metallic neutrality that we cherish, the ground floor was designed more in accordance to what we’ve experienced as *micro-moments*, and we chose an overall materiality closer to this ground-floor language. This attention is well-depicted in this picture<sup>[06]</sup>. There’s on the left a thin side alley between the buildings that is so narrow that the other building’s canopy, when deployed, is close to touching our façade, and somehow provides an informal protection for our main entrance. We indeed made sure to align the dimensions of our ground floor to these surrounding structures. We also used wall tiles because they’re a little more tangible, part of a more redundant language, whereas aluminium can be a bit more abstract. For us, these tiles were a little victory, because usually clients consider them to be too old-fashioned.

NM There are other words that also come to mind to describe that project, related to the concept of *quiet architecture*, which could be *sobriety*, *austerity*. Maybe we can direct the discussion around more specific design topics.

GV Proposing a solid façade when the client expects a *cheap* glazed curtain wall, more economically efficient, created a constraint that was solved with repetition. Since the beginning of the project we did put a lot of effort into the façade, but we’ve also focused our attention on the morphology of the building, the plans, the way it’s using the plot, and the organisation of the circulations.

This building did not come from an adaptive reuse project; it’s an entirely new one. The local architects we were working with were extremely good at organising the plan, every square centimetre was put to use. The debates with them were generally on specific things that were important to us, especially the continuity between the plans and the façade, but, in the end, we didn’t meddle with the general morphology, the floor height, the articulation with the plot. At first they gave us a blank volume, in which we tried to find rhythm, we tried to find dimensions, modulations, a general grid; only for them to impose small changes, such as a slightly higher ceiling here or there.

Then, the question became: how to absorb potential changes within the system? Because throughout these modulations we’re still trying to reduce the amount of singular parts, we’re still trying to be systematic and reinforce the overall rhythm. If you focus on this picture<sup>[06]</sup>, you see that there’s a break in the continuity, there’s an additional strip added after the first two floors. Originally everything followed a very strict and repetitive system, but they added a water tank rather late into the design, so we had to find a solution to integrate it into the grid. We had to be reasonable, for example regarding materials, whilst still keeping a strong and efficient concept and grid; all the aspects that make the identity of





the building. In the end, all the windows are the same except the ones on the first floor. The modules and the angles are treated similarly throughout the project, except at the top floor, which also uses the same trick as the *break* above the second floor. There were many versions of the design, all trying to minimise the individual parts used in the grid.

**RJvS** I remember all the attempts to try to find a logic. As soon as you find one that is strong enough, it's very hard for the client, or else, to contradict your vision. *A contrario*, not having such a logic will force you to fight throughout the design process.

**GV** It's the idea of finding such a simple line of defence that you can always come back to and use to defend the project against feedback that would alter its essence too much. Some of the people on the client board expressed that they simply found the building boring, without significant variations, which was in turn explained and backed by our strict and repetitive system. The same criticism has been made regarding the lighting pattern, for which we had a similar way of incorporating it within the façade. We were also careful about the colour temperatures of the light bulbs, because of course we were asked to have colour-changing ones. We responded that we would simply use 4000K bulbs, the average light colour used in the surrounding public areas and inside the domestic spaces that are visible at night. Basically, this project is a great case study on how to resist giving in to the temptation of *overdesigning* things.

**CLH** That picture<sup>[06]</sup> is a good depiction of the small exceptions, the *accidents* within the standardised grid. Since the ceiling here is a little higher, we started by incorporating the same window, to keep the standard format, but we also added a smaller one on top, to fit the gap, which produces a slight variation in the grid.

**GV** Yes, that's the risk of having a strong and rigid way of approaching the design; you might not be able to absorb necessary modifications. This can indeed completely destroy a project. I'm not sure why we chose this layout over elongating the window. It might also have made sense on a purely industrial level. Same for some of the solid parts which are pierced, because some specific ventilation modules needed a certain amount of airflow; we decided to directly cut through the aluminium panels. The holes seem obvious in this picture<sup>[07]</sup>, because it was taken very frontally, but in reality they are much more discrete; they almost disappear.

**NM** Moving on to the construction detail of the curtain wall.

**RJvS** What's interesting about this curtain wall is that it manages to hide its nature, whether from the outside or from the inside. The exercise was to blur the usual curtain walls' characteristics, which are not that comfortable for residential use, even though here the program calls for multipurpose spaces. The plaster on the inside is just a magical solution to make it look traditional and to cover the aluminium profiles and the gaps, which would have made the technical aspect loud, interfering with the architectural experience. The outside surface is more of a combination of

technical and architectural, but here as well, the construction grid is so closely linked to the architectural one that it in fact becomes architecture. And one not expressing a typical curtain wall system.

This detail<sup>[08]</sup> is interesting; we had long discussions about the corner. Corners are usually a weak point in architecture, because two individual great façades have to connect at some point, and sometimes it doesn't work. Here, we solved it in a logical and mathematical way. It's the result of one clear attitude, linked to the overarching grid. We managed to keep it as continuous as possible.

**GV** We also wanted to associate a notion of lightness to the idea of the solid curtain wall. Aluminium surely seemed ideal for that intent. The material calls for extrusion as a shape-defining principle; that's how you end up with these profiles that express the by-definition vertical essence of a tower. The result was a perceptible corrugation, a sensibility we had from the start. I remember multiple occurrences of the corner where the design was undivided, but that was too difficult to make, so the contractor proposed a two-part detail, which we managed to make consistent by following the material's inherent logic.

*At BEAU we appreciate what could be called industrial language, a certain austerity, a certain sobriety, this wish to deal with materials that are shortly available, plain, not so processed, in a sense.*

We wanted to employ the simplicity of corrugated panels, which also technically improves the rigidity of the material, allowing us to reduce its overall thickness. Corrugation, I think, also plays a role in increasing the general surface of the façade, and producing a differentiation with the inside, in the width of the wall, populated by the thermal insulation and the ventilated cavities.

**RJvS** True, the wall does work with ventilated air cavities, which is unusual in HONG KONG, although extremely efficient. You basically have a screen, blocking solar radiation, then, an empty air layer that prevents heat transfer from the exterior panel to the inside. To avoid the air cavity to rise in temperature, you must have a panel that functions as a radiator, similar to the fans on a motorbike's air-cooled engine.

*The cladding collects heat from the sun, but also radiates it back, and doesn't transfer it to the inside. It was the first time we used this technique on a project, but that led us*

*to continue developing the concept later for a data centre building, which incidentally also has to cool down all the time.*

The pleasing architectural aspect of such a façade being light and bright is coupled with all the very efficient thermal benefits. To illustrate a sensible contrast, I can feel the heat radiating through the concrete wall of my own office tower in TAI KOK TSUI. The outside air temperature is sometimes five to ten degrees higher than it is inside. Thus, on this project, like anywhere else in HONG KONG, blocking the heat transfer inwards is crucial; it was one of the most important aspects of our design.

**GV** Looking at this picture<sup>[09]</sup> and as a quick summary, this façade is where magic happens; where all the parameters come together. We're using aluminium because it's lighter, then we extrude it. It allows for a corrugated aspect, which enhances rigidity, allowing the material to be thinner; which spares material. Then, the inverted radiator principle prevents the heat from going through by diffusing outwards. All these decisions produce a certain visual language that might seem banal, but indeed makes a lot of sense when you consider all of those things brought together.

**CLH** Maybe this is also simply where *quiet innovation* takes place; a curtain wall façade that performs better than its glazed counterparts.

**NM** It's really an extraordinary sustainable detail that also produces quite a beautiful façade even though I know it might not be your primary focus.

**RJvS** Even though we don't list beauty as the main criteria, we still give it value; it is the result of all the mentioned gestures.

**GV** The building is facing east. Because of the width of KING'S ROAD, from morning until noon the façade receives abundant direct sunlight. That's also why all these specific efforts were essential.

**RJvS** And even with this over-exposure, we have no glare issues, which is probably helped by the corrugation of the panels. A flatter surface might have caused more problems in that regard. Whenever I walk by 39 KING'S ROAD, the light is different, but the façade always catches beautiful reflections. We also thought about using aluminium without finish, which was the most sustainable approach. It can, in a sense, corrode, but that corrosion over time becomes a protective layer.

We made a project with REM KOOLHAAS 25 years ago using anodised and unpainted aluminium, and although the material isn't shiny anymore, it's still in a structurally excellent state. It's about accepting that the façade will age, just as the surrounding buildings. But it's something most wouldn't approve of, whether in HONG KONG or in FRANCE, as people would rather have forever new-looking buildings, in general.



[06]  
STREET VIEW OF 39 KING'S ROAD  
© KRIS PROVOOST  
2023



[07]  
FAÇADE PROTOTYPE OF 39 KING'S ROAD  
© GILLES VANDERSTOCKEN  
2020



[08]  
CORNER MOCK-UP OF 39 KING'S ROAD  
© ERIC YUEN  
2019



*But I think that even if this façade were to become less glossy, less shiny, it would still be a beautiful building, because its quality does not only lie in its finish.*

GV To have radical, raw, unfinished aluminium would have been the ultimate achievement. Indeed, the idea of an ageless building is relatively recent. Before, the aging process was included in the choice of materials, more or less. And this idea of a building remaining perfect is a bit awkward, in a sense, because it implies all of these additional layers that cancel out the original beauty of materials. But it's fine, we'll try to push for that idea next time!

CLH What we succeeded to do this time, though, was to build a new tower in HONG KONG that wasn't made of glass. The clients were surprised, but we explained the thermal benefits of such a solid façade, along with the enhanced possibility of potential future subdivisions, which was actually part of the original brief. This led to adaptive floor plans, allowing for a two-part plan, or even, in a very Hong Kongese manner, a four-part plan. We know this kind of practice is more than common here, and as architects we worked on figuring out how to incorporate this knowledge into our design, making these tiny, subdivided rooms still pleasant. Other than researching the façade, we also made sure to improve the indoor spatial qualities. Notably, we substantially increased the headroom of each floor by placing most of the electrical and mechanical fixtures in the corridors.

GV This picture<sup>[10]</sup> encapsulates how, from the inside, the building doesn't express the curtain wall system, what's visible is simply two layers of gypsum board. But, to link that to what CHARLOTTE was saying earlier, the rigidity of the grid and the construction method allow for super-easy subdivisions, which prevents the usual unsuccessful contact points between added partitions and the main structure. Sometimes, in various places, you even see plaster directly stuck to the glass façade, which creates awkward unresolved connections between materials.

*The main architectural principles, as well as the materials we used ended up allowing a rather clean subdivision process, knowing that it was unavoidable.*

NM This unavoidable subdivision practice added constraints to the indoors. There's also this dimension of mutability; the way you've

reacted to it is almost in anticipation of *adaptive reuse*. What comes to mind, in this context, is the concept of *flexibility through rigidity*, an approach where you are so extremely rational, logical, and rigid in your processes, that it provides – in term – flexibility. What comes out of this is sustainability, because it then becomes easy to work on the space, from the inside.

GV Similar to ROBERT's *quiet innovation* concept, we formalised this *flexibility through rigidity* idea long ago, which has an interesting paradoxical aspect to it, but indeed proves its efficiency in practice. In a sense, this conversation does spark the debate around whether we would have made all of these very radical choices if not for the various constraints. When you cannot go against constraints, as an architect or a façade designer, you have to promote as many qualities as possible.

NM It is also bringing me to question something about this project; the process being so rigid and rational also gives off, from the outside, this feeling of it being *deterministic*. We were discussing, last time, what would happen if you were to build another tower next to it, also with ROBERT. Would you build it the same way?

GV I will start with a disclaimer; we heard critics say that we are basically always building the same project, whatever the scale, whatever the function, the program, or the location. Comment taken!

If we were to build a tower next to it, we would probably start with the same questions, but then we might become passionate about other topics. This would serve as an inflexion point and might make the project deviate towards something else. We might question the aluminium itself. I remember discussions about using tiles or ceramic for the curtain wall; that would be an interesting direction. Or we could question the dimensions of the panels; could they be bigger? What are the limits to such changes? Could we challenge this idea of outside canopies? We gave up rather quickly on that, among various options, but we realised that they can exist, in the end, if you follow regulations. They just have to be limited to a certain dimension, which raises the question of efficiency, and how they would interact with the morphology of the windows. Also, there's the question of typhoons; are the canopies fixed, or are they easily retractable? If fixed, they must be made in a durable material. All these questions could have driven the project in a completely different direction.

RJvS This question makes me smile; all architects seem to have this interrogation towards what would happen to what surrounds their work.

*For this project, as for most of our projects, we based everything on logic, and as such, I think we would keep the choices driven by rationality as*

*they are. But there are aspects where we can introduce more complexity or ambiguity.*

Still, the answer can be split into two parts: the window and the wall. For the window, there is something frustrating here, because you have the same window, without regard for orientation. Thus, I'd say the first step would be to take more care about orientation. Even if windows have the same shape, we could modify the glass type, or add a protective layer. We could maybe reveal the thickness of the wall, expressing it with some more variation. On the south façade, you usually want to reflect the light and prevent it from coming in; that could be done with micro-corrugation. On the north façade, it's the contrary, so the reveal could be flush. I think that a simple window like this one<sup>[10]</sup> is perfect for the case, we could work on the opening types; this being said, here, the handrail is still a problem in my opinion.

And for the wall, we could indeed question aluminium, as it's not such a sustainable material in the end, its carbon footprint being almost four kilograms of CO2 per kilogram. In HONG KONG, we have a maritime atmosphere, so any materials must definitely resist corrosion, typhoons, heat, humidity. It's a good choice to use aluminium here for all these reasons. But there can be other materials. We're currently working on a project with a façade made out of fabric, which is a very lightweight, rather unexpected material. It might not be viable for typhoons, but, if you twist it, and create a double curvature, rather than have a flat surface, it enhances its rigidity, and could resist wind loads. Also, *Ultra High-Performance Concrete (UHPC)* could be interesting. It would still be a unitised curtain wall, except with another architectural expression. UHPC for example is a much more massive material, so the heat is already kind of blocked, because it takes some time to heat it up due to its thermal mass. Already, the discussion is different... On every project with BEAU there's a story; basically, if we can explain it to architecture students, and they like it, then we've succeeded! There are still nice stories to be told, in a different manner, but there are a few parameters developed for this project that will certainly remain the same. But the small stories will diverge. In fact, I think the whole island could be renovated this way, because it's just a logical solution, compared to the many illogical solutions that can be seen elsewhere.

*It's not about beauty. It can be, but at the same time beauty can be deeply illogical. In this context of crisis, whether the climate crisis or others, we must resort to rationality. It's not an option, it's necessary.*

As architects, as consultants, we are not allowed to be as crazy as before. We are bound to make buildings more reasonable. If things made

[09]  
FAÇADE CLOSE-UP VIEW OF 39 KING'S ROAD  
© XU LIANG LEON  
2023



[10]  
INTERIOR VIEW OF 39 KING'S ROAD  
© XU LIANG LEON  
2023





before were not reasonable, we must not repeat the same actions. Here, we made a very reasonable building, which is kind of a prototype of what could have been done in HONG KONG for the last 30 years.

