

# FRIEZE PROJECTS

## Artists' Commissions and Talks



# The Museum as Sculpture

## 2003

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## How do architects design for art? A discussion of new, spectacular museum buildings and exhibition display

**Deyan Sudjic** *Good afternoon everyone, my name is Deyan Sudjic. I'm the architecture critic of The Observer and I'm here to chair a conversation about the museum as sculpture. We have David Adjaye in the Christopher Wren slot. He's an architect who's spent a lot of time working with artists in London, and he's also responsible for this amazing structure around us, the largest temporary building London has seen since the Millennium Dome. We also have Wilfried Kühn, an architect responsible, among other projects, for the architecture of last year's documenta [2002], and again an architect who's worked a lot with artists. The topic is the museum as sculpture, but none of us, of course, believes that the museum should be sculpture. So having got that out of the way, I'm going to ask David what he thinks museums should be about; thank you, David.*

**David Adjaye** How architects choose to engage with contemporary art is an interesting topic. Right now people are really discussing how one makes contemporary art spaces without denying the art of architecture or the art of art. When I'm working, I'm concerned about the quality, presence and form of the space, but also very concerned about complementing and enhancing the contents of the space – and, in a way, using the contents of the space as a foil to elevate the idea of the project itself. I'm less interested in using a formal architectural style to signify the building than in celebrating what is being presented within the critical practice. For instance, here is a temporary fair which took us nine months to design and two weeks to build, and

it's going to be down in five days. There's a celebration of that – it's a lightweight structure; you feel like you're on a boat. That wasn't deliberate, but it's just the forces of nature. We're in this fantastic park and bathed in this beautiful light, and it seemed such a shame to not manipulate and enjoy that. There were some formal concerns about finding a scale sympathetic to the art, which would allow the works to have a presence without being in conflict with the architecture. For me, that is how I approach the idea of critical engagement. Especially when I work with artists on their homes, it's not acceptable to make strictly functional art spaces. You have to really try and find out what is going on underneath the critical practice and reveal that.

**Deyan Sudjic** *What is the relationship between an architect and an artist when they're working with each other?*

**David Adjaye** I always say that when architects and artists enter a dialogue, the excitement comes from enjoying the expertise or the exoticism of the other. For me it's interesting to understand how an artist makes a work and how they want that work to be represented. The artists I've worked with have always been fascinated with how I set up the frames for the work – and ironically when we're working, the artist tends to support and push the architecture; so you have this strange role reversal.

**Deyan Sudjic** *But who steals most from the other? There's that famous piece in The New Yorker a couple of years ago*

*in which Richard Serra describes how he sees Frank Gehry – and that wasn't favourable. If you listen to Dan Graham, he will tell you that those pesky Swiss guys have stolen his best ideas. Why is it such a charged, tense relationship?*

**David Adjaye** The idea of a singular originality is a bit of a red herring. I don't believe that works just originate from singular people. There are certain attitudes which are prevalent and certain tendencies which groups migrate to. And there are obvious similarities among them because essentially things are very simple – there are walls, floors and ceilings. It gets simplistic when people become territorial. The idea that if you use mirror-tinted glass, nobody else can touch it – that reduces the things that one can do in the world.

**Deyan Sudjic** *Wilfried, when you worked at documenta you had to deal with many different views. How do you see that relationship between artists and architects?*

**Wilfried Kühn** First of all, it's interesting to talk about the museum while at an art fair. The art fair itself has become an important space in which to exchange views, as well as a place to look at the art and decide what is good and what it not. It's very competitive and difficult to be present here as an artist. It shows you very clearly that the function of selection which traditionally has been covered by museums is now increasingly covered also by art fairs. This is in addition to fairs being the largest exhibitions of contemporary art, of an enormous size and enormous wealth – without having a curator or a director like a museum and, normally, without having an architect. The infrastructure for this exhibition has been done by an architect – and I think it's been done very well, by the way. But that's an exception and it's still, as David explained, nine month's planning for five days. The museum is typically the opposite – an eternal structure planned in a rather short time.

