

Press Release, 8 June 2021

On 9 June 2021
the International Architecture Biennale Rotterdam (IABR)
is reopening its 9th edition:

DOWN TO EARTH

with the following two exhibitions

RECLAIMING THE COMMONS and WATERSCHOOL M4H+

While there is no denying the seriousness of the current pandemic, the climate and biodiversity crisis is increasingly and urgently confronting us with the fact that we have pretty much ruined our relationship with the planet.

Science warns us: we're almost at the tipping point. This puts us on high alert and forces us to *radically change how we think and act*, to create design solutions that will concretely and sustainably allow us to *land*.

Presenting the exhibitions RECLAIMING THE COMMONS and WATERSCHOOL M4H+, the IABR is once again on top of current affairs: climate crisis, mass extinction, global warming, and rapidly growing inequality. It is here that the IABR believes its key challenges lie.

Where Can We Land?

With the 9th edition of the IABR, DOWN TO EARTH Chief Curator George Brugmans raises the question: Where can we land? Can we resettle on planet Earth, *as it were*, in a sustainable balance with all other lifeforms? Can we, as philosopher Bruno Latour puts it, redesign our living environments as that *on which a terrestrial depends* and always ask ourselves *what other terrestrials also depend on it?* For this is now inevitably the challenge we face: We have to redefine all of our actions as that which takes us back to Earth. DOWN TO EARTH.

DOWN TO EARTH is a plea for systems thinking and proposes to use the solutions to distinct and urgently felt problems as leverage for the sustainable transformation of the entire system. Not only to transform our urban landscapes and living environments to create a sustainable balance with other species and with nature, but also to stimulate the political-social debate on the structure, quality, and ownership of radical change. Concretely, practically, and locally, DOWN TO EARTH explores ways to bridge the gap between plans and projects, between knowing and doing.

Water and Energy Transitions as Leverage for Change

The theme of DOWN TO EARTH is the concrete change-targeting research by design into water and energy transition-related issues that the IABR has been conducting in recent years in its IABR–Ateliers and in a number of collaborative projects.

The water and energy transition present urgent global challenges, which are also highly topical in the Netherlands: in our country, we're facing both drought and flooding, we've decided to make our houses natural gas-free and we must step away from the fossil economy as quickly as we can.

Deliberately using these infrastructural challenges can help us develop new ways to inhabit the Earth more wisely and use its resources more responsibly. But they become social challenges when specifically used as leverage for broader, sustainable, and socially supported truly transformative change.

RECLAIMING THE COMMONS

RECLAIMING THE COMMONS builds on the exhibition WHOSE ENERGY IS IT, ANYWAY?, which had to close prematurely at the end of 2020 because of the lockdown and which focused on the energy transition at the district level. Curators George Brugmans and Thijs van Spaandonk now take things one step further and say: *The energy transition cannot take place without a social transition*. Renewable energy, that is: solar, wind, and hydrogen energy, belong to nobody and therefore to everybody. Centuries ago, energy was part of the commons: that which belongs to us all and that we take care of together. Why not pick up where we once left off? Why not reinvent the commons for the twenty-first century?

The exhibition is built up around the results of research by design conducted by IABR–Atelier Rotterdam, more specifically in the Bospolder-Tussendijken (BoTu) district in Rotterdam. It will present the LEAP or Local Energy Action Plan that the Atelier and its lead designer Eva Pfannes (OOZE Architects and Urbanists) drafted together with partners at, and residents of, Bospolder-Tussendijken. The LEAP comes with a *Toolbox for the District* while PLAY THE CITY devised a game, *Resilient Botu 2028: The Community Game*, which residents can use to practice building a socially inclusive and sustainable district together.

The IABR will also support ten residents' initiatives that focus on the Resilient Botu 2028 program. In this program, initiated by Mayor Ahmed Aboutaleb and with the IABR as one of the five stakeholders, residents, entrepreneurs, and other partners are working together to realize major improvements in the Bospolder-Tussendijken district. The *Community Game* is named after this program.

With social designer and architect Robbert de Vrieze as the curator— IABR@Bospolder-Tussendijken, the IABR will set up a transition practice in which the selected initiatives will start to work with the LEAP and with the tools provided by the IABR in the coming year. The results will be used in the next biennale, SHOCK AND ROLL, at the end of 2022.

And so ultimately, this exhibition is also about the question of how, not only in Bospolder-Tussendijken, but also in the other 5,000 districts in the Netherlands that need to become natural gas-free, the energy transition can be deployed at the district level to improve the deadlocked democratic process, the key question being: *Transition, sure, but whose transition?*

WATERSCHOOL M4H+

Rotterdam is a low-lying port city in the delta. In times of climate crisis, the city has to respond to acute challenges such as subsidence, water safety, extreme rainfall, heat, and drought. But what about water use?