In the end, for me, a building next to this one could be the same, because I don't see so many things to improve upon. It's a more efficient solution than the buildings currently adjacent, and a much better solution than the overglazed structures currently being built in HONG KONG.

CLH This time we managed to produce a façade which absorbs less energy; do you think the next building could have a façade that produces energy?

RJvS It is worth trying. In HONG KONG, the sun goes up from the east, and gets quite high rather quickly, and goes down in a similar fashion. The façades aren't exposed to as much sun as we have in EUROPE, for example. Here, in contrast, the south façade isn't exposed that much. In winter, the sun revolves around a 68-degree altitude angle, so it's more prominent, but in general, the façade is not the most efficient surface to collect energy.

On another site, the question would be different, but here, all buildings are overshadowing one another, so I would probably resort to solar panels on the roof, maybe with expanding and retracting satellite-like panels. Collecting energy in the city isn't easy. It could happen on the outskirts, for sure. The best you can do here is reduce energy consumption, and that's what we've done with this project.

GV I'd like to reverse the question. NATAZSA, you were asking what we would do if we were to build next to this tower. Of course we could make adjustments, variations, but we could also consider the existing towers as subjects for adaptive reuse; they already have everything necessary to make it happen. The concrete framing already reaches its maximum height, it has a defined plot; most of the things can be kept. The weak point is always the façade. It could be interesting to imagine transposing our façade system onto another site and play into this misunderstanding that we've revamped an existing tower, and actually do it!

*This could be an answer to discussions around the future of façade restoration in HONG KONG. It's not always about demolishing and producing from scratch, but also considering improvements on existing buildings. It can be applied onto different scales as well.*

Of course, the question is open, but there is value in this subject and these proposed solutions. Also, I guess that if curtain walls are easily built, they are also easy to dismantle, and

we could replace fully-glazed façades with a more environmentally-efficient solution.

RJvS The reuse of buildings really makes sense, although I'm so impressed by the way people in HONG KONG manage to demolish buildings so efficiently, with not so much dust or noise, etc. But reusing makes sense.

In EUROPE we always dwell on the buildings' functions, which are currently shifting; office buildings are now often empty because we figured out that working from home was fine, and allowed us to be closer to family. The world is changing, and even though façades are an important reuse focal point, the interior spaces will also deviate and evolve; how can a building adapt to different functions? Also, when you live and work at the same place, homes should certainly be bigger than the current HONG KONG standards. There could be a new housing typology.

On a current project, in FRANCE, we're keeping the structural elements of the curtain wall, and we're changing the infill, a sort of on-site replacement, which is even softer, and faster. With little changes, you can adapt a building to a different function, so it indeed isn't always about demolishing. In most cases you can find solutions. As well as keeping the floors, the staircases, the elevators of a building, you could keep the main frame of the façade, that makes it water and air-tight, if they are in good condition, and only change the parts that are dysfunctional, in terms of energy or function.

NM It ultimately sounds like a sustainable approach to have for HONG KONG, and anywhere, it seems. Maybe we can end this conversation with a few conclusive words?

RJvS What is important to highlight is that this project is neither the start nor the finish of something, it sits in a *continuum* of thoughts we have in common with BEAU. As much as the result was inspired by experiences we had in the past, we are – through it – already planning the future. Our ideas flow from one challenge to another; we work in a dynamic process.

*We never repeat, but the past always serves as inspiration to start new projects that are filled with new contexts and solutions to explore.*

It's an ongoing gradual loop. This was the story of one building, a short moment in our lives; what's really important, in the end, is the whole story and through it find ways to continue producing relevant architecture.

*This conversation has been edited for length and clarity.*

CONVERSATION

# ONTOLOGICAL HIP-POCAMPUS

PHD GROUP<sup>[P.168]</sup> *co-founders* YSABELLE CHEUNG<sup>[YC]</sup> & WILLEM MOLESWORTH<sup>[WM]</sup> *with* BEAU *co-founders* GILLES VANDERSTOCKEN<sup>[GV]</sup> & CHARLOTTE LAFONT-HUGO<sup>[CLH]</sup>.

In their most vulnerable states of disrepair, spaces can either intimidate or intrigue. For CHEUNG and MOLESWORTH, a transformative potential existed in a neglected penthouse of a commercial building in WAN CHAI. Cluttered with accumulated furniture, boxes, books, and miscellaneous domestic items sitting in entropic wildness, the space conveyed scant traces of its previous life as a private gentleman's club, built in the 1970s by CHEUNG's grandfather and his business partners.

Over four months, a timeline sharpened by tightly-managed resources, the 1970s-era clubhouse became PHD GROUP and an extreme example of adaptive reuse, sensitively observed by BEAU. Original walls, systems, and internal structures were preserved, and hardware sourced from local vendors in the neighbourhood of GOOSE NECK BRIDGE; furniture that could be salvaged was restored and put to use once more. Throughout this process, BEAU and PHD GROUP collaborated on their shared vision for *non-extractive architecture*, a movement identified by MILAN-based studio SPACE CAVIAR that challenges capitalist models of accumulation and waste, asking how architects and their clients can be agents of change.

For the conversation below, the usual roles of client and architect are reversed. Reminiscing on the clubhouse and its history, PHD GROUP asked BEAU about their choices, their methods, and their philosophies when approaching site and space.

WM I feel like you're always the ones asking questions, gathering information. So today, I wanted to turn the tables and quiz you a little bit.

I was scrolling through your website again the other day and came across your mission statement. It says that you are interested in *'the exploration of archetypes and the application of classical tools through an experimental approach'*. It was fascinating when we saw you working with that. You would come into the gallery and do these drawings on paper very simply, none of these fancy renderings or anything like that. But then the ideas would be incredible. And just the articulation of the ideas through your pen and paper and

[01]  
INSTALLATION VIEW OF SASAOKA YURIKO: "PLANARIA" AT PHD GROUP  
COURTESY THE ARTIST AND PHD GROUP - © FELIX SC WONG  
2022



[02]  
INSTALLATION VIEW OF VIRTUE VILLAGE: "VILLAGE PORN" AT PHD GROUP  
COURTESY THE ARTISTS AND PHD GROUP - © FELIX SC WONG  
2022





then kind of talking through them with us was really something to see. Tell us more about that.

GV The first thing is to ask what we mean by *archetypes* and *classical tools*. And why we confront these classical ways to what we consider an experimental approach. The notion of archetype in architecture is important because everything is somehow defined. And certain models have become redundant. Like there always is an overly typical house, and there are strongly predefined models for specific rooms, even art galleries. You have a very important archetype in the art world to date: the white cube, right? It was rather experimental 50 or 60 years ago. Then it became fancy. Then it became a norm. And today it is dictated, it is a must. You cannot do anything else.

So, this notion of archetype is something that we like to play with, and we connect that to the idea of classical tools. Classical tools are what you see; it is hand drawings, scribbles on paper, plans and sections. We are basically talking about methods and how they are applied to challenge the thinking process and its materialisation. And this is where experimentation comes in. If you accept these methods, if you're able to identify them, you can literally deconstruct them, in an experimental way.

CLH During our first years, we were more focused on experimenting through making. Then, at some point, on questioning how to represent the project of architecture. And more recently we have become eager to test assembly, how things come together.

WM It's impressive; as much as you're being flexible, you've also really stuck to that ideology over the past ten years. And to see how much of it still does inform what you're doing was really wonderful to see and to have experienced. I think it unlocked a lot of new ways of thinking for us as well, in terms of how we approach things, and that has come to really define the gallery and what we're doing. I'd like to hear about how you prepare for site visits: what you bring, the psychological approach.

CLH It's funny because I read your questions last Friday in a taxi, on my way to a site visit, and I was like *'Fuck!'* I am unprepared. I like to take a laser metre sometimes, but I was a bit late and just had my notebook and my phone.

GV We do usually take minimal equipment or a notebook or camera but sometimes it simply doesn't matter. And yes, to be honest, we don't prepare so much because generally we don't like that. But then I was like, come on, that's not true. And I started to think why I was feeling that we don't. It's not that we don't care. It's more that a space or a project is obviously physical in nature but also so much more. It is about what is given to you; what is given to us as architects. Of course it has a certain morphology, or certain shapes, or materiality, and this can be quantified. But then what?

CLH We always try to feel the aura of a place. And then scan for potentials. For the clubhouse, the aura was quite strong because the space was full of soul, full of memories, full of stories. I'll never forget that first visit. When we took the lift to go up to the last floor and then

we arrived in this lobby with all these plants and the 1970s-era signage. Then we took this discreet, kind of hidden flight of stairs and arrived outdoors, at the top of the tower, and projected through this fence-like structure was the filtered view of the city. Then inside again: the furniture, the old bar. And imagining what the space used to be and what it could be in the future. And then, of course, also few problems. At first, I think you guys saw mostly the problems.

GV I remember that the clubhouse was almost impossible to decode as a physical object. It was so messy. You were basically telling us: it's shit, right? It's really shit. We cannot do anything. And we reacted with: There *is* something that can be done here. Because our job when we are visiting a space is to start imagining how to incorporate these things, the way people perceive the space, their vision for it, the site's physical nature. And that is basically the only thing that we need to be ready for: to understand these complex conditions, to be able to listen. You also have to be ready to adjust. Sometimes you have to adjust the space. Sometimes you have to adjust the expectations of the client. But then everything more or less progressively comes together and there it begins.

YC You came in with all these questions, about the history of the space, my grandfather's connection to it and what it meant to my family. We even discussed continuous adaptive reuse: what would happen to the space 100 years from now? What would happen to HONG KONG's giant megamalls 100 years from now? This cycle of disappearance and reappearance, especially given the rate at which the city is rebuilding itself constantly.

GV It is true that all projects have a natural timeline. The clubhouse has a timeline in being connected so much to your family, by having been abandoned, by being retaken, by being reshaped into something else.

*So this project has, and will, evolve in time. And this is interesting to discuss in the context of other projects that are trying so much to be frozen or exist in the state of the perfect moment, where everything is in the right place. The chair is in the right place. The table is in the right place. The finish on the wall is pristine.*

But actually, that's fake. It's not real. It's not life, right? Things change. You move the table from one side of the room to the other. You grow tired of the colour of the wall. You have another need, another necessity. Or you simply cannot afford to do everything at once. In your case, you

have decided that things would change every so often, that you will adapt, and that is important. And it is also the reality of architecture. The moment you freeze architecture too much, it is, in a way, already dead.

CLH Building with this timeline of 100 years in mind, we asked ourselves: okay, so what remains? What are the materials that will last for 100 years? And how do we decide on the elements that will not last? So, the balance is in that: being careful with the selection of materials or structures that will remain for 100 years and being more unbound and flexible in areas that the user might want to change. PHD GROUP is an existing building from the 1970s and it has been potentially percolating for 50 years. What could be kept for a long time is definitely the concrete structure. All the rest can already be questioned, changed.

GV Or adapted. And don't get me wrong, when I say that things should change and be able to adapt, I'm not saying we should not build with a long-term perspective. It's more about where we should stop, as architects or designers. And where we do leave the possibility for people to do their own thing.

Some architects are overdesigning everything, including the way people should live. There are some famous stories of clients who became depressed or abandoned their homes because architects had overdesigned everything, implicitly telling them how to behave and how to do this or that.

*But what CHARLOTTE is saying is, there is a difference between providing the universal envelope, the roof, the walls, etc. and what happens around that. It is very important to find a way to design and build that leaves the possibility for appropriation, because people will always do that anyway. People will always modify, invent, improvise. And it's a fine line; we have to let go at the right moment. Some clients really expect you to design everything. It's very difficult sometimes to explain that we don't, or don't want to. Actually, we feel like it's dishonest.*

CLH I think one thing that works really well at PHD GROUP is the study room, previously

[03]  
ZHENG MAHLER: "BREATHING SOUNDS (A QUIET STUDY OF A BAT'S BODY)"  
COURTESY THE ARTISTS AND PHD GROUP - © FELIX SC WONG  
2023





the clubhouse’s kitchen, because you adapted the space nicely. You included all of these objects from your grandfather’s collection and linked it back to the narrative of the building. You succeeded in bringing a sense of comfort and history to this concrete shell.

**WM** Do you know ALEXIE GLASS-KANTOR? She’s the curator of ARTSPACE in SYDNEY. When she visited the study, she described it as an *onto-logical hippocampus*, which I thought was really interesting, like a living memory.

**GV** Yes. And also, for some exhibitions there has been a complete takeover. Like for the Japanese artist, SASAOKA YURIKO, with all the added carpets and curtains<sup>[01]</sup>. That was completely different from VIRTUE VILLAGE’s show before it<sup>[02]</sup>. And that’s totally fine with us.

**WM** I think people are always really shocked by how we install artworks on the large window that’s been bricked up<sup>[03]</sup><sup>[04]</sup>. We’re thinking of that area as only a wall, or an extension of the wall, whereas a lot of people tend to think of it as like a frame, or a design element. We try really hard not to think of it like that.

**CLH** Let’s talk a little more about the walls.

**WM** People love the walls. But at the same time, they are often, I think, intimidated by them because they do possess a very strong aesthetic. And I think it’s very important that we understand, accept and really embrace this concept you have expressed really beautifully of just appropriating it. It exists not as the final thing itself, but as the framework for what you’re doing in this space. And that’s beautiful. I think it’s just so brilliant and really makes you stand out, and the projects flourish. And it’s just truthful. It’s honest. It’s wonderful.

**YC** Funnily enough, this natural patterning on the walls, these repetitive, PARK SEO-B0-esque markings<sup>[05]</sup>, receive the most comments from visitors. We’ve been asked again and again: how did you do that? I don’t think people expect to hear that it was the totally unexpected result of workers manually chipping away at the old plaster walls with a metal tool. Now we’re seeing some spaces that have attempted to mimic that pattern but using mechanical methods or building new walls.

**GV** I always think about this when clients say ‘*Oh, we want the same thing*’. And it doesn’t make sense, right? It’s impossible to have the same because that’s actually a process of manipulating existing elements. It’s embedded in the physical reality of the site. In your case, it’s a concrete envelope with all its cracks and everything pressing through this massive layer of screed where the wall was damaged, and then the addition of plaster in an attempt to resolve that issue.

Ultimately, it’s also about removal. We remove more than we add, sometimes, which is also somehow connected to this idea of economy of means, of austerity, and so on. Some people say ‘*You always do concrete, concrete, concrete*’. But it’s because 99% of HONG KONG’s buildings are made out of concrete.