Documenta and the Venice Biennale, by contrast, are curated. The spaces here and at Basel are presented by galleries; the spaces at documenta were made by the artists. The theme of documenta in 2002 was the idea that every artist would have their own space. Comparing that to documenta X in 1997, you see a big difference. Catherine David had more promiscuous spaces – she hung different works by different artists next to each other, and the spaces weren't created so much with the artist. Documenta this

time was done together with the artist; the whole concept was to make artists' spaces possible. We didn't talk about the museum as sculpture because we weren't talking about objects. We talked about the in-between; we talked about making space. When you're talking about space, you talk about something you cannot really see. Space is perceived in movement, it's perceived when you walk through it, it's perceived when you enter and when you leave it. It's perceived through the light and the sound, and all these characteristics of space have become important to art as well. Artists themselves research space. They work in space, they work with acoustic space, they work with video space, they work with city space. It's our absolute need as architects to become interested in space again. That's the problem with many museums of the last generation. They might be spectacular; they might be interesting – and I think it's not bad at all if Bilbao is back on the map. In the future, other cities, like Rio de Janeiro or Belgrade and Baghdad for that matter, will be also. The problem is not about the Bilbao effect – it's the problem of space. Space in the Guggenheim Bilbao, in my opinion, doesn't exist.

**Deyan Sudjic** *Well, it's almost unavoidable that we'd talk about Bilbao at some stage in a conversation like this. It is high time that this idea of the Bilbao syndrome finally explodes. It's taking a very long time for mayors of ambitious cities to understand that now the Guggenheim is so strapped for cash, it has had to close its Las Vegas outpost and is slashing back its curatorial programme in New York. There's a story – and I'm not sure if it's true, but it might be – that the mayor of Rome, on introducing the design for Zaha Hadid's project in Rome [MAXXI Contemporary Art Centre], said that at last Rome can now be another Bilbao. As if Bilbao wouldn't rather be another Rome! The problem here is that art, of course, is used as a weapon, from the perspective of economic development, one can say. It's used to recycle old industrial buildings or to breathe new life into cities. It seems an intolerable burden for art to carry. Surely it should be done for its own sake rather than as an economic crutch.*

**Wilfried Kühn** It's also an abuse that architecture has become a marketing tool. Even before it became that, if you look at the museums of the 1980s, when the Guggenheim was still not a focal point, we witness a strange ignorance of architecture regarding art; art was something that you put in the space and left there. We have the possibility to

think about space in a much more complex way – we can think about the time factor in space. For instance, Cedric Price was an interesting departure because he realized that temporary structures would be the museums of the future. They would be the places of the future where people would meet. It would no longer be so much a question of how the building looked; he refused even to design façades. Price realized the question would rather be about the building's function, and the reuse and adaptation of all kinds of existing structures. A tent like this is also an existing structure, because it's basically a tent for rent. It's a tent you can order and stage any type of event in. Cedric Price and the debates of the 1960s can teach us how to use structures intelligently. How to make use of structures that are already there, how to invent less and use more, how to be less interested in style and more interested in the intelligence of a certain solution or concept. In that sense, the space can become so strong that in the end the architecture is close to invisible.

**Deyan Sudjic** *You highlighted the theme of temporary structures, but if you look at a certain generation of artists, they're trying to move in a different direction. Both Marfa and Dia:Beacon seem to be Judd's attempt to find what he called a point of reference – an ideal situation where work is not moved and where it becomes permanent in the architectural sense. What do you think about permanence and temporariness?*

**David Adjaye** It's an interesting debate, but I think there is a misconception of what temporary work was, especially in the 1980s. Architects, then, looked at art in a very functional way, in the old sense. They thought it was a collection of objects that was thrown into a room. There was an explosion of Postmodernist galleries around Europe, and there was a ridiculous search for certain formal ideas that could work with an institution which had become incredibly elevated as a cultural phenomenon. I think Judd was frustrated with the fact that art was seen as something that filled a container. He wanted to reverse the condition and talk about the presence, about the lack of difference between the space and the work. Artworks are not just commodities which are brought to art fairs, and sold and taken away. There's no irony in the fact that there's an explosion of installation work in the contemporary scene right now. Instead of existing in the white space, artists are trying to reclaim the control of the viewer's

experience. That throws up interesting questions about what the art space is and how one makes spaces for artists.

