

DOWN



TO EARTH

PRESS RELEASE

DOWN TO EARTH

9TH EDITION OF THE INTERNATIONAL ARCHITECTURE BIENNALE ROTTERDAM
TAKES OFF

Rotterdam, 14 September 2020

DOWN TO EARTH, the 9th edition of the International Architecture Biennale Rotterdam, the IABR, is a biennale in times of pandemic. It is an anti-biennale, averse to peak hour tendencies, with a program that will incrementally unfold over the next ten months, until the summer of 2021, in a series of exhibitions and activities, their form and planning adapted to the challenging circumstances.

DOWN TO EARTH will start on 19 September with a first exhibition, **DROUGHT IN THE DELTA**. The second exhibition, **WHOSE ENERGY IS IT, ANYWAY?**, will open on 30 October. Both exhibitions will take place in the IABR's new home, the Keilezaal, in the Merwe-Vierhavens District in Rotterdam.

IABR director and **DOWN TO EARTH** lead curator George Brugmans: 'Without wishing to detract from the seriousness of the current pandemic, these two exhibitions show that the IABR is on point with regard to what we see as today's most pressing challenge: that of climate change. Insidiously, yet almost daily, it confronts us with new challenges and their consequences. Take the Netherlands. After three extremely dry summers in a row, the Dutch suddenly realize that freshwater shortages are imminent and that we have to re-design our delta. And we know we have to stop using natural gas in our homes. However, we don't really know what to do to meet these challenges in a way that keeps everyone on board and ensures that people will get to co-own the transition rather than just be presented with the bill. These are issues that our research has been focusing on.'

DROUGHT IN THE DELTA and **WHOSE ENERGY IS IT, ANYWAY?** present the results of research by design carried out over the past two years by the IABR and its many partners. As the exhibitions include concrete proposals and striking imaginations of practical solutions, the IABR, as a knowledge institute and cultural platform, purposefully contributes to real change toward more sustainable cities.

A Biennale in Times of Pandemic

The form of **DOWN TO EARTH** has been adapted due to the Covid-19 crisis: it is not concentrated in time and place, because we simply cannot invite large crowds of people, who have come from far and wide, to walk in through the same door at the same time. This also means: no grand openings or peak hours, but rather a series of exhibitions, activities, and programs spread out over a longer, ten-month period. The form is secondary to the circumstances. This way, the IABR will incrementally present the results of the research by design of the IABR–Ateliers in combination with selected projects and various activities that focus on the question: *Where can we land?* **DOWN TO EARTH.**

The IABR follows the guidelines of the RIVM, the Dutch Health Authority. All IABR exhibitions are open to a maximum number of visitors. All tickets are for a specific timeslot (with a beginning and end time). Advance online reservations via iabr.nl are required.

DOWN TO EARTH: DROUGHT IN THE DELTA

19 SEPTEMBER – 18 OCTOBER | KEILEZAAL ROTTERDAM

11 AM – 5 PM, CLOSED ON MONDAYS



Artist impression of the animation made by Atelier Drought in the Delta © IABR, Studio Marco Vermeulen

The first exhibition, **DOWN TO EARTH: DROUGHT IN THE DELTA**, opens on 19 September and will pick up where the previous biennale left off in 2018: in the Dutch Delta. Almost every day now, we hear that our delta is in danger of drying up. Water companies warn us not to water our gardens, wash our cars or fill our swimming pools. At other times, the streets are flooded and there is too much water.

We live in a delta in which climate change confronts us with new problems. For hundreds of years, we have worked hard to make our country better at draining water as quickly and efficiently as possible for reasons of safety and agricultural productivity. But now we are suddenly facing a new challenge: how to retain water in order to be able to use it when we need it. Or, as architect and urban designer Marco Vermeulen puts it: 'Climate change is forcing us to re-design the Dutch water machine back into a resilient delta.'