**WM** Yeah, yeah, yeah.

**GV** That’s HONG KONG. I mean, I’d love to play with something else, but it’s simply not happening.

**YC** I feel like it’s also a situation of control. We relinquished control to the space itself: the space tells us what can be done, what can’t be done. And perhaps with other clients or people, that is something that is not so easily accepted. As individuals who live in a world that is sadly very *human-centric* and *not environment-centric*, there is perhaps this innate desire to possess or control things, or spaces. And I just feel like that’s not what PHD GROUP is about.

**WM** Or what your architecture practice is about, right? It’s not about this kind of aggression, control. And as a gallerist, I think about it in terms of art history, and in particular Western art history, being so obsessed with control and precision and the need to define and to be monolithic in the conceptualisation and execution of something. And within the larger morals of the era we’re living in, I think that’s quickly being proven to be a dangerous kind of mentality. Because we’re destroying the planet through this kind of thinking.

*And so for us this relinquishing of control and acceptance of a space as is and just doing the bare minimum is frankly the only reaction we should be having. And you can still do that beautifully.*

**GV** Exactly. But I do think there’s a difference between control or imposing your will on something and being precise. Because you cannot say we’re not precise. Remember how we were obsessed about the curve of this, the position of that? It was freaking precise!

**WM** Very true.

**GV** It’s related to the same discussion we had earlier about the tools. You know that you will be precise, and you know you will be *in* control. So you don’t have to worry about that. You can then be much more open about whatever is happening in terms of surprises or say, discoveries. Because you still have a catalogue of tricks and tools to apply. So it’s not like you’re improvising. And as a consequence, you accept, you accept what is given to you, even on the spot.

If I may, that’s also why in terms of tools, renderings can be dangerous. They can be very useful, but they can be dangerous because they provide an *image*. And that image, once it is implemented in the mind of the client, the result has to be that. And it can be dangerous because sometimes it’s simply not possible to build. In the end, it’s simply an image and at best it’s trying to convey

a certain vision, nothing more. But ultimately it’s never that simple, especially when dealing with construction or existing conditions.

**YC** I wanted to circle back to this idea of building consciously, and also reference a talk that SPACE CAVIAR gave at HKU, invited by your department. I think that was the first time I had heard a term for this type of conscious movement in architecture and building: *non-extractive architecture*.

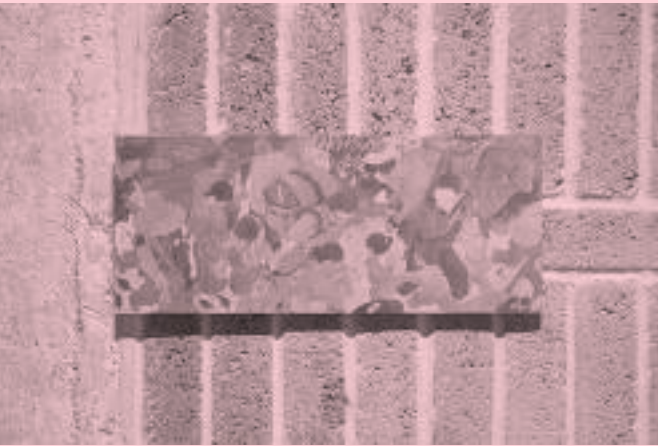
**GV** Yes. Non-extractive architecture. It’s funny because that’s a term we first heard of only *after* we worked on your space. I mean, in HONG KONG it is anyway very difficult to apply 100% non-extractive architecture. It’s a challenge, almost an impossible one.

*What we have done through the years though is develop a couple of strategies or methods that are as close as possible to being non-extractive. And that implies using what is already there or basically what is readily available. The idea of going to the shop next door and taking the most common product or part. Also even mixing things. That item you buy next door with something custom-made that you then combine to somehow achieve what you had in mind; it’s a bit of a collage, do-it-yourself, make-do approach. It is playful though. There is the opportunity to invent a new language, a new constructive and aesthetic language.*

Together with CHARLOTTE, we define this as *expressive austerity*. It’s austere, yes, but you can make it expressive if you embrace its potential.

**CLH** Out of the four projects we worked on together with you, WILLEM and YSABELLE, three were in fact experimenting with non-extractive architecture. For PHD GROUP, we did everything that was necessary, but also as little as possible, and that was all. But then for the second UNSCHEDULED art fair, we focused on the idea that everything that can be built can also be dismantled and reused if designed with that objective in

[04]  
XI JIU: "GREAT CHANGES ARE COMING"  
COURTESY THE ARTIST AND PHD GROUP - © FELIX SC WONG  
2020



[05]  
SASAOKA YURIKO: "WORKING BEAR"  
COURTESY THE ARTIST AND PHD GROUP - © FELIX SC WONG  
2024





mind and yes, indeed, most of the materials were repurposed. SUPPER CLUB <sup>[P.202]</sup> was maybe the most conscious project of these three as we literally re-configured elements and materials found on site with almost nothing new added. The few things we did add were made to be as easily dismountable as possible, and ultimately reused too. So that is what *non-extractive architecture* is about. It's to produce as little as possible and not extract any more resources from the universe.

WM And it's beautiful because it continues to embrace this *expressive austerity*.

CLH Expressive austerity is to reveal a former window opening with filled-in bricks and assume the construction logic as design generator. *That* is expressive austerity, the fact that you don't apply more than needed to achieve beauty.

WM And I think those bricks cost 1.8 HKD each. Hahahaha. Yeah, so it's also austere in its costs. Hahahaha.

YC I'd love to hear a little bit more about these smaller decisions, the finishing touches of the space. I'm thinking in particular about the silver curtains used in our viewing room and offices. At first I was so against them. Now I feel like they really do fit in this space.

*I had to shift my perspective into seeing the curtains as not just added decoration, but part of the space itself. That's something that can be difficult to accept if you haven't experienced it before; I had these preconceived notion of what curtains were for, their function and purpose, because of all the domestic spaces I've lived in and the way that these items are marketed and sold.*

And so I appreciate that you were able to change my mind. You knew from the beginning, you understood, and you were able to envision it.

But it's funny because that was one of the very last things that we had to finalise before opening PHD GROUP. And out of all the elements of the space, I was the most uncomfortable with the curtains.

GV The viewing room has this very raw envelope, which displays a very specific language. Then you have introduced, obviously, the artworks, but also these elements that are very strong, like the vintage table with its palm tree leaves, the chairs that you have re-upholstered, etc. <sup>[06]</sup>. And it works well, because it all exists in a consistent envelope. So somehow, the problem, or the way that we saw the curtain,

was that it was not belonging to the family of objects existing *inside* that envelope. In a way it was too close to the envelope to not be *a part* of the envelope. So the moment we realised that, the main challenge was to find a material that fits that logic. You were open-minded; I mean some clients would say *'No way!'* but you were open to trying it. And then CHARLOTTE came with all these prototypes, and slowly we made choices. Ultimately the main criteria was that the moment the curtain is closed, the envelope should come together. And it does!

*Talking about curtains, furniture, I must say we struggle a lot with what is called integrated furniture. I really, personally, struggle a lot with that. I'm trying to understand why; even after this conversation, I have to go back to another project where I've been trying for a couple of days to address it. I can see it's related to the way things are articulated together, the hierarchy of the project's elements, the envelope-versus-objects dichotomy, yet I still feel very frustrated. But progressively we're finding our way and with your project it is actually quite clear: what is being integrated belongs to the envelope and it kind of disappears. Then the objects around are floating freely and complementing it. It's in the end simple but effective.*

WM I was thinking about the doors earlier, too. The new ones are totally taken from the context of the building; they're almost the same colour and texture of the doors you have to go through to get up to the clubhouse. There's something very contemporary about them, but also something out of the 1970s at the same time. It's amazing.

CLH That feeling does come from the door itself but also the corner detail of the

doorframe<sup>[07]</sup>; you see how the plywood is coming together, also how it connects to the wall, that's the contemporary touch. We were also careful with the material and the proportions, always referencing the ones from the 1970s.

WM In our exhibition for WONG KIT YI, when I built those three temporary artificial living rooms, it was the first time I installed a more traditional type of door. And I was like *'Oooobbbbbb'*. You don't need much precision because the decorative elements cover so much. It made me really appreciate how we had to be very precise in making those doors for PHD GROUP. We needed those measurements to be exact, because it's just exposed plywood. If it was not the right size, it wouldn't work. And we did have that ultimately happen with one door and the door guys, without me having a chance to think about how to resolve the situation, took off the top piece of plywood from one of the door frames. Do you remember that?

GV Yes, of course! And funnily enough, I like it like that, the asymmetry of the frame! But back to the door design itself, it's again an exploration on an *archetype*. What is the role of the frame for a door? How do you make that frame? What kind of detail do you want at the corner? How do you make it using raw plywood rather than those standard laminated bits and parts?

YC We have one final question: it's about collaboration. Your work is all about collaborative practice with your clients and with your team. And then the ultimate collaboration is between yourselves. And this for ten years. WILLEM and I have only been collaborating, as business partners and as a couple, for a fraction of that time. It's not easy. You obviously are two quite different personalities as well, as WILLEM and I also are.

CLH This book covers ten years of BEAU but this Friday is also our tenth wedding anniversary.

GV Ten years of working together. Actually, I don't think it's so complicated. It's a question of consciously stepping in.

*When we started the office together, we had different backgrounds, different experiences, different ways of seeing architecture, but what is worth realising is that over ten years we ended up developing a shared agenda.*

We don't argue about ideas as much as we used to. We don't argue so much about strategies either. We have other issues today. It's more about logistics and management, because the team has grown busy. But when it comes to, let's say, the big picture or the main objectives or the things that we don't want to compromise on, these

[06]  
INTERIOR VIEW OF PHD GROUP  
© XU LIANG LEON  
2022



[07]  
DOOR DETAIL AT PHD GROUP  
© XU LIANG LEON  
2022





have become really clear and they have been elaborated together. I mean, our objectives wouldn't be so clear if it wasn't for CHARLOTTE and the last ten years of working together. And it's the same situation at university when teaching. Sure, we don't always agree on everything, but that's negligible when you compare it to the agreements we have on the intellectual aspects of what our practice is and how to make things happen.

**CLH** We are quite on the same page. Hmm. I need more time to think about my answer...

**WM** It's a loaded one. I mean, we can talk about us. We can talk about us for a little bit.

**YC** We've been working together three years now and have been married eight years. Before PHD GROUP, we had both been working in different jobs for a long time. We went from having very little time together, maybe a half day per week, to 24 hours, seven days a week, in an uninterrupted collaboration. And so, you know, the relationship has become a situation of testing each other's boundaries, navigating when and where we're able to be challenged and not. But I think because WILLEM and I are both, maybe *too* focused, *too* ambitious, *everything* becomes a collaboration. Sometimes we disagree, sometimes we agree, but it is always interesting.

**WM** The struggle is that the results are always better for it.

**YC** It's always better, right. There's all these micro challenges we present each other with. We think we might have resolved something, and then suddenly one of us would say '*But what if?*' And these open-ended questions can be so frustrating and challenging but are also necessary, I think, in the process of building something.

**WM** It does feel very fruitful. I really feel like collaborative practices are more rewarding than just doing it on your own. And it always seems to lead to significant quality improvement. I think collaboration is increasingly important to acknowledge because when you think about the past, people were not always acknowledging the collaborative nature of their work. PICASSO being the example I always turn to. The guy was riding off of other people's ideas constantly. And really it was a very collaborative practice, but he's understood as a monolith.

And so, I think it's important we talk and share and figure it out, because the truth of the matter is that it's also not easy to do, right? It's very challenging maintaining these relationships as they're often, as in both of our cases, work and romantic relationships.

**CLH** I think you're right. When you build this trust, your ways of working or producing ideas can be faster. But you also become more demanding because you know that you can push one another.

**WM** You would never push your staff the way that you push your partner.

**GV** They would quit!

**CLH** Yeah. Hahaha.

**WM** Exactly. And there we have it.

**GV** You're saying this as a joke, but it's the real strength of this particular condition. Yes, it's sometimes difficult, but you know that you can, in a way, question or challenge things at such a level.

Any other person you work with, even like a long-term collaborator, it's not the same. There is a lot that is unsaid in the way that we collaborate. Progressively, the steps or the objectives become clear, sometimes without even having to discuss it literally. It just happens. One day it's just there. It's obvious that you have to make it like that. It's obvious that you cannot compromise on whatever this *it* represents. And this, honestly, I'm still amazed by. And by the way, this is not my first collaboration, I had previous lives before, I've been through at least five offices. So, I worked with collaborators before, with friends, some still very close. But it never reached this same level of *demandingness*. I just made up that word. But you know what I mean, right? The level of expectations? Again, that word is not expressing it correctly. It's more on how much you are demanding about what you're doing collectively.

**YC** I know what you mean. But I don't know the word either.

**WM** Just a rigor. Maybe it's like a demand, like a commitment. Because as easy-going as it seems to be, and even as we express a willingness to appropriate and adapt, it is demanding. Totally. Oftentimes these installations we do, we're like *dead, dead, dead, dead*, after what feels like the hardest installation we've ever done. Then we look at it and we're like, well, it looks like we did this in five minutes. It looks so simple and so effortless and so good. And you're just like, god-damn it, it was so hard, it was so hard to do.

**YC** It's because every element is so considered to the point of exhaustion. None of the decisions are easy. It's all intentional.

**GV** Which is sometimes almost absurd, right? We could exhaust ourselves and others about things that are so tiny. A couple of years after, and we're like, why did we even care? But, anyway, it's like that.

**CLH** Yes, it's like that.

**WM** It is like that.

*This conversation has been edited for length and clarity.*

CONVERSATION

# BUILDING UNCANNY WORLDS

*Chinese contemporary artist* CAO FEI <sup>[CF]</sup> *talks with* CHARLOTTE LAFONT-HUGO <sup>[CLH]</sup> & GILLES VANDERSTOCKEN <sup>[GV]</sup> *on producing large-scale, experimental exhibitions together, moderated by* NATASZA MINASIEWICZ <sup>[NM]</sup> & *with translation assistance by* MADELIN CHENG.

Since 2002, the multidisciplinary artist CAO FEI has engaged in critical examinations on our modern world, creating narratives that blur, simulate, and generate spaces in between artificiality and reality. Translating these concepts into tangible elements requires a mediation of spatiality, materiality, and history akin to *world-building*.