**Deyan Sudjic** *But architects certainly have egos, don't they? They have a cultural ambition too.*

**David Adjaye** Yes, but it's possible to marry the two. The egos come together, really. I like the idea of a complete work, where several intelligent minds come together and curate and make something.

**Deyan Sudjic** *Do you think art and architecture are converging or diverging?*

**David Adjaye** It depends on who you speak to. For me, they're definitely converging. I hate to be generational, but in my generation there's a lot of dialogue with artists and a kind of mutual interest in each other's practice.

**Wilfried Kühn** I agree very much. The idea that the architect has to do away with his ego in order to make good space for art is a misconception. You can put all of yourself into making a good space for art. The visible materials should come together with the art.

Donald Judd is a good starting-point for us because what he did, in the end, was require a space. He didn't accept the fact that the museum was a container with flexible walls on which things would be hung. He wanted a space to be a counterpart to his work, and since he didn't find a suitable space he made it himself. But that time has passed, and Beacon is a good example of how space now works for art. The space there has been developed together with the artist, but it's still an architectural conception. Lots of what I saw in Beacon reflected ideas as we had at documenta, such as looking at a hall from how you actually move through it. Beacon, of course, is not very contemporary because the work in there is not altogether that contemporary.

**Deyan Sudjic** *Yes, it's a national museum.*

**Wilfried Kühn** All the sound and video work there is in the basement, and that separation poses a problem. One of the most important questions for us at Enwezor's documenta was to figure out how to have video, acoustic work, painting, sculpture and installations next to each other and not fall back on the conservative layering of media done in

museums. It's enormously difficult in technical terms to have a sound work next to a painting. Walls that might seem like spatial obstacles are actually technically necessary in order to block the sound. Documenta was also thought about in those terms – about how to combine different media in a close space.

**Deyan Sudjic** *How do you think the Venice Biennale [2003] works?*

**Wilfried Kühn** The Biennale is a counter-example. They tried to go in a completely different direction, which is always good. There were many curators and different examples of how space was laid out. Personally, I think the Biennale lacked a certain order, which made it difficult to engage properly with each work. The art was jammed into the space, and it felt overwhelming. As an attempt, it was valid, but I don't think that's the future.

**Deyan Sudjic** *Those places do bring home the limits of some new media. Harald Szeemann's Biennale [1999] was overwhelmed by video. It nearly turned the Arsenale into a multiplex cinema, in which the art became hard to understand. There is a sense that art is suspicious of organizational imperatives to actually make places work; but perhaps it needs that.*

**Wilfried Kühn** Szeemann's Biennale was a warning example of what to avoid. There was a long corridor with video cabins left and right – it was tiring to walk through a hall where there was always space still in front of you. That was why we wanted to separate spaces.

**Deyan Sudjic** *We've been talking about temporary spaces quite a lot, but, David, are there some examples of contemporary museums that you think are moving in an interesting direction?*

**David Adjaye** There are collections which are making buildings really interesting, because there's more of a relationship between what's been collected and the desire to make the building. We had Gini Goetz on an earlier panel discussion who was talking about Herzog & de Meuron projects, which are a benchmark for changing the perception of space. There's some beautiful projects, like Ensel Hombrich's in Dusseldorf. To return to the idea of the museum as sculpture, I also feel that generationally there's

a desire to break away from a *fin-de-siècle* position within architecture, where we feel we've completely exhausted architectural motifs and icons. I certainly don't feel comfortable, and I know that my generation doesn't feel comfortable, using the languages that we've inherited. We see a generation which is regurgitating; Serra's comment about Frank [Gehry] is a sore point – it's a lunge at a new aesthetic. It's a bit literal, a bit too close. There's a last hope of seeing some incredible form in Zaha Hadid's Constructivist approach. In contemporary art there are some practices that are leaping past architects and showing new directions and forms, and understanding of materials. That is also interesting about the collaboration that is happening within our generation.