The objective of WATERSCHOOL M4H+ curators Rianne Makkink and Jurgen Bey is to raise awareness of our huge water footprint and of the ways we can reduce it, as well as to take this as the starting point for the alternative ‘learning by doing’ area development of what the IABR launched as IABR–Test Site M4H+ in 2018. They use the (awareness of) water use as leverage for the exploration of a learning production landscape in a district in which the city wants to build some 3,000 (live-work) dwellings for approximately 6,300 people in the next couple of years.

WATERSCHOOL M4H+ is a working exhibition that takes place in the workspace of Studio Makkink & Bey. It shows what a new living and working environment in Rotterdam’s Merwe-Vierhavens district could look like if the future residents of the area think in terms of sustainable use of raw materials and resources.

In addition, five spatial installations set up in outdoor locations across M4H show how people can live and work here in the future. The installations represent five different stories about new ways of resource usage and the impact this would have on Merwe-Vierhavens. Using a QR code, visitors can access a web application that introduces pioneers, currently active makers, and entrepreneurs as well as future residents in and of the district. 3D drawings illustrate what this future living and working environment can look like.

Curators

The curators of RECLAIMING THE COMMONS are George Brugmans (Chief Curator DOWN TO EARTH and President IABR) and Thijs van Spaandonk (Bright and Head of Urbanism at the Rotterdam Academy of Architecture).

The curators of WATERSCHOOL M4H+ are architect-designer Rianne Makkink and designer Jurgen Bey (Studio Makkink & Bey).

Merwe-Vierhavens District in Rotterdam: One Big Biennale Site

In the Keilezaal, RECLAIMING THE COMMONS is open from 9 June to 11 July 2021; in Studio Makkink & Bey, WATERSCHOOL M4H+ is open from 9 June to 30 July 2021. Both venues are located in the Merwe-Vierhavens district in Rotterdam.

The exhibitions are open from Tuesday to Sunday, from 11 am to 5 pm. After 11 July WATERSCHOOL M4H+ will be open from Tuesday to Friday, from 11 am to 5 pm.

We are always closed on Mondays.

Please note that the IABR follows the guidelines of the Dutch Health Authority. We allow a maximum number of visitors in an exhibition at any one time and all visitors have to reserve time slots in advance via iabr.nl.

Hosting two exhibitions and five WATERSCHOOL installations in the public space, the Merwe-Vierhavens district has become one big biennale site, as it were. The installations, which are found throughout the district, can be visited without advance reservation until 30 July 2021.

About the IABR

The International Architecture Biennale Rotterdam (IABR) is both a knowledge institute and a cultural platform. Its two most important tools are the IABR–Ateliers, at which its research takes place, and the Biennale, a biennial cultural event. The IABR mainly focuses on the future of the city where, in a few decades, nearly 80 percent of the world's population will produce more than 90 percent of our wealth – and this will have to be done sustainably. We believe we can best help solve the global climate crisis if we first solve it in the cities – where we reside, work and live. Design plays a crucial role in this process.

The IABR has fully committed itself to the *2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development* of the United Nations and all of its activities and research take full account of the Sustainable Development Goals and contribute to the design of socially inclusive and sustainable cities to the best of its ability.

A Biennale in Times of Pandemic

DOWN TO EARTH, the 9th edition of the International Architecture Biennale Rotterdam, is a biennale in times of pandemic. Instead of a single large exhibition with an extensive side program, the IABR is presenting a series of exhibitions,

activities, and programs spread over a longer period of ten months, from September 2020 to July 2021 and in two cities, with the form depending on the circumstances. Step by step, the IABR is presenting the results of the research by design conducted in the IABR–Ateliers in combination with selected projects, various activities, and a number of partner exhibitions under the umbrella of DOWN TO EARTH.

The closing exhibition of this edition of the biennale, THE HIGH GROUND, will open in the Biesboschhal in Dordrecht in July. The IABR is organizing this exhibition in collaboration with the City of Dordrecht and in the context of the commemoration of the St Elizabeth's Flood (1421). It presents the results of the IABR–Atelier Dordrecht, which focuses on water safety as leverage for sustainable area development.

For all exhibitions and the program, please visit www.iabr.nl

NOTE TO EDITORS

For more information and/or visual material, please contact us via pers@iabr.nl or +31(0)10-206 00 33

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