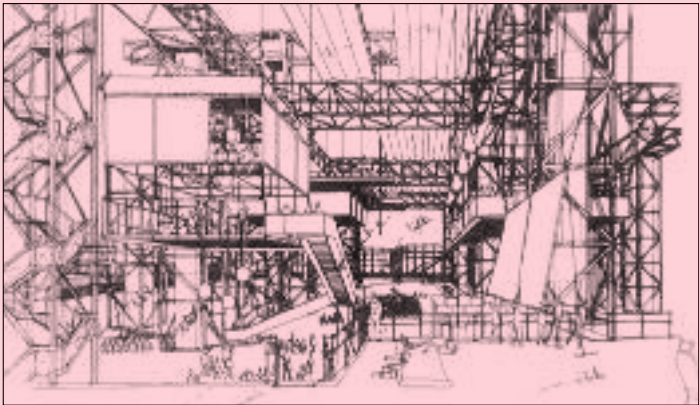
In 2018, CAO FEI first worked with BEAU to create these uncanny worlds for her solo exhibition, "A HOLLOW IN A WORLD TOO FULL" <sup>[P42]</sup>, at TAI KWUN CONTEMPORARY, HONG KONG. Two years later, they collaborated again for her retrospective, "STAGING THE ERA" <sup>[P96]</sup>, at UCCA BEIJING; and in the summer of 2024, a third project materialised from their collaboration, "TIDAL FLUX" <sup>[P192]</sup>, at SHANGHAI'S MUSEUM OF ART PUDONG.

The subject of the conversation below focuses on their second project, "STAGING THE ERA", and the *joyful chaos* that has come to signify the generative and expansive worlds of CAO FEI.

**NM** To start off, I would like to ask about the first reference for this project, which is CEDRIC PRICE's drawing, "FUN PALACE" <sup>[01]</sup>. Can you explain the relationship between that drawing and the photograph <sup>[02]</sup> that is juxtaposed; how they informed or inspired the show?

**GV** This duality depicts how we work with CAO FEI. We exchange images, pictures, references all the time. Back then, she sent us this interior view of the WENHEYOU CHANGSHA MALL <sup>[02]</sup> in CHINA, as a counterpoint to the drawing.

[01]  
DRAWING OF "FUN PALACE"  
© CEDRIC PRICE  
1964



[02]  
INTERIOR VIEW OF SUPER WENHEYOU, CHANGSHA  
2021



[03]  
ULLENS CENTER FOR CONTEMPORARY ART (UCCA)  
INTERIOR VIEW OF GREAT HALL BEFORE RENOVATION  
CA. 1990 - 2000





*These two pictures illustrate the way we feed each other, intellectually, to progressively generate ideas, languages, directions. It also allows us to think about the project in terms of layers, in a kind of additive manner.*

The drawing talks about space, structure, and hints at the way elements can be literally layered. And the photograph portrays an environment that echoes a city; the urban liveliness, the way they use signage, lighting, and the addition of layers, again, on top of one another. In the end these two express the same spatial experience; the over multiplication of tangible and sensible elements, this kind of *joyful chaos* that we were aiming for.

UCCA is a former factory that used to be run by the CHINESE GOVERNMENT<sup>[03]</sup>. We can definitely see part of this history within the design of "STAGING THE ERA", as it was thought of as a city, as a town, and definitely as a factory space. If you look at the drawing of CEDRIC PRICE<sup>[01]</sup>, which had a strong influence on the design, you can see all of these typologies being expressed. It's like a hybrid between all of them.

UCCA is in the NORTH; I come from the SOUTH. I was trying to bring this kind of very messy and very *Southern style* to BEIJING, to this Northern area.

*I was looking for an energy similar to the one of the KOWLOON slums, the old WALLED CITY area in HONG KONG. Because UCCA is normally used as a white cube<sup>[04]</sup>, we wanted to turn the space into a city, an outdoor space, somewhat of a paradise. And it worked. During the opening, most people, when they came into the space, they just went 'WOW!'.*

It totally changed their opinion on UCCA and what was possible in that space. It was like the WENHEYU CHANGSHA building<sup>[02]</sup>; you opened a door, and suddenly, without you knowing what happened, you were in another country. You entered one box or another and you would experience something else: another world, another time.

We coined it the "ALICE IN WONDERLAND" *rabbit hole* principle. It's that moment when you're physically going through something, whatever that something is, and suddenly you're falling into another world. That's the *transformative* moment, which we have also identified as one of the main challenges when it comes to working on CAO FEI's shows.

Let's delve into that.

Well, to achieve all this we envisioned two different layouts. One was more like a central object, with a lot of void around it. The one that we selected, the one that we're looking at<sup>[05]</sup>, does the opposite; it occupies the full space, spreading everywhere, trying to intensify everything, and creates a large central void whilst multiplying the points of view between the various works. Beyond its spatial intention, that strategy was also related to this idea of having the opportunity to look at everything at once, somewhat of a chaotic *panopticon*.

*There was no real beginning, no real end to it. No time was imposed to watch the show, and with this kind of configuration one had the possibility to spend 30 minutes or five hours, or come back five times and still discover things. The show was completely open to interpretation.*

To illustrate this, there's this anecdote that apparently one visitor slept there overnight, just because this was somehow made possible...

Because the room is so long, and so high, we were like "Okay, let's have fun!" and we created this multi-connected elevated journey where one can freely walk, look up, explore and really play with the space.

The second main intention was to link the design to the museum's history. As CAO FEI mentioned before, it used to be a massive workshop before being renovated into an art space. So, our direction was to reconnect with this heritage, this history of the site; and possibly play with the ambiguity between past, present... maybe, even the future.

*To produce such an intricate experience, we looked back at CAO FEI's previous artworks, and found some inspiration in it to create this city-like, workshop-like, exhibition design.*

When some of my close friends stepped inside the space for the first time, they suddenly felt like it was a distant land; they called it *Fei's Land*. For them, it felt like an artist's park, a whole new environment they had never seen before. It was like a playground filled with artworks<sup>[06]</sup>.

This distancing made people really fascinated with the exhibition space. It was not a white cube; it had a narrative, a path to see the works produced throughout the years; it created a journey through time. You could see it as a city; you could sit to watch a video or just relax within an installation. We also added a real restaurant within the central atrium, which made the show livelier. You could smell and order *dim sum*, you could drink *milk tea*. Other museums cannot do that, because typically food is not allowed in exhibition spaces. All of that contributed to encouraging the audience to think of the whole space as a town. You could do anything you wanted; you could sleep in the screening room, you could stay a half day, or an entire one; you'd never feel bored. I think this has indeed been extremely experimental when it comes to all that.

In fact, with such a large-scale exhibition, the global environment is almost more important than the art itself. I always want to live within my work; I always want to live inside my installations. In many of my shows, I like to stay in this environment; it is relaxing and 治愈, *healing*, right? In the end this ambiguity is so important. You can play with it; as with the many fake plants we added, it's a mix of the natural and 人工, *artificial*, all together.

*And somehow it also reflects the idea of "RMB CITY", an earlier project of mine set in the virtual game "SECOND LIFE". There is this mixture of fake, real, fiction, reality. But with this little bit of added chaos, because you do want the whole environment to have this dream-like atmosphere; the dream city.*

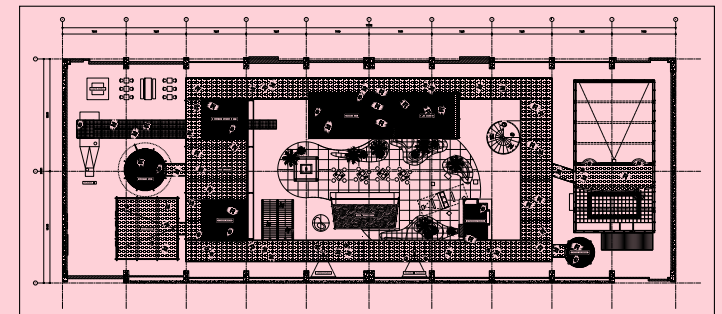
I think we now understand the big scale of the project, and how it all came together. It would also be interesting to address the interiority of it. Some artworks are isolated in a room-like volume, some are distributed loosely; how did you decide which artwork goes where?

The exhibition at UCCA was a retrospective show, so we gathered material on all the different installations that have been produced throughout the years and we looked at it to understand how the works were displayed. We realised that sometimes they exist as extracted, autonomous objects; it's only a video, or only a photograph, usually in a white-cube-like environment. Sometimes it's a video plus a photograph; or the works are inside a specific room, but still, this

[04]  
ULLENS CENTER FOR CONTEMPORARY ART (UCCA)  
INTERIOR VIEW OF GREAT HALL  
2007



[05]  
PLAN VIEW OF CAO FEI: "STAGING THE ERA" AT UCCA  
2021



[06]  
INSTALLATION VIEW OF CAO FEI: "STAGING THE ERA" AT UCCA  
COURTESY THE ARTIST - © STEFEN CHOW  
2021





room remains neutral. And finally, sometimes – in the most complex case – it’s a video inside a set; the world it depicts literally spilling out into the exhibition space.

**GV** The thing that is now connecting all of the shows we’ve worked on with CAO FEI, and more globally her work and our work, is the idea of *fluctuant reality*. You never really know if you’re looking at the artwork, or if you’re within the artwork; if it’s the real world, or if it’s a set-like fake world around you. All of that is always a bit blurred. As CHARLOTTE was explaining, it’s true that categories help in understanding the strategies or the mechanisms that we can use. But ultimately, the challenge is also to find a balance between these categories and find ways to even blur the limit between things that are already blurred. At UCCA, everything was really fluid. It’s indeed also because CAO FEI’s work is fluid *per se*; you never really know what you’re looking at. Is it real, is it fake? Is it an avatar, is it someone in disguise or is it actually that person...

**CLH** Is it the past, is it the future?

**GV** Is it a city, is it a fake city? Whatever! All of these layers are multiplied. And we had very long discussions about how to separate, or not, how to merge, or not, and how to alternate these layers and still guarantee the overall quality; in terms of sound, in terms of light, in terms of intimacy. Sometimes an installation required a room that was relatively small, echoing something more domestic, like a bedroom or a playroom for kids. This is where we could really play with all the architectural elements, experimenting with the idea of gradients between literal architecture and something barely suggestive of it.

I think this picture <sup>[07]</sup> summarises everything. There’s this window, this curtain, which is a very domestic condition that could be part of any bedroom. It’s covering part of the view whilst still giving a glimpse of the rest of the show, so even in that mostly enclosed room you’re still invited to look at the rest. And reversely, if you’re standing in front of it, on the other side of the platform, or in the central space, you can also have a peek inside. All these small details and spatial strategies act as *callers*, invitations to explore and get lost.

**CLH** Thanks to all these different doors and openings, you still can, most of the time, create visual or mental links among all the spaces and with the entire show in general.

*In a sense, because of these links, the body of work presented at that time, as a whole experience, is unique. The show becomes a project in itself. And that marks the difference between an exhibition where you have a series of blunt, white*

*boxes, and one where you create spaces in a way that resembles micro-architecture.*

**CF** Most contemporary artists have an immutable strategy to set up their installations; most of the time they will never change it. On my side, I try to have a different output every time, reorganising different elements. That is not easy; even when I work with my gallery they are sometimes confused, they would ask *‘What is the final version of this installation?’* But I don’t know and actually don’t care. For me, everything can change and fluctuate; I try to reinterpret my installations all the time.

**NM** There is really a high level of complexity to that project, various scales; like CAO FEI said it’s a city within a city, a world within a world. Can you talk about the actual process of working together? I imagine it’s as complex as the finished product.

**CLH** It always begins with a discussion together to understand the general direction for the show, and it’s always CAO FEI giving this direction first. Following that, we propose a master plan or an initial spatial structure that serves as a canvas upon which CAO FEI intervenes and starts adding these *layers* we were talking about earlier. We then react to that feedback and refine the proposal that is again sent to the artist, etc. It’s this loop, this back and forth process that gradually creates the exhibition.

This photograph <sup>[08]</sup> also illustrates another one of our processes. This is the theatre where CAO FEI had her studio, and where her 2019 movie “NOVA” was shot. We visited the space, we looked closely at the building, its morphology, its details and material language, and from that *scan* we made an absurdly big architecture model <sup>[09]</sup>. We wanted it to evoke as much as possible the original, without being a literal copy.

*Complexity is introduced when you add all the overlapping layers, this mix between reality, movie, fiction and the ultimate layer: virtual or augmented reality. Throughout the show, you simultaneously experience walking through the exhibition setting, carrying a memory of what you just saw, and also witnessing this added layer that is virtual or augmented reality.*

**GV** That’s something we realised with CAO FEI’s work; you have to reach a critical mass of multiple layers to really make it work. As CHARLOTTE is mentioning, they all come together and merge; the fake, the real, the past, the present. And this complexity is crucial in bringing the show to life. For us, that’s a lot of fun, and that’s where we have very long discussions with the artist about how we put that together and how we balance the whole. I would say this summarises the way we work together.

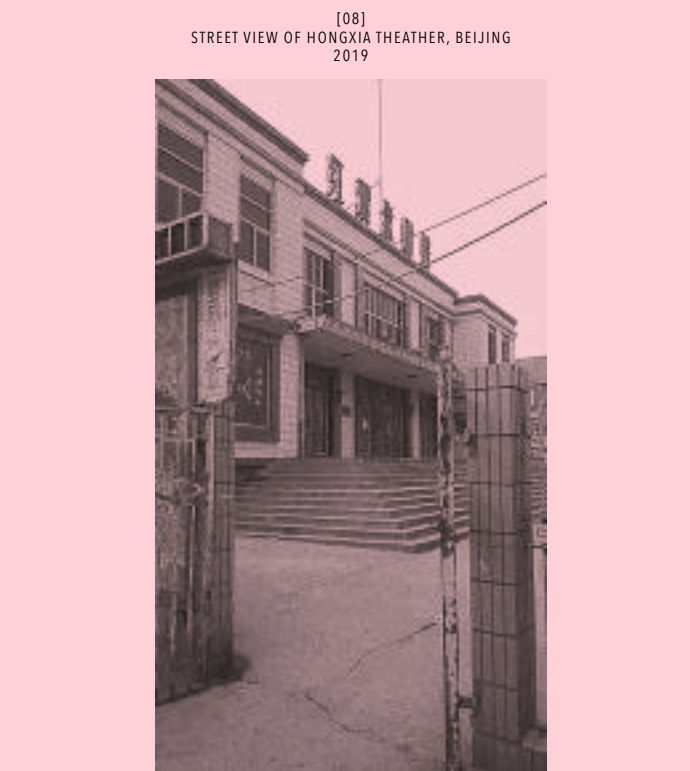
**CF** Why do I like to work with BEAU? I think it’s because my work is like a new format; you could call it a bit unpolished or untidy, right? So sometimes I need architects to provide me with a structure. I need some kind of solid framework.

I’m constantly thinking about the balance between clean and messy. You cannot make things too clean, you know. When something is too clean, I feel like we’re the ones under construction; we’re controlled by the architects, or by the exhibition design. And it looks so 乖, *well-behaved*. So I think the really important question is how to balance these two sides. Because, in the art world, people see so many standardised stereotypes at these big museums, whether at the TATE or the GUGGENHEIM. Huge windows, very expensive floors. You cannot alter anything, you cannot introduce other materials, you cannot have food inside; there are so many boundaries. On top of that, there is a budget and standards to what a contemporary art museum is supposed to produce. Even the conditions of light and temperature have to meet certain standards. All the big cities, super cities, when they build a new contemporary art museum, or even a new department within a museum: it’s usually in a form that’s so traditional.