**Deyan Sudjic** *The very word 'icon' is a huge burden – it implies a relentless consumption of imagery and spectacle. One can see why it came about, but it's almost scarred your generation to the point that it's just not on the radar screen. You also see this terrible consumption, not just of architectural imagery but of the whole idea of what museums might be about. It's now as conventional an idea that a museum or a gallery is in a recycled industrial building as it once was to have a classical Palladian façade. It's become the sign of a museum. Those heritage signs on the motorways which say 'art gallery ahead', with pediments and columns, should now have an old factory chimney and a brick wall.*

**David Adjaye** There's no irony in that the new Dia centre is a former Nabisco biscuit factory, which has now become a temple to great cultural artefacts. There's a cheeky delight in that, but in the absence of any other convincing models, it has become a retrenched position. It's a bit of a shame.

**Deyan Sudjic** *To go back to the question of 'temporary' versus 'permanent', do you think it's possible that the Judd-like fetish of permanence – to create a new Stonehenge – could reflect art's desire to achieve what architecture can? When you make a piece of architecture, it might get damaged or altered but it stays in the same place. Despite the late, lamented Cedric Price, that is an appeal too.*

**David Adjaye** Totally. There is a point where architecture has retreated in its critical engagement with culture – and by contrast contemporary art has more confidence in positioning itself within contemporary life. It's a fascinating psychosis.

**Deyan Sudjic** *Wilfried, do you think architecture has things to teach art?*

**Wilfried Kühn** It's not so much about teaching; it's about mutually learning. The idea that architecture is something very specific and art is also something very specific and therefore they are conceptually diverse is altogether wrong. Architecture is a form of art. It is very much rooted in the real world; when artists today work on projects, they try to be rooted as possible. That's not only today: the whole theme of modern art has been to reunite everyday life and art and to overcome the border between high and low. Architecture therefore is at the centre of art itself; we are working in the field of art as architects.

**Deyan Sudjic** *There are still a lot of barriers between certain areas of practice, and people are not comfortable with those who transgress these barriers. There's a world of design, there's a world of art, there's a world of architecture, and these are all seen in different terms. There is a sense of fighting for your turf and controlling what's yours.*

**Wilfried Kühn** Sometimes a fight is necessary to establish the real borders between things. I had a very interesting confrontation with Heimo Zobernig when designing a table and a bar for INIT, a temporary Kunsthalle in Berlin. He made the first exhibition there and he brought his own table. He also had a bar with him – and then all of a sudden we had two bars and two tables. It was a problem and we had a strong discussion, but we resolved the situation. There were two bars and two tables in the end; it was an exchange about space. It's not so bad to have a border that is being negotiated all the time.

**David Adjaye** That's absolutely right. We had health and safety officers come to inspect the Frieze tent, and they looked at the objects in a completely different way, as detached from their cultural meaning. For the health and safety officials this tent is full of hazards – there are shards of glass on pieces of timber, there are rotating metal blades, there are liquids suspended above your head. The insurance list that makes this place work is absolutely hilarious. On the other extreme, there is the negotiation with the egos of the galleries, who want to absolutely control the way in which their work is presented. Simple things like our red entrance corridor, which stimulated lots of people as they entered, became incredibly difficult

in terms of the emitting of that hue in proximity to other spaces

**Deyan Sudjic** *I've often wondered how they can install Louise Bourgeois' spider at Tate Modern but not have disabled access.*

**David Adjaye** Yes, whereas in this scenario, for instance, we were supposed to have a fantastic window at the end of each of these axes of the tent. The fire officer forced us to put exit doors on each one at the last minute. There was no way to save the idea of perceiving the wonderful park that you are in while at the fair. You just had to say, fine, okay, it's a compromise.