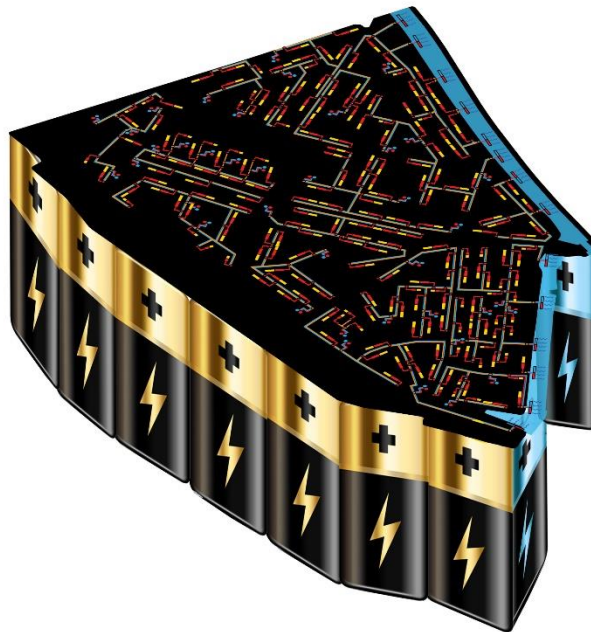
Building Blocks for a New Freshwater Strategy

The dry summer of 2018 prompted the IABR to start an investigation into opportunities and frameworks for the large-scale storage of freshwater, both aboveground and underground. In the past year, the IABR–Atelier Drought in the Delta headed by lead designer Marco Vermeulen explored the possibilities for increasing the delta's water-buffering capacity and the opportunities that this would create for transformational change.

The results are visualized by means of a spectacular 30-m-wide, 3.5-m-high animation of a cross section of the Dutch Delta – the heart of the exhibition. Looking in the direction of Germany, France and Belgium, upstream along the Rhine, Meuse and Scheldt, we see the Alps in the distance. In about seven minutes, the animation shows how our delta is currently functioning, what problems have arisen due to climate change and what possible building blocks there are for a new freshwater strategy in conjunction with other transition challenges such as the energy transition, food production and urbanization. In addition, **DROUGHT IN THE DELTA** curator George Brugmans selected four, COASTAR, Water Mosaic Groene Hart, Panorama Waterland and Sponstuin, which explore concrete solutions at the local or regional level.

DOWN TO EARTH: WHOSE ENERGY IS IT, ANYWAY?

30 OCTOBER – 20 DECEMBER | KEILEZAAL ROTTERDAM
11 AM – 5 PM, CLOSED ON MONDAYS



The neighborhood as a battery © IABR, Ooze

In the second exhibition, **DOWN TO EARTH: WHOSE ENERGY IS IT, ANYWAY?** which opens on 30 October, the IABR focuses on the energy transition. Since 2017 the IABR–Atelier Rotterdam has been exploring ways to use the energy transition as leverage for achieving a more socially inclusive form of urban development – and since 2019 in Rotterdam’s Bospolder-Tussendijken neighborhood specifically. If a district has to stop using natural gas, if it needs an overhaul anyway, is it perhaps possible to cleverly link this transition to the solving of a number of other urgent challenges? After all, the creation of a truly CO2-neutral neighborhood not only presents technological, spatial and financial challenges, but also social ones.

And that, as far as the IABR is concerned, is what it is all about. The transition to the sustainable production of solar and wind energy is also a transition to a different energy management system, from centralized to decentralized, from extractive to circular, and therefore possibly to other forms of ownership. After all, especially at the level of the neighborhood in which the energy will be generated, stored and traded, one can ask:

WHOSE ENERGY IS IT, ANYWAY? Rather than mere consumers, neighborhood residents – especially if they associate – can also become producers, distributors and entrepreneurs. By cleverly linking the energy system to the local economy, the energy transition can quite naturally transform into a social challenge. In that case the securing of common ownership in such a way that citizens not only receive energy bills, but also get to actively co-own the transition and profit from it, becomes pivotal.