But for artists, if we always work in a clean space, it’s so boring for us. In the end, how we play with this kind of muted space is a huge challenge. So that’s why I work with BEAU.

*I’m always looking for a way to deal with different modern conditions. It’s very easy to make things polished, like in a shopping mall, or a glazed-tower district. But I don’t want to make that. I think we have to question these conditions. Even if I keep producing exhibitions for 20 years, I still want to find possibilities to create something different every time.*

*This conversation has been edited for length and clarity.*





# DECON-STRUCTING THE ART SPACE CANON

*Gallerists* EDOUARD MALINGUE<sup>[EM]</sup> & LORRAINE KIANG<sup>[LK]</sup> *discuss their latest space, a renovated tong lau on* SIK ON STREET<sup>[P.64]</sup>, *with* CHARLOTTE LAFONT-HUGO<sup>[CLH]</sup> & GILLES VANDERSTOCKEN<sup>[GV]</sup>, *moderated by* NATASZA MINASIEWICZ<sup>[NM]</sup>.

Any visionary client understands that the key to longevity is a committed long-term collaborator. For EDOUARD MALINGUE and LORRAINE KIANG, co-founders of KIANG MALINGUE gallery, they find that in GILLES VANDERSTOCKEN and CHARLOTTE LAFONT-HUGO. Over the past eight years, they have worked on five projects together, from the first space on 33 DES VOEUX ROAD<sup>[P.8]</sup> in CENTRAL to their unusual SHANGHAI<sup>[P.20]</sup> site inside a former shopping mall. As the gallery evolved and expanded, a more intimate code of trust and understanding unfolded between client and architect, allowing for greater experimentation of space and radical expressions of materiality while still abiding by a primary criteria: to facilitate the display and exhibition of artworks.

In 2022, their latest project came together in the form of a renovated 1960s-era *tong lau* located at SIK ON street in the WAN CHAI district. Tasked with transforming a six-storey tenement building into a commercial art gallery, BEAU and KIANG MALINGUE challenged the typology’s canons with various adaptive reuse approaches to the site, including a silver-painted façade, the use of both concrete and white walls, and an emphasis on verticality via an existing central staircase linking all floors, which, KIANG mentions ‘*Creates chapters, in a sense, to the exhibitions’ experience*’. Although countless discussions have taken place between MALINGUE, KIANG, VANDERSTOCKEN, and LAFONT-HUGO, the conversation below takes stock of their entire portfolio for the first time, anchored around the essential idea of *the journey* and the deconstruction of stereotypical art spaces.

EM Here<sup>[01]</sup>, we are only looking at five projects we did together, right, not six?

GV Yes, five projects plus the very first one you did with OMA, on the top left.

EM Yes, so the first one is when I arrived in HONG KONG. I was concerned with this restricted amount of space. I did not want to deal with a square or rectangular shape, because you can always stand in the middle, turn around in a 360-degree motion, and pretend you’ve seen the show. I wanted the visitor to travel. Through discussions with OMA we came up with this shape, which prevented people from seeing the entire show from one spot. You would thus have to walk around and see the works from different angles. As gallerists, that allowed us to meet and greet the visitor and spend more time telling them stories about the works, the concepts behind them, and discuss ideas about aesthetics. So that was the first project.

Then we met GILLES and CHARLOTTE, and we continued that discussion. This was for the space located at 33 DES VOEUX ROAD<sup>[02]</sup> in CENTRAL, on the sixth floor. We were no longer visible from the street, and we were dealing with people that were already looking for us. There was the same requirement about *the journey* to be had, and BEAU proposed a shape that stretched out the exploration. The visitor landed in a space that was quite bare, very honest in its function and display, because all the visible elements, as the main wall, would articulate it. We dedicated that space to showing contemporary art. For us, there was a sort of harmony between what was presented to the world by a young, emerging artist, unfiltered by art critics’ or curators’ understanding, and the way the space was straightforward and honest. Then BEAU proposed the addition of a very intimate setting behind the scenes, which felt like a stage because of a step up leading to a wooden floor. In there, you could spend time. You would go from a situation where you’re taking in and displaying what’s very new, to a situation where you can relax. In both cases, you are very far from *aggressive* commercial concerns; in the first you are supposed to be surprised, and take in new ideas and concepts, and in the second you can travel to the past and see more established artists, but essentially you can spend more time there.

Then, we worked together on a space in an industrial building in the Southern part of the island in TIN WAN<sup>[P.178]</sup>, which was supposed to have several functions, such as hosting the gallery team and our storage. Both concerns were meant to remedy the abominable rent situation in HONG KONG, and BEAU proposed to use the remaining space as exhibition space. At the beginning, we were a bit shy about it, because I didn’t think these two volumes looked very nice. But they introduced very simple gestures. If you look at the image<sup>[03]</sup>, you see a translucent screen, and the beautiful natural light coming from the south of the island through the windows is then filtered by the screen, so that the first room, which is otherwise dark, became naturally sufficiently lit, so far as to make a space, initially small, look brighter and bigger than it actually is. Then, they played with original colours, such as the red pipes; they also added a blue tint to the doors.

During the pandemic, the place became quite successful. We had a lot of visitors, especially on the weekends, so we expanded to the space located above<sup>[04]</sup>, with its yellow tinted

floor. The most brilliant gesture BEAU did on this occasion was to mostly stay silent and do nothing, which is probably the best compliment I can give to an architect. Hahaha. The goal is to understand how a location can spatially function. If most of it is operational, we can accept it as it is, and then intervene on what is necessary to the people who will eventually use it. They proposed a new entrance, which didn’t change in terms of shape, but only in its physical appearance, which was then repeated onto the kitchen. We also have the most eco-friendly bathroom, perfect for a breath of fresh air; it’s full of amazing plants.

The rawness of the space has excited quite a few artists. We also did group shows there, which were made possible by its nature. It offered a very horizontal open space that produced a nice dialogue with and within the program, and ultimately with the WAN CHAI location, which is an entire building BEAU renovated during the pandemic.

GV These pictures<sup>[01][02][03][04]</sup> depict our main common obsession throughout the years, which is to dissect the canons of the art space bit by bit. Edouard was explaining how he had insisted on producing a journey and providing different views, as well as creating surprises around every corner. Back then we were using a lot these types of sudden turns that created relationships between artworks.

*If I had to summarise all these pictures in one sentence, I would say that through all these projects together, we progressively deconstructed their associated set of archetypes. We started to question the solidity of the walls, the making of the journey, the relation between the front stage, which is more public, and the backstage, the more private area of an art space.*

We also started to question what is *really* necessary or not. The second TIN WAN space<sup>[04]</sup> ended up with almost nothing, and I think that was indeed a good decision. The most radical leap can be seen at SIK ON<sup>[05]</sup>, which is completely shifting the way a building can function as an art gallery; in this case completely on its own and, most importantly, across six floors.

NM It seems like the art spaces informed one another, gradually. Did the artists, by the way they interacted with the different spaces, make you realise things that influenced the next projects?

EM There was a back and forth, in terms of allowing artists to take over the space, and potentially change it. The very first space<sup>[01]</sup> couldn’t be modified; it was small, so you had to





accept the shape as it was and play with it. The second one, on DES VOEUX ROAD<sup>[02]</sup>, offered that possibility, it was flexible. Even if personally I preferred the shows when the artists took the space as it was. The shapes offered were interesting enough to be played with. But a few artists did challenge the architecture, and it also worked very well. In SHANGHAI<sup>[06]</sup> we had this big, bright open space, which was meant for the artists to design as they wished, according to the needs of the exhibition. The space was indeed very flexible, because it was easy to set up a wall and remove it; BEAU designed a system that allowed for that. It made it financially manageable, for a contemporary art gallery. It was then more about administration and organisation; it was quite demanding for the gallery, especially if each artist had different ideas from one show to another. It did require a big commitment on our part. But LORRAINE and I both have fond memories of it. There was something very radical about that place. We mentioned the concept of *white cube*; I think this was as far away as you could get from it. Also, we had a program that could fit very well there, no matter whether the artist was a painter, a video artist or a sculptor. It worked very well, the dialogue was brilliant.

The gallery at TIN WAN<sup>[04]</sup>, the one with the yellow floor, has a similar vibe, so the comments will be the same, except the ceiling is a bit lower, and that keeping the space open is part of its charm. For now we’ve tried to lead the artists to play with it whilst keeping it very open.

As for the last space we made together, depicted in these two images<sup>[07][08]</sup>, there is definitely this vertical journey going from one room to the next. This gallery must be taken as it is; there isn’t much room for an artist to alter its structure, its materiality. That’s something that I like, when an artist comes in with what they already have and manages to put on a great show. I think great artists are able to do that. We invite them over to HONG KONG so they can spend a couple of days lingering in the space, and then they have a year to come up with their project. A year after its opening we’ve been very happy with this gallery.

CLH For the DES VOEUX ROAD<sup>[02]</sup> and SHANGHAI<sup>[06]</sup> projects, we kind of challenged the notion of the wall in the exhibition space; then we finally came back to the post-industrial layout, with no more added walls.

EM We’re an art gallery. Firstly, our job is to understand artists as early as possible and bring their art to the public. The second step is to find a home for the works they’ve created. The artwork will travel from the artist’s studio to a gallery, and then to a home. If you’re a museum, you can create a specific environment for an artwork, and you can push that freedom for the artist to express whatever idea he or she has in mind. Within a gallery, I like this idea that an artwork can settle in the given environment, because ultimately, if it makes it into a collector’s home, it will probably be in a *normal setting* with walls, a standard apartment shape with a sofa, a table.

*If you create an artificial environment for the artwork, maybe it will look really nice in the exhibition space, but*

*I think it’s a pity if it loses its attractiveness just because that environment has been removed. The fact that an artist can take over SIK ON STREET in WAN CHAI, and take it as it is while coming up with a successful show, is one step closer to the artwork leaving us for a new home, because it has proven to be good enough for that.*

That’s why I’m always a bit careful when an artist is going to completely change a given space just for the sake of an artwork. In some cases, it’s necessary, such as for an installation, so I’m not fundamentally against it. But I still remain cautious.

NM It seems very clear that you worked with different art space types, but also different building typologies. You have this industrial space in TIN WAN, a commercial tower in CENTRAL, and now a residential *tong lau* in WAN CHAI. How did these different typologies influence the strategies and in general the projects?

LK In HONG KONG we are always bound by practical circumstances, so the move from a commercial space in CENTRAL to the second space was initially more for practical reasons, especially to avoid the high rent. The shifts in the program since we first started in 2010 led to the idea that we wanted to keep our rental cost as low as possible so that the exhibitions can subsist longer. Looking for a more permanent space led us to look for locations beyond CENTRAL, which is currently the hub for a lot of *blue-chip* galleries.

The moment we considered moving out of that district, we started looking at different areas, such as SHEUNG WAN, KENNEDY TOWN, WAN CHAI, WONG CHUK HANG; kind of all around. We even considered moving outside of HONG KONG ISLAND, and then, finally, the building we saw in WAN CHAI became available, and it became evident to us that having a physical space that you can identify and have kind of a visual impression of was quite important to us. The area has shops, restaurants and residential buildings, inhabited by a local population, which makes it not so gentrified, although part of it still is. There are very old buildings too; all this giving a kind of hybrid nature to that area, which is also very reflective of HONG KONG itself.

The size of the location was also a concern; we wanted to find something similar in size to our previous spaces. Although here it’s been converted in a vertical fashion. That creates another challenge. There are galleries like this in EUROPE, or in NEW YORK, inside little townhouse buildings. To us, this old walk-up building, similar to a lot of buildings from the 1950s or 1960s here, gives a nice identity to the gallery.

The gallery program is international, but more than 50% of the artists we represent are

based within HONG KONG, CHINA, TAIWAN, and also the rest of ASIA. In this sense, by our choice of location, we let people know that we are based here. We thus weren’t so concerned about being next to other galleries, and we hoped that pulling ourselves away would lead people to take the initiative to come and find us.

*The whole process was a transition, and each space had its challenges, because of practical reasons, but also, because artists react differently whenever we shift locations. It’s not so much about finding the right artist to work within the space, it’s actually the other way around; we have a consistent program of artists, and, depending on the space we have, they react to it.*

They’ve always succeeded in working within the different locations, which always inspired them and actually gave them something fresh to work with. To be able to adapt to a specific space usually gets gradually harder for artists, the more shows they do; such a shifting environment makes it interesting for them to work with.

CLH This shift, from a horizontal space to a vertical one, but also from a shared location to your own, forced the artists, but also the architects, to modulate their perception of it towards a more singular and vertical one. That’s what is radically different! Because otherwise in terms of square metres, the SIK ON gallery is in the end quite similar to the one in 33 DES VOEUX ROAD.

LK Because it’s now distributed over different floors, the way the show is set, it actually expands it a bit; people feel like it’s larger. The journey is segmented by the staircase, which creates chapters, in a sense, to the exhibitions’ experience.

GV If we take a step back and look at all these typologies and projects, it’s interesting to see that, for the first four ones, we almost always started with a horizontal open space, and within that open space we progressively tried to create subspaces. But here, we got into a kind of pre-existing fragmented verticality.

*And it was not about subdividing a large space anymore, but about playing with this aggregation of small spaces, put together as one. In terms of architecture, it*

[04]  
INSTALLATION VIEW OF "SSSSSSSSSCULPTURESQUE"  
AT KIANG MALINGUE 13/F OF BLUE BOX FACTORY, HONG KONG  
COURTESY THE ARTISTS AND KIANG MALINGUE - © XU LIANG LEON  
2022



[05]  
INSTALLATION VIEW OF TIFFANY CHUNG:  
"ENTANGLED TRACES, DISREMEMBERED LANDSCAPES"  
AT KIANG MALINGUE 10 SIK ON STREET, HONG KONG  
COURTESY THE ARTIST AND KIANG MALINGUE - © WONG PAK HANG  
2023



[06]  
INSTALLATION VIEW OF "MUSE FOR A MIMETICIST"  
AT EDOUARD MALINGUE GALLERY WEST BUND DISTRICT, SHANGHAI  
© ZHANG HONG  
2017





*was a complete inversion of all the things we’ve done together so far; it was a radical shift.*

LK It’s very surprising to the viewers and the artists, because of the different treatments within the building. You can thus utilise the space quite differently. Usually the perception is quite consistent within a gallery space, but I think because of the way we treated the walls, one type being white, and one being concrete, the experience of the show becomes quite dramatised. I think people are surprised by that, in a good way. It’s very rare, in HONG KONG, or generally in gallery spaces, worldwide, to have a finish that pushes a bit more than the usual neutral spaces. Here, it clearly isn’t neutral.