**Deyan Sudjic** *I think part of the equipment of art is that you don't take no for an answer, and as an architect you need to sometimes.*

**Wilfried Kühn** As an architect you always work with a client. Many people think that it's a burden for an architect because he always has to compromise. I don't agree with that position – the dialogue between an architect and a client is what makes the project develop. The client, with all his naiveties and all his illusions, his sometimes strange ideas and expectations, is a very rich partner. And I think for many artists there are similar situations. Galleries play a very important role in the artwork. They're not just the ones who sell it in the end; through their constant collaboration, they help create the energy in which works can develop. Even artists have to negotiate – I've witnessed it not only at documenta. Sometimes it's a space problem, sometimes it's about permissions for public work. Richard Serra had to dismantle much of his work in America, and there were many polemics about it.

**Deyan Sudjic** *Now you have to sign a contract which says that you will not move the piece without his prior approval.*

**Wilfried Kühn** Which is ridiculous, because he won't be there forever to do so. We all know very well that it's not so much our personal opinion and ego that is important; it's what remains conceptually and materially of what we do. Architecture is very much part of reality, and in this involvement with reality it has its strongest possibility of changing this reality. I believe in form; I don't think that Cedric Price was altogether right. Although not personally –

he was a very stylish person – Cedric Price wilfully neglected form conceptually. Form is a way of establishing communication between people, and between cultural modes of being.

**Deyan Sudjic** *David, from what I've seen of your work it seems to me that space and material are more important to you than form. Is that true?*

**David Adjaye** It's not exactly true. I am interested in a kind of constructional form. I don't start by thinking about form and then applying material and space to it; I'm more interested in the exploration of material possibilities and testing what one can get away with spatially. I'm interested in the small (but particular) becoming something big, which perhaps becomes a language.

**Deyan Sudjic** *Let's talk about big for a minute, actually. You can't escape from that fact that art is getting bigger and bigger all the time. And as it gets bigger, it seems it does converge with architecture. The way it's made becomes more like a building in that there is a set of shop drawings, an engineer and a contractor. Craft aspects like finish become rather important.*

**David Adjaye** Two projects that I think exemplify that are the *Marsyas* project by Anish Kapoor [Tate Modern, London, 2002–3], which would have been impossible without the help of one of the best engineers in the world. It could be made in papier mâché in the studio, but conceiving of that level of complexity of material could only be done with computers and by engineers thinking creatively about structural dynamics. Even the piece in the Turbine Hall right now [*The Weather Project*, 2003–4], the Olafur Eliasson, which is praised for its simplicity, still requires joining several sections of material to make the reflective ceiling.

**Deyan Sudjic** *By comparison, your work with Chris Ofili in Venice was intimate.*

**David Adjaye** It was a three-way team. Chris conceived it, but it required an architect and an engineer to realize the result. A lot had to be taken away for it to be read as an artwork.

**Deyan Sudjic** *If you were drawing up a master plan for a new contemporary museum right now, what would be the key things to get right?*

**Wilfried Kühn** Good question. First of all, the idea of change must be built in – not in the 1970s' idea of having flexible walls, but as a larger conceptual frame. You have to work with a very precise formal structure that is very solidly arranged. At the same time, you have to be aware that the whole structure will undergo changes that you cannot foresee. If we look at the warehouses that are being reused for museums and which work quite well, like Dia:Beacon, it is because those buildings had been designed for industrial purposes. They had to install large machines and knew that those machines might change in five years. So they created a layout that allowed them to put in new machines without destroying the whole building.

The second issue is that artists, when they work in the museum today, no longer just hand over their piece and say goodbye. They want to interact with the space, and you have to provide a spatial challenge to whoever enters the place – be it a visitor, an artist or a curator. You have to create a strong space, and one that's absolutely not neutral. It has to be diverse and have different possibilities in it, otherwise museums won't work. The Vienna MUMOK that was completed three years ago has very many small spaces but lacks a big space because the very sculptural entrance hall cuts the building in two halves. So when Heimo Zobernig made his intervention there, connecting the two separate spaces across the entrance hall, he actually negated the whole architectural space. Similarly at Tate Modern after Olafur's intervention, you have a darkening of the hall and a claustrophobia that can be felt even on the fifth floor. As celebrated as it might seem, Tate Modern has problems with the proportion between the size of the hall and the size of the spaces that are apparently made for the art. In the end, it seems that the hall is the better space to exhibit, but a museum should provide more diversity and allow for different installations. In terms of material, the master plan only works when there's a formal conception. It doesn't work when it's just a master plan in the manner of urban planning. Buildings are drawn on the plan, but the realities are completely obstructed. You have the same contradiction in museums that are too rigidly planned. They're planned to be built in ten years, and nothing of the museum that will be built in ten years corresponds to the needs in ten years. That's why temporary structures are a good thing to start from. We have to think about shorter periods of planning, shorter periods of building and a more diverse approach to the whole concept of museums.