To achieve a more socially inclusive transition and implement it spatially, we need a LEAP, a Local Energy Action Plan supported by the community, which is what Atelier Rotterdam is now developing together with many partners in and residents of Bospolder-Tussendijken.

This exhibition also includes contributions by the IABR–Atelier East Flanders Core Region – which the IABR set up together with the Province of East Flanders. The Eeklo demonstration project is an exploration in this East Flemish municipality of how the existing built environment can be redesigned, as it were, given the opportunities offered by the inevitable energy transition.

The curators of **WHOSE ENERGY IS IT, ANYWAY?** are Thijs van Spaandonk (partner at BRIGHT and Head of Urbanism at the Rotterdam Academy of Architecture) and Eva Pfannes (OOZE Architects and Urbanists).

THE THEME OF THIS EDITION: DOWN TO EARTH

The question IABR **DOWN TO EARTH** head curator George Brugmans asks with this 9th edition of the IABR is: Where can we land?

‘Can we, as it were, re-settle on planet Earth, in a sustainable balance with other lifeforms? Can we, as philosopher Bruno Latour puts it, redesign our living environment 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: redefine all our actions as what leads toward the Earth – leads **DOWN TO EARTH.**’

‘**DOWN TO EARTH** wants to contribute to the necessary exploration of new places to land. Not without sounding the alarm,’ Brugmans stresses, ‘after all, there’s no use denying that the situation scares us a little. But it’s only with eyes wide open that we can focus to the max, hone our survival instincts and force ourselves into a concrete and solution-oriented activism. Because what really matters now, is that we *do* something.’

IABR–ATELIERS INVESTIGATE WATER AND ENERGY TRANSITION AS LEVERAGE

The research by design the IABR carried out in both the IABR–Ateliers and in other collaborative projects in recent years run like a thread through **DOWN TO EARTH**. The IABR has chosen to investigate challenges related to the water and energy transition. These are urgent worldwide as well as highly topical in the Netherlands: we face both droughts and flooding, have to stop using natural gas in our homes and need to get rid of the fossil economy as quickly as possible.

These challenges can help us develop new ways of inhabiting the Earth more wisely and using its resources more responsibly. They are also social challenges, especially if we very deliberately use them as leverage. This is how we want to make a concrete contribution: by exploring how water and energy transition-related challenges can be used as leverage. Not only for the complete transformation of our urban landscapes and living environment towards a sustainable balance with other species and nature, but also to stimulate the political and social debate about the character, quality and ownership of the transition.

ABOUT THE IABR

The IABR, the International Architecture Biennale Rotterdam, was founded in 2001 on the conviction that architecture and especially urban design are of great social importance. As a cultural platform, it offers free space for the generation of ideas as well as for discussion and experimentation on the future of the city. This is why the IABR mainly focuses on the future of the city where, in just 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 can only solve the climate crisis if we solve it in the cities first – in the places where we dwell, work and live. And to achieve this, good design is crucial. Well-designed, socially inclusive, resilient cities are our gateway to the future. The challenge is clear. And it is now or never. The IABR has therefore fully committed itself to the *Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development* of the United Nations; its main objective is to contribute to the achievement of the *Sustainable Development Goals* to the best of its ability.

The IABR is a cultural platform as well as a knowledge institute. This combination allows it to generate real-world change, using the power of imagination and design as its main instrument. The two most important tools the IABR uses to achieve its objectives are the IABR–Ateliers, in which research is done, and the biennale itself, the cultural event where results are shown and contextualized and the public debate takes place.

Every biennale contributes to the bridging of the gap between research and action, between plans and ideas, toward understanding and social support. The fact that the IABR resolutely uses the free cultural space in this way, connecting research by design to public presentations in a continuous open and cultural work process aimed at concrete application, makes it unique in the world.

NOTE TO EDITORS

For more information or images, please contact us via pers@iabr.nl or +31(0)10 206 00 33

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