Sometimes it is quite challenging for the artists, they might feel overwhelmed, but once they get used to it, it becomes a warm space, because it feels and looks like a home. People feel comfortable inside.

NM The façade<sup>[09]</sup> is clearly the face of the gallery; can you explain why you chose the silver finish?

LK When we first looked at the building<sup>[10]</sup>, we brought our kids, along with GILLES and CHARLOTTE. Our son was wearing this silver bomber jacket that had this *plasticky*, reflective fabric; it was glowing because of the sun. That sight made us want to mimic that onto the façade. It started with this funny joke, but also, we’ve always kind of liked the PRADA FOUNDATION’s gold building, which always left a strong impression on us. The idea of using colour was nice, and silver gives this feeling of a futuristic element. It does depend on how you use it, but we decided to use paint, which is a very simplistic way of treating the building. We didn’t really use expensive materials; there is this sense of relationship with the HONG KONG environment, and the materiality became something that was quite fun to work with.

CLH We wanted to preserve the existing monolithic quality, and painting the building was an easy way to keep all the traces and show the several modifications it went through since 1965 without weakening this condition. I remember EDOUARD asking for a unique treatment that could enhance these aspects, whilst improving the singularity of the building inside the street.

GV The paint was so obvious as an answer; it’s a simple and cheap material.

*It echoes not only a colour but also a blunt, generic, pragmatic material, since this silver paint, basically a mix of actual metallic particles, is what’s used on the street poles to protect them from rust. But*

*also, as CHARLOTTE was saying, it allows for a merging of all the different layers of interventions this building is made of.*

On the façade, if the little canopies are the original parts, we then infilled the windows, etc. There are also what we called the *scars*, the traces of the modifications that were more or less violently put on and/or removed, which show all the transformations the building went through. Our goal was to find a way to unify all that without over-showing the new interventions, while still keeping the legibility of the original structure.

We also have a story about the silver colour, dating back to when we visited the massive ventilation tower in TOKYO’s train station, which also has this silver tint. We realised back then that the texture was super important with this type of finish, and on this building we’ve given a strong texture to the paint, which plays a lot with the light, and brings a certain liveliness to the result.

NM Switching from the context and the façade towards the building itself, and its internal organisation; can you elaborate on the spatial experience that gives the new gallery its identity?

CLH As LORRAINE said, the gallery functions as a series of rooms, organised around the staircase as a vertical journey. On the ground floor, there is this long and wide-open exhibition room. On the first floor, there’s a semi-private kitchen, linked to an outdoor garden. On the second floor, there’s a white cube, then on the very top what we call the concrete cube. The main morphologic transformation of the building was the removal of two of the original floors, which was almost a requirement from the start.

GV I remember you were really worried about the floor height, and how to create more. I remember sitting with CHARLOTTE trying to unlock the project, because there’s always a main starting point. With our previous projects together, we were mostly resolving a plan. The questions back then were about how to create the journey using the walls, producing public space along with the more private areas, etc. But for this project, the resolution originated from the section. Everything was about layering and organising the various subspaces around the staircase.

CLH It echoes what LORRAINE mentioned before, that the variety of spaces gives the impression that it’s bigger.

NM You mentioned that, looking at original pictures, you remembered how hard it was for everyone to envision what it could become.

EM I actually think it wasn’t hard. It was still tenanted when we got in; each floor was occupied. The feeling we got once everybody left was that it was a very tight space. The one thing we really wanted to do was to open it up. In all the projects we did together, LORRAINE and I would generally have a few simple yet strong ideas that would be very dear to us. For this particular

project, what was immediately vital was to produce more space. If you are a giant and you want to stretch, but if the ceiling is in the way, then you just blow it up!

Once we had this idea, since we’re always concerned about volumes, and the journey, I don’t think I had much input because what was most important to me had already been resolved. Afterwards, there were much more discussions about materiality, and here, LORRAINE was more involved than I was. But I think the project was mainly quickly resolved once we decided to blow up these two floors.

NM What did it mean to you, GILLES and CHARLOTTE, to work with an entire existing building? *Adaptive reuse* is a constant theme in your practice; how did that approach influence the architecture of this project?

GV We are indeed doing more and more *adaptive reuse*; but at some point we seriously did consider demolishing the entire structure, and rebuilding a completely new one. But we then realised it would have ended up looking exactly the same, using exactly the same materials, because of the rigidity of the codes and regulations in HONG KONG. We would have had the same volumes, also in concrete; so what was the point of demolishing the one we already had?

Beyond these practical, almost anecdotal stories, we also strongly think that adaptive reuse is a way to maintain a certain cultural sustainability. LORRAINE mentioned that the area is a mix of old and new buildings, under a gentrification process, with a similar destiny as many other areas, everywhere in the world, where people are arriving and altering the fabric, along with projects like galleries.

*We think that maintaining the typology, by somehow celebrating it in the way we’ve transformed it, by keeping traces or elements that are very typical of the city and its architecture, is sustaining the cultural value of the building. It is something we are more and more concerned about when it comes to our projects.*

As EDOUARD said, we quickly knew the direction of the project, but then, the things that changed a lot through time were the way we approached materiality, and the way we progressively decided on the details, the colours, the finishes. On the top cube<sup>[08]</sup>, I remember we tried so many different *collages* during the design phase, where the walls and the floors were treated differently, and the rails were designed in another way. In the end, all these decisions were reached by progressively discovering the site itself. During the first phase of construction, when we were





dismantling and removing everything that wasn't needed, including these two floors, we were also gradually revealing construction methods, materials, colours, as well as traces such as the *terrazzo*, used in the original apartments, which we reused later on the walls. All of that was feeding these decisions; in fact the whole project was never frozen at any moment.

*It was indeed a very long and careful process, a quiet discovery of all these elements. We call that method sensible archaeology, because at this point we were literally scratching surfaces and progressively grasping tangible material that fed the design itself.*

*Adaptive reuse*, to us, is also an important opportunity to decode the context, whether the area, the street, the people living around, the building, its history, the way it was built. All of these aspects are crucial.

NM Speaking of materiality, and interiority, there is a very strong sense of domesticity, especially around the living room and the kitchen area. You mentioned before that it was part of the program. LORRAINE and EDOUARD, could you speak about your *rituals*, and explain why you wanted such spaces to welcome your guests?

EM Once you enter the front door, you're in an exhibition space, and you are greeted by someone who can walk you through the show, all the way up. It is very vertical; you do have to climb stairs. It's a journey that I find more enjoyable when you enter a discussion with the host. You can also take a rest at each floor by looking at the show, before climbing up again. LORRAINE, myself, and the team all enjoy presenting the works and having these discussions with the public.

Although the gallery sits in a pedestrian street that's tucked away, and somewhat hard to find if you've never been there before, it is open to the public, it is a gallery, just as what you see in CHELSEA in NEW YORK, or in LE MARAIS in PARIS. So, whether someone wants to buy art or not, it's a space for them during opening hours, and there's a whole team that's ready to give anyone a tour. I think that this experience, in this particular environment, is quite unique. The idea isn't to put an overwhelming impression upon the visitor that would make them feel like they are not worthy, and that the only option to catch up would be to buy. It really isn't the strategy here. Rather, the strategy is to familiarise people with practices they've never encountered before.

GV We were constantly discussing this question of domesticity, figuring out how to maintain a sense of scale, how to make it *human*.

*Domesticity is something we've been discussing for years, but in that project it was fundamental. There was an opportunity to seize that notion and push it even further. We decided to literally have a dining room, a kitchen, a garden; things that are usually absolutely not part of the typology of a gallery space. It allows these moments, whilst going up through the journey, to reconnect with something less abstract.*

LK Because of the size of the building, we envisioned that a typical person coming by would have almost a one-on-one experience of the space, and that it would generally not be larger groups. The staircase isn't wide, the square footage of each floor isn't that big, so, ideally, the best experience of the gallery would be within small groups of people. As such, the experience becomes something similar to visiting someone's home, being greeted, and having a very personal journey and explanation about the work.

That is also translated into the space; we wanted it to have something that feels like HONG KONG. There is a certain roughness, but there are also more refined treatments of materials, along with an acute attention to details, that one would notice whilst being at somebody's home; the way they place things inside the space, the proportions, the use of materials...

There are only a few things to work with, as galleries, so these simple elements became very important. We were very aware, while testing colours and textures, the feeling each choice would induce to the viewer. We wanted to make sure the space felt warm, and not too cold because of the usage of cement, and all the stone elements. We didn't want the space to feel heavy either, because of the multiplicity of materials. Daylight is also very important in this space. To complement the different materials we also used wood, for the brown tint, against the greys and the whites. A palette that gives a little more warmth to the space, with the greenery, alongside the silver of the façade and the kitchen modules. We wanted it to feel like home, without it being too overwhelming, because at the end, the experience is about the artwork. The architecture, in the end, is here to enhance that experience.

NM We've discussed the articulation of various ideas, from challenging the art space typology, the domestic hybridity, and the contextual material language, along with the economy of means. Another idea is the hanging system<sup>[05][08][11]</sup>

you created. Does this pose any challenge to you, as gallerists, while working with artists?

EM Once you've explained how it works, it's pretty efficient.

LK We're also learning to work with it. It's not common for a gallery to have such strict variables, and the cement walls have somewhat of an organic finish, which has its flaws, in a way, that become part of the beauty of the material. We're also still learning to deal with it because of HONG KONG's climate.

CLH We call that *flexibility through rigidity*. It's a motto we came up with during the SHANGHAI project<sup>[06]</sup>, with the pole system that was organising the space. Here, we designed this railing system because of the nature of the walls finish, as along with wanting to give a mineral quality to the space, we discovered the original bare concrete beyond the multiple layers we stripped from the walls, and we didn't want too much of a contrast with it.

GV When it comes to a white wall, you can drill holes and directly suspend the artworks; you just have to repaint afterwards. But with this kind of finish, the *Shanghai plaster*, you cannot do that. We thus had to supply the possibility of hanging without touching the wall itself.

CLH This choice is also due to discussions about sustainability, and the economical and ecological costs of repainting the walls after every show.

EM We can consider two situations. Firstly, buying an artwork, and building a house around it, to make sure the house fits the artwork, to make it shine. The second situation is seeing how you can place an artwork in your actual living space.

In some cases, an artwork did not make it to a flat because the collector thought that the colour of the painting didn't match the fabric of the sofa. As absurd as it is, because of that, the artwork would not find itself a new home. In this case, we created a space that is *reminiscent* of domesticity; it has its restrictions, but it's much less than in a home, usually cluttered with all the furniture and everything one collects in a lifetime. In the end, as LORRAINE said, up until now the artists have responded very well to these restrictions.

NM Let's talk about the real *white cube*<sup>[07]</sup>, somehow a utopia come true; an actual, geometrically perfect, 4.9-metres cube located at the core of the building. As art dealers, as collectors and artists, what does it mean to be working with such a feature?

EM There is a real joke about it; as private as it can be, I think that a sense of humour, in whatever business, is important. In general, the white cube concept is extremely efficient, that's why it has been lasting so long. It's also very dry and fake and creates a theatricality that prevents a true relationship to happen between the artwork and the viewer. This is a discussion we had many times since the beginning with BEAU. Indeed, all the spaces we described before were already clearly breaking away from that concept. In this case, we rather quickly decided to go for this cubic shape, for both of the upper spaces; and for one

[09]  
FAÇADE VIEW OF 10 SIK ON STREET BUILDING, HONG KONG  
© XU LIANG LEON  
2022



[10]  
FAÇADE VIEW OF 10 SIK ON STREET BUILDING  
BEFORE RENOVATION, HONG KONG  
© XU LIANG LEON  
2019





of them BEAU proposed to finish it as a real, literal white cube. We found this idea hilarious, so we studied the possibility of actually doing it.

The conclusion is that it produces a dramatisation of the experience. We're leading our guests from this mineral ground floor, through the domestic first floor space, with the kitchen and the wooden table, until we arrive in the white cube. They are genuinely surprised. In the end, it's both a private joke that we won't be tired of, and a dramatisation effect.

GV EDOUARD has already said a lot, I would just insist on the importance of the pure geometrical figure that was somehow critical in fleshing out this idea, beyond the metaphor.

*We've always been deconstructing the white cube, together. Some people are not open to questioning the concept, but LORRAINE and EDOUARD are, so we've been doing this since the beginning, and it sometimes went to very extreme solutions. We're not anti-white cube per se; we're just annoyed if it's the solution by default, a kind of diktat. If people are just, in a way, passively demanding it, we would still strongly push into another direction, just to somehow illustrate the existence of alternatives.*

Here, the white cube makes sense because there is this idea of diversity among the different spaces, bringing novelty and excitement. It somehow validates the whole journey.

What's also interesting is the way that white cube is positioned within the building; it's at its core, its most central, hidden part. If the white cube's role is to disconnect you from the world, and to completely neutralise spatial perception, such a position is crucial. I'm glad we were able to make such a design, and somehow turn it into a stance; as I said, we're not anti-white cube, it's just a system, among many others, that needs to be balanced within a larger scheme.

NM Speaking of diversity, it seems like the staircase becomes not only a connector but actually one of the art spaces; one of the interior space typologies.

CLH It's true that taking the opportunity to exhibit in a staircase<sup>[12]</sup>, or in a kitchen<sup>[13]</sup>, allows us to raise typological questions, all the

while emulating what a home would look like. Beyond that, what we wanted, as architects, is to increase the spatial experience inside this vertical journey. That's why it was important to create massive perforations within the original shaft so as to achieve this horizontal expansion mid-way, and then, at the top, this vertical expansion towards the roof. The same goes for the three round-shaped light cannons distributed all along to, again, increase the spatial quality of this vertical journey.

GV We see the staircase as the common denominator; you're always going from the staircase to a specific room, and then back to it. It was part of the question: how do you bring people all the way to the top? And the answer was to provide excitement, and make sure that every floor proposed something different. The staircase then becomes the generator of this journey, the motor bringing people upwards.

LK I think that the treatment of the white walls in the staircase is a noticeable detail. We decide whether to hang things in the staircase, or not. Sometimes we bring the collector up ourselves, which allowed us to find out that somehow the walking experience wasn't that long and provides time to talk to someone.

*Even if a visitor is to experience the gallery by themselves, the staircase does not actually become something too obvious. Certain details within the staircase might become points of intrigue, and then it has its own singularity, but it's mostly a device that leads from one space to another.*

NM The conversation is coming to an end. One last word on the project? Maybe we can come back to that street view<sup>[09]</sup>?