**Deyan Sudjic** *David?*

**David Adjaye** That was a comprehensive answer; I agree with all the points there. I'm also fascinated by the fact that the hallowed museum can be made more accessible, which can be done architecturally. I am excited by the idea that these institutions become more and more like the fabric of our streets and less like rarefied institutions that you enter into. Buildings should be accessible both to people who are culturally attuned and people who are just passing by.

**Deyan Sudjic** *We're telling ourselves, of course, that we favour mute, flexible, diverse spaces without rhetoric or sculpture. That's true, but on the other hand I'm sure that the fact that museums haven't lost their audience as much as, say, classical music, has to do with the amount of energy that's gone into building art museums and galleries. By comparison the concert hall, until Disney Hall in LA, was almost forgotten for 20 years. We shouldn't flagellate ourselves too much.*

**David Adjaye** Absolutely. I think we're reacting against the idea that buildings made for the existing urban environment should have a sculptural quality. Big buildings tend to have a sculptural quality, so one is not necessarily against the idea of a powerful urban form. One is reacting against the predictable celebration of a sculptural form which we think is not very relevant or engaged. It becomes something which is exclusive, and I'm always deeply suspicious about exclusivity.

**Deyan Sudjic** *Should we open it to the audience? There's a hand in the front row.*

**Question** David, what is the relationship of light and space in the tent? How did you open the space?

**David Adjaye** The space is conceived as a chamber where you are bathed in natural light, and in which you're aware of the resonance of light. That light isn't flattened, it's a fluctuating frequency, but that doesn't require the tons of trusses everywhere which you normally have in art fairs. To connect to the context, we made a huge effort to make a series of vistas visible, so that you could always see this particular time, which is very beautiful in London: the foliage changing from yellow to red. We even wanted to put a window in the auditorium, which is not really necessary

but which would connect you to the outside world. The whole project is about light and the way in which light is augmented and curated in the structure – which is at least 160,000 square metres of space.

**Deyan Sudjic** *It's quite a micro-climate, you can get lost in it. Any other questions? A hand over here.*

**Question** A great many buildings in this country need restoration. You've talked about the industrial buildings that have been used for museum and gallery space. Do you think we have a duty to use other sorts of buildings as well, so that by using them we can revitalize run-down areas and spread museums and art galleries around the country a bit more?

**Deyan Sudjic** *David, is there a building itching to be recycled?*

**David Adjaye** Buckingham Palace is a potential cultural space. Almost any type of building can be used as a showing space. There's an interesting argument about recycling on a fundamental level – buildings are actually the biggest consumers of energy on the planet. We talk about conserving energy, but the fact that we build is actually the most wasteful exercise that we make. So reusing existing stock is a very valid one. Every type, I think, is absolutely up for grabs, it's just a matter of how you position it.

**Deyan Sudjic** *Do you think County Hall works as a place to show?*

**David Adjaye** Most people in the business find the installation of the work a little bit shambolic, but people who've been to visit it find it incredibly stimulating. I instinctively didn't like the way that County Hall worked, except for Robert Wilson's oil piece [20:50, 1987], which is probably the best I've seen anywhere. The rest of the hanging I found rather clumsy, although I liked the rooms dedicated to specific artists. There was something interesting about how the public perceived the frame and their context, compared to the way in which people in the business look at it.

**Deyan Sudjic** *Anybody else? Well, shall we call it a day? Thank you very much, Wilfried, thank you very much, David.*

**This talk took place on Friday 17 October 2003 at 3pm.**