EM If you look 25 years back, within the strategies art galleries used to conquer an audience; you would see a striving for branding. The reputation of the gallery would then be so strong that it would convince people to acquire what may be very expensive, or what they don't always fully understand yet. And you would see a movement, a physical movement, galleries seeking for space and coverage of territory, relentless geographical expansion, at the expense of having a soul, and a proper identity. This method has been very successful, and still is.

But I really think that it's coming to an end, precisely for its lack of soul and identity, and today it's vital to be somewhere and embrace locality. I don't think it matters if you're in a famous, international art centre or a small village, provided you have that soul within the program; an identity that reflects and is reflected by the environment.

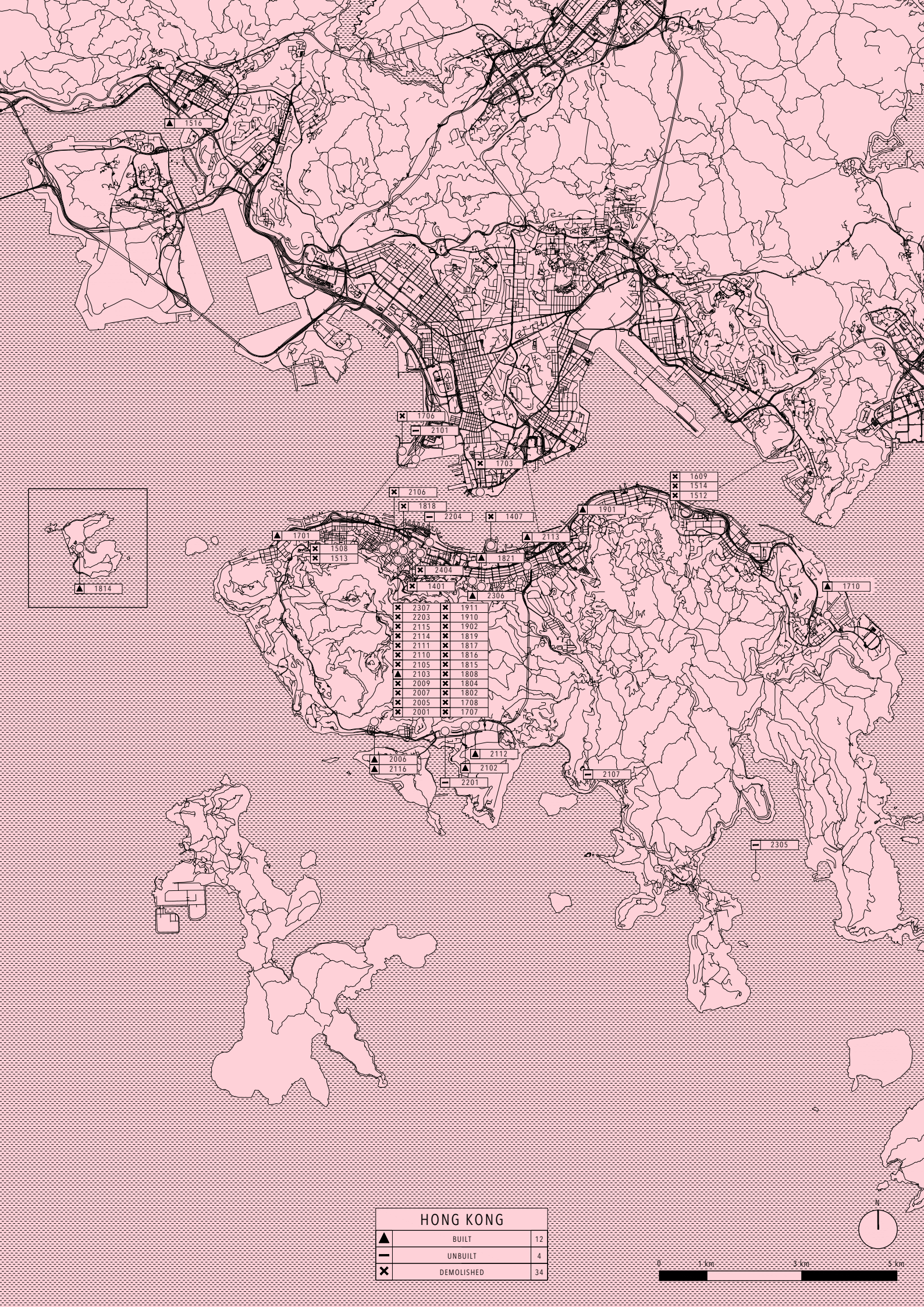
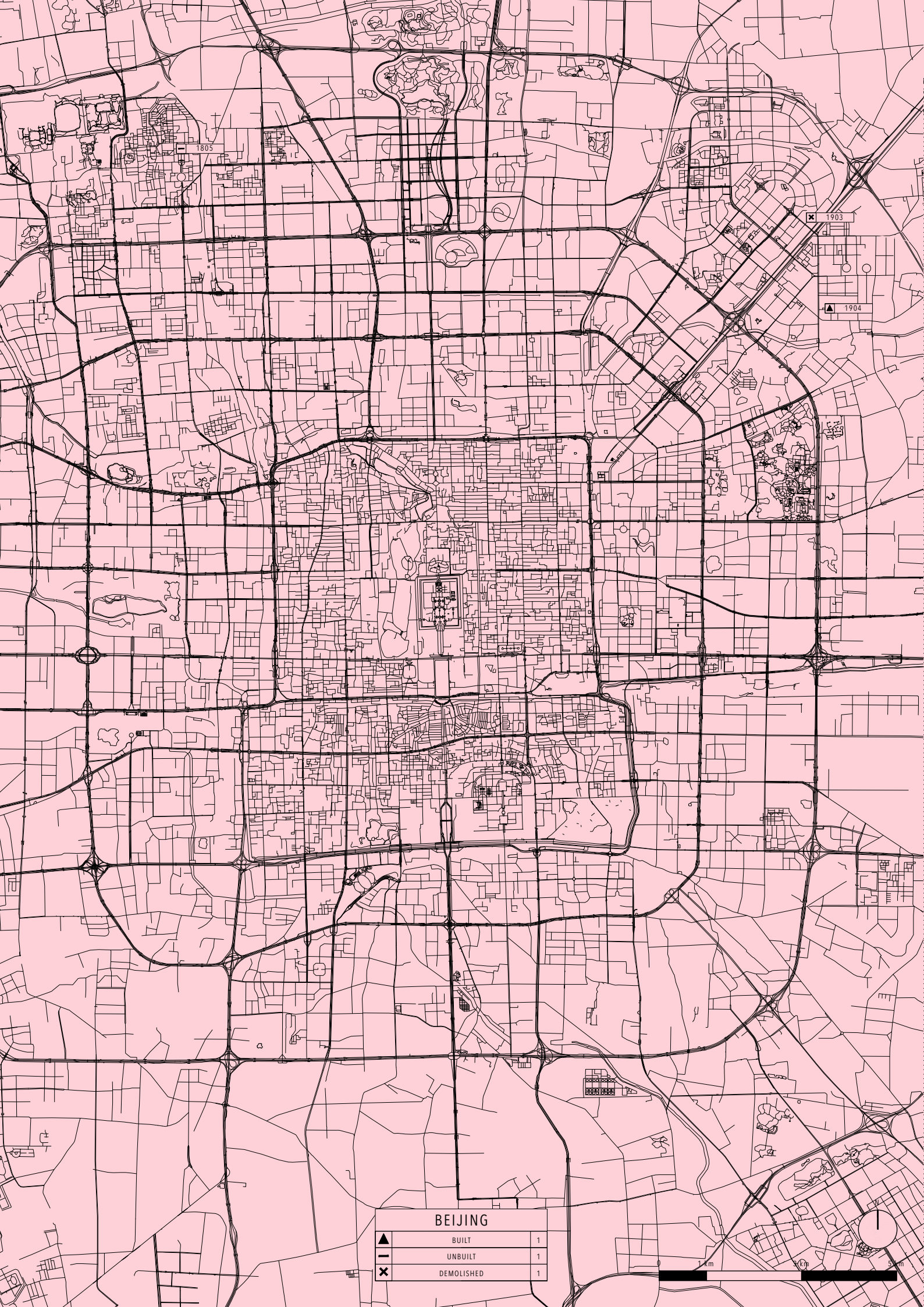
*This project is a love story. From our story as a couple first, then flowing towards the artists we represent, and the city that we live in. And I speak as a foreigner; I'm from FRANCE, I come from very far away. But despite that, it's very important for us to reflect certain values. Having a home for the program, a home to welcome people, and make a very strong statement about where we are and where we stand in order to achieve all that.*

So, back to this picture<sup>[09]</sup>, this silver façade embraces both what is up-and-coming and what it was, through all the details that BEAU created to illustrate the history of the building. The way they made this *reading* obvious is a gesture towards honesty and straightforwardness, a sort of archive of what has happened in the last 60 years to the building. I think that, once a gallery is able to make this statement, then it can continue working on its identity, spreading the word internationally.

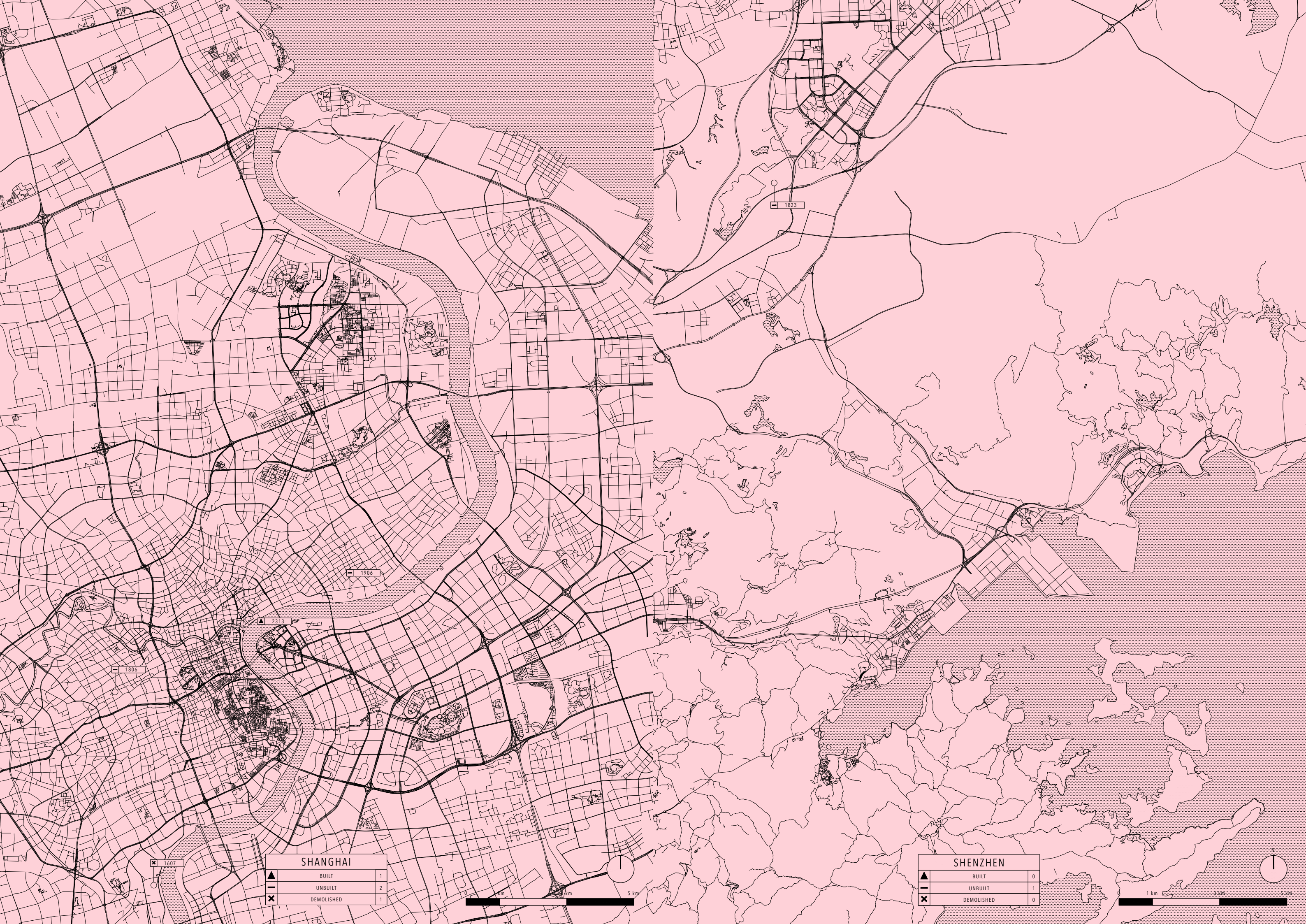
*This conversation has been edited for length and clarity.*











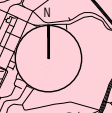
| SHANGHAI |            |   |
|----------|------------|---|
| ▲        | BUILT      | 1 |
| ---      | UNBUILT    | 2 |
| ×        | DEMOLISHED | 1 |

| SHENZHEN |            |   |
|----------|------------|---|
| ▲        | BUILT      | 0 |
| ---      | UNBUILT    | 1 |
| ×        | DEMOLISHED | 0 |





| SHENZHEN |            |   |
|----------|------------|---|
| ▲        | BUILT      | 2 |
|          | UNBUILT    | 0 |
| X        | DEMOLISHED | 0 |





# 2024

## 2405\_ YDP

LONDON, ENGLAND  
DESIGN DEVELOPMENT  
TARGET 2025

## 2404\_ SUPPER CLUB

ART FAIR  
HONG KONG, SAR CHINA  
TEMPORARY  
25 - 30 MARCH 2024  
P.202

## 2401\_ MOORSOM ROAD

HOUSING  
HONG KONG, SAR CHINA  
DESIGN DEVELOPMENT  
TARGET 2025

# 2023

## 2313\_ CAO FEI

TIDAL FLUX  
EXHIBITION  
SHANGHAI, CHINA  
TEMPORARY  
22 JUNE - 17 NOVEMBER 2024  
P.192

## 2311\_ CAO FEI

MY CITY IS YOURS  
EXHIBITION  
SYDNEY, AUSTRALIA  
TEMPORARY  
30 NOVEMBER - 13 APRIL 2025

## 2307\_ GREEN SNAKE

WOMEN-CENTRED ECOLOGIES  
EXHIBITION  
HONG KONG, SAR CHINA  
TEMPORARY  
20 DECEMBER 2023 - 01 APRIL 2024

## 2306\_ WOAW

ART GALLERY  
HONG KONG, SAR CHINA  
COMPLETED  
2023

## 2305\_ THE WAN

BOAT EVENT SPACE  
HONG KONG, SAR CHINA  
STUDY

# 2022

## 2205\_ ALICJA KWADE

SOLO SHOW  
EXHIBITION  
HONG KONG, SAR CHINA  
DESIGN DEVELOPMENT  
TARGET 2025

## 2204\_ FEATURE PERIMETER DESIGN

FOR CENTRAL HARBOURFRONT  
PUBLIC ART  
HONG KONG, SAR CHINA  
INVITED COMPETITION (2ND PRIZE)

## 2203\_ MYTH MAKERS

SPECTROSYNTHESIS III  
EXHIBITION  
HONG KONG, SAR CHINA  
TEMPORARY  
24 DECEMBER - 10 APRIL 2023

## 2201\_ ASYMMETRY ART FOUNDATION

ART SPACE  
HONG KONG, SAR CHINA  
STUDY

# 2021

## 2116\_ KIANG MALINGUE

TIN WAN  
ART GALLERY  
HONG KONG, SAR CHINA  
COMPLETED  
2022  
P.178

## 2115\_ INK CITY

EXHIBITION  
HONG KONG, SAR CHINA  
TEMPORARY  
23 APRIL - 01 AUGUST 2021

## 2114\_ DIGIRADIANCE

EXHIBITION  
HONG KONG, SAR CHINA  
TEMPORARY  
17 FEBRUARY - 16 MARCH 2023

## 2113\_ PHD GROUP

ART GALLERY  
HONG KONG, SAR CHINA  
COMPLETED  
2022  
P.168

## 2112\_ ROSSI ROSSI

ART GALLERY  
HONG KONG, SAR CHINA  
COMPLETED  
2021

## 2111\_ DOUBLE VISION

EXHIBITION  
HONG KONG, SAR CHINA  
TEMPORARY  
21 APRIL - 12 JUNE 2022

## 2110\_ PIPILOTTI RIST

BEHIND YOUR EYELID  
EXHIBITION  
HONG KONG, SAR CHINA  
TEMPORARY  
03 AUGUST - 21 NOVEMBER 2022

# 2020

## 2108\_ NUOVO.ID SHELVING SYSTEM I

FURNITURE  
HONG KONG, SAR CHINA  
DESIGN DEVELOPMENT

## 2107\_ MONTE VERDE RESIDENCE

HOUSING  
HONG KONG, SAR CHINA  
STUDY

## 2106\_ UNSCHEDULED #2

ART FAIR  
HONG KONG, SAR CHINA  
TEMPORARY  
02 - 06 SEPTEMBER 2021

## 2105\_ POETIC HERITAGE

EXHIBITION  
HONG KONG, SAR CHINA  
TEMPORARY  
02 SEPTEMBER - 21 NOVEMBER 2021

## 2103\_ PROJECT OASIS

PUBLIC SPACE (COLLABORATION WITH LANDSCAPE  
ARCHITECT BUREAU BAS SMETS - BBS)  
HONG KONG, SAR CHINA  
COMPLETED  
2021  
P.152

## 2102\_ SPRING #2

ART SPACE & HOUSING  
HONG KONG, SAR CHINA  
COMPLETED  
2021

## 2101\_ ASIA ART ARCHIVE

(AAA)  
ARCHIVE & LIBRARY  
HONG KONG, SAR CHINA  
INVITED COMPETITION (2ND PRIZE)

## 2013\_ BAY WALK ART PROJECT

PUBLIC ART  
HONG KONG, SAR CHINA  
COMPLETED  
2021  
P.144

## 2009\_ FRANCIS ALYS

WET FEET\_DRYFEET, BORDER AND GAMES  
EXHIBITION  
HONG KONG, SAR CHINA  
TEMPORARY  
28 OCTOBER 2020 - 28 MARCH 2021

## 2007\_ MIKA ROTTENBERG

SNEEZE  
EXHIBITION  
HONG KONG, SAR CHINA  
TEMPORARY  
24 OCTOBER 2020 - 31 MARCH 2021

## 2006\_ EDOUARD MALINGUE GALLERY

OFFICE & ART STORAGE  
HONG KONG, SAR CHINA  
COMPLETED  
2020

## 2005\_ UNSCHEDULED #1

ART FAIR  
HONG KONG, SAR CHINA  
TEMPORARY  
17 - 27 JUNE 2020  
P.132

## 2001\_ MY BODY HOLDS ITS SHAPE

EXHIBITION  
HONG KONG, SAR CHINA  
TEMPORARY  
25 MAY - 27 SEPTEMBER 2020

# 2019

## 1911\_ BOOKED

TAI KWUN CONTEMPORARY'S  
HONG KONG ART BOOK FAIR  
ART BOOK FAIR  
HONG KONG, SAR CHINA  
TEMPORARY  
16 - 19 JANUARY 2020

## 1910\_ THEY DO NOT UNDERSTAND EACH OTHER

EXHIBITION  
HONG KONG, SAR CHINA  
TEMPORARY  
25 MAY - 13 SEPTEMBER 2020

## 1907\_ 2019 UABB

"URBAN INTERACTIONS" EIGHTH EDITION  
OF THE BI-CITY SHENZHEN BIENNALE  
PUBLIC ART  
HONG KONG, SAR CHINA  
COMPLETED  
2019  
P.124

## 1906\_ SUSAS

PUBLIC ART (COLLABORATION WITH  
ARCHITECT LEON XU LIANG)  
HONG KONG, SAR CHINA  
OPEN COMPETITION

## 1904\_ CAO FEI ARTIST STUDIO

ARTIST ATELIER  
BEIJING, CHINA  
COMPLETED  
2020  
P.114

## 1903\_ CAO FEI

STAGING THE ERA  
EXHIBITION  
BEIJING, CHINA  
TEMPORARY  
12 MARCH - 06 JUNE 2021  
P.96

## 1902\_ PHANTOM PLANE

CYBERPUNK IN THE YEAR OF THE FUTURE  
EXHIBITION  
HONG KONG, SAR CHINA  
TEMPORARY  
05 OCTOBER 2019 - 04 JANUARY 2020

## 1901\_ 39 KING'S ROAD

OFFICE TOWER  
HONG KONG, SAR CHINA  
COMPLETED  
2022  
P.82



# 2018

## 1823\_ CUHK PHASE 2

SCHOOL (COLLABORATION WITH  
ARCHITECT CENTRAL OFFICE FOR  
ARCHITECTURE AND URBANISM)  
SHENZHEN, CHINA  
OPEN COMPETITION

## 1821\_ KIANG MALINGUE

WAN CHAI  
ART GALLERY  
HONG KONG, SAR CHINA  
COMPLETED  
2023  
P.64

## 1819\_ PERFORMING SOCIETY

THE VIOLENCE OF GENDER  
EXHIBITION  
HONG KONG, SAR CHINA  
TEMPORARY  
16 FEBRUARY – 28 APRIL 2019

## 1818\_ STOREFRONT

ARTWORK  
HONG KONG, SAR CHINA  
STUDY

## 1817\_ BOOKED

TAI KWUN CONTEMPORARY'S  
HONG KONG ART BOOK FAIR

ART BOOK FAIR  
HONG KONG, SAR CHINA  
TEMPORARY  
11 – 13 JANUARY 2019  
P.58

## 1816\_ CONTAGIOUS CITIES

FAR AWAY, TOO CLOSE  
EXHIBITION  
HONG KONG, SAR CHINA  
TEMPORARY  
26 JANUARY – 21 APRIL 2019  
P.52

## 1814\_ PENG CHAU RESIDENCE

HOUSING (FAÇADE CONSULTANCY,  
COLLABORATION WITH ARCHITECTS  
GÉRALDINE BORIO & JAE HYUN LIM)  
HONG KONG, SAR CHINA  
COMPLETED  
2022

## 1815\_ MURAKAMI VS MURAKAMI

EXHIBITION  
HONG KONG, SAR CHINA  
TEMPORARY  
01 JUNE – 01 SEPTEMBER 2019

## 1810\_ MACHINE FOR DYING

ARTWORK  
NEW YORK, USA  
TEMPORARY  
2018

## 1808\_ CAO FEI

A HOLLOW IN A WORLD TOO FULL  
EXHIBITION  
HONG KONG, SAR CHINA  
TEMPORARY  
08 SEPTEMBER – 04 JANUARY 2019  
P.42

## 1806\_ TONGREN ROAD

ART SPACE  
SHANGHAI, CHINA  
STUDY

## 1804\_ NUCLEUS

BY GABRIEL LESTER (POLYLESTER)  
SCULPTURAL INSTALLATION (TECHNICAL  
SUPPORT FOR ARTIST GABRIEL LESTER)  
HONG KONG, SAR CHINA  
TEMPORARY  
09 JUNE – 19 AUGUST 2018

## 1805\_ TSINGHUA

UNIVERSITY SCIENCE MUSEUM  
SCHOOL (COLLABORATION WITH  
HENNING & LARSEN)  
BEIJING, CHINA  
COMPETITION

## 1802\_ REHEARSAL

EXHIBITION  
HONG KONG, SAR CHINA  
TEMPORARY  
23 MARCH – 15 APRIL 2018

# 2017

## 1714\_ CHAPTER 8 THE UPSIDE DOWN

"IMMINENT COMMON"; 1ST SEOUL BIENNALE  
OF ARCHITECTURE AND URBANISM

ARTWORK  
SEOUL, KOREA  
TEMPORARY  
01 – 05 SEPTEMBER 2017

## 1710\_ CHAI WAN ARTIST STUDIO

ARTIST ATELIER  
HONG KONG, SAR CHINA  
YEAR: 2017 – ONGOING  
CONSTRUCTION  
TARGET 2024

## 1708\_ DISMANTLING THE SCAFFOLD

EXHIBITION  
HONG KONG, SAR CHINA  
TEMPORARY  
09 JUNE – 19 AUGUST 2018

## 1707\_ P-SCAPE

BY NADIM ABBAS  
SCULPTURAL INSTALLATION (TECHNICAL  
SUPPORT FOR ARTIST NADIM ABBAS)  
HONG KONG, SAR CHINA  
DEMOLISHED  
2021

## 1706\_ THE WEIGHT OF LIGHTNESS

INK ART FROM M+ COLLECTION  
EXHIBITION  
HONG KONG, SAR CHINA  
TEMPORARY  
13 OCTOBER 2017 – 14 JANUARY 2018

## 1703\_ TAI KWUN TABLE

FURNITURE  
HONG KONG, SAR CHINA  
TEMPORARY  
2017

## 1701\_ HART HAUS

ARTIST ATELIER  
HONG KONG, SAR CHINA  
COMPLETED  
2018  
P.30

# 2016

## 1609\_ ZAHA HADID

THERE SHOULD BE NO END TO EXPERIMENTATION  
EXHIBITION  
HONG KONG, SAR CHINA  
TEMPORARY  
17 MARCH – 06 APRIL 2017

## 1607\_ EDOUARD MALINGUE GALLERY

WEST BUND  
ART GALLERY  
SHANGHAI, CHINA  
DEMOLISHED  
2020  
P.20

# 2015

## 1516\_ CENTRE FOR HERITAGE ART & TEXTILE (CHAT)

ART SPACE  
HONG KONG, SAR CHINA  
COMPLETED  
2018

## 1514\_ M+ SIGG COLLECTION

FOUR DECADES OF CHINESE CONTEMPORARY ART  
EXHIBITION  
HONG KONG, SAR CHINA  
TEMPORARY  
23 FEBRUARY – 05 APRIL 2016

## 1513\_ NATIONA(A)L

POP-UP SHOP  
HONG KONG, SAR CHINA  
TEMPORARY  
2015

## 1512\_ FUNDAMENTAL / WILLIAM LIM

40 YEARS OF DESIGN INSPIRATION FROM THE EAST  
EXHIBITION (VISUAL COMMUNICATION,  
COLLABORATION WITH XUE TAN)  
HONG KONG, SAR CHINA  
TEMPORARY  
05 – 27 SEPTEMBER 2015

## 1508\_ CASETIFY

POP-UP SHOP  
HONG KONG, SAR CHINA  
DEMOLISHED  
2025

# 2014

## 1407\_ MAUSOLEUM

BY JOÃO VASCO PAIVA  
SCULPTURAL INSTALLATION (TECHNICAL  
SUPPORT FOR ARTIST JOÃO VASCO PAIVA)  
HONG KONG, SAR CHINA  
TEMPORARY  
15 – 18 MAY 2014

## 1401\_ EDOUARD MALINGUE GALLERY

CENTRAL  
ART GALLERY  
HONG KONG, SAR CHINA  
DEMOLISHED  
2020  
P.8



# CREDITS

This book has been published in conjunction with the exhibition BEAU 2014 – 2024 at Current Plans from 26th of October to 23rd of November 2024.

EXHIBITION VENUE  
Current Plans  
3F, Remex Centre,  
42 Wong Chuk Hang,  
Hong Kong

EXHIBITION ORGANISER  
Eunice Tsang

FOREWORD  
Charles Lai

CONVERSATIONS MODERATOR  
Natasza Minasiewicz

CONVERSATIONISTS  
Cao Fei  
Charlotte Lafont-Hugo  
Edouard Malingue  
Gilles Vanderstocken  
Lorraine Kiang-Malingue  
Robert-Jan van Santen  
Willem Molesworth  
Ysabelle Cheung

PHOTOGRAPHY  
Felix SC Wong  
JJY studio  
Kangyu Hu  
Kris Provoost  
Leon Xu Liang  
Peng Jung  
Stefen Chow  
Wong Pak Hang  
Zhang Hong

COPYRIGHT  
All pictures without specific ©  
are BEAU limited property.

OFFICE CONTACT  
hello@beau.hk

SUPPORTED BY  
 香港藝術發展局  
Hong Kong Arts Development Council

Hong Kong Arts Development Council supports freedom of artistic expression. The views and opinions expressed in this project do not represent the stand of the Council.

EDITING & COPYEDITING  
Ysabelle Cheung

CONVERSATIONS TRANSCRIPTION  
Joshua Guiffrey

PROJECT TEXTS  
Gilles Vanderstocken

GRAPHIC DESIGN  
KYD  
kidnapyourdesigner.com

FONTS  
Avenir Next Condensed  
SangBleu Kingdom

PRINTING  
Asia One, Hong Kong

PAPER  
Mori Silk 150g  
Natural\_U 110g



BEAU is a Hong Kong-based architecture studio founded in 2014 by Charlotte Lafont-Hugo and Gilles Vanderstocken. The practice has since evolved into a larger team, all contributing to the development of a critical methodology and rigorous production. Since the studio's inception, its agenda has been focused on the exploration of archetypes and the application of classical tools through an experimental approach. As different they are, the projects are obsessively articulated around the notions of context, program, materiality, and construction. Highly straightforward, the resulting body of work displays an expressive austerity that questions the relations between a project's objectives and the means to achieve them, an approach taking form as experiments in construction methods and adaptive reuse typologies. This book, celebrating ten years of practice, and published in the context of the exhibition "BEAU 2014 – 2024", includes a selection of projects, accompanied by conversations elaborating on their conception process.

