

## Serious Fun Architecture & Games

17.03.–05.09.2022, Exhibition Hall 2

Opening: Wed 16.03.2022, 19:00

Press conference: Wed 16.03.2022, 11:00

The opening and the press conference will take place along the current Covid-19 measures!

**We are all familiar with the classic architecture games, from building blocks that become daring structures to board games where the players compete for spatial-strategic advantages. What are, though, the architecture narratives invested in doll's houses, along which guidelines do cities grow in computer games, and what kind of buildings shield ego-shooters from their assailants? The exhibition 'Serious Fun' shows and examines architecture games and toys, inviting you to marvel, play and reflect.**

Architecture games and toys are a part of our cultural and technical heritage. They come made of wood, metal or cardboard, others are played on computers or consoles. Hybrid variations turn the city itself into a gameboard, creating an interface to parallel worlds. These games and toys are a part of social history, too. As a deeply expressive form of popular culture, they convey how we perceive our built environment and different ways of imagining it. Unlike representations with images, which we view from a distance, games can develop a strongly immersive character: Whoever participates in a game becomes part of it himself. This captivating power is not without ambivalence. On the one hand, the miniature scale is inviting, so people can actively participate in the development of buildings, towns or situations that they would never otherwise have had any access to in reality – which has made games popular as a tool in participatory processes. On the other hand, it is the developers who influence or manipulate the course and outcome of the games. Their decisions not only build whole worlds, they also shape world views.

The exhibition presents games and reflections on games. The exhibits, many of which are interactive, were created by architects, artists and game developers. The visitor's gaze is frequently drawn to specific, sometimes strange but frequently innovative aspects of architecture games. What are the utopias and dystopias that they evoke, what are the values and ideas they convey, criticise or endorse? What kind of places, themes and ways of life are frequently left out, and which games fill these gaps? Visitors can take an alternative city tour through a videogame environment, they can dabble on the virtual London property market, experience doll's houses as lurid minidramas or emancipatory narratives, stimulate the spatial experience of a blind person in a purely acoustic videogame, or develop eco-friendly city districts in collaboration with others.

The exhibition 'Serious Fun' invites visitors to play and to ponder. It provides an opportunity to become immersed in both familiar and in less familiar games, while it also encourages people to take a step back and to take a critical look at the world of games and the constructed worlds that they create. Games can both celebrate and trivialise architecture, they can delimit and they can de-limit whole worlds. They do not only integrate architectural practice, they also hold a mirror up to it.

**Curator:** Mélanie van der Hoorn  
**Project coordination:** Katharina Ritter  
**Exhibition design:** DWARS ontwerp (Mark Schulte & Miriam de Lange)

### **Catalogue of the Exhibition**

The 'Serious Fun. Architecture & Games' exhibition is accompanied by a comprehensive catalogue. Available at the Az W Shop, or may be ordered directly from [eshop@azw.at](mailto:eshop@azw.at)  
Editors: Mélanie van der Hoorn, in conjunction with the Architekturzentrum Wien  
published by nai010 publishers  
Language: English

### **Projects in the Exhibition**

#### **1. *Critical Blocks*, Maykel Roovers, 2012**

A mega farm, a power plant or a highway as toy building blocks. For the designer Maykel Roovers, they embody essential elements of today's architecture and spatial planning. Large-scale architecture is abstracted by the toy blocks and the contrast between the hardness of these urban buildings and the playful children's world, which feigns friendliness and limitless possibilities, is emphasized.

#### **2. *Luisterhuis*, Machiel Spaan & Rozalie Hirs, 2017**

The "Listening House" by architect Machiel Spaan and composer Rozalie Hirs is a dollhouse that children with and without disabilities can play together with. The house-shaped wooden sculpture has seven hollow spaces that you can explore with your ears.

#### **3. *The Unchanging World*, Alice Pasquini, 2018**

A dollhouse has a time and a life of its own. It appears as if detached from the environment. Weather, catastrophes and deterioration pass it by. Artist Alice Pasquini causes these foundations to sway. History has left deep marks on her dollhouse with broken windows, glass shards and ruined furniture.

#### **4. *Untitled (Dollhouse)*, Yinka Shonibare, 2002**

Viewed from the outside, Yinka Shonibare's dollhouse is a miniature copy of the upper-class Victorian house in London's East End where the artist himself lives. The humorless, smug architectural style contrasts with the shrill interior design, which boasts colorful wallpaper and upholstery made of Vlisco batik fabric. The material embodies the complexity of (post-)colonial relations against the background of globalization and the shaping of multicultural identities.

#### **5. *The Dollhouse*, Heather Benning & Chad Galloway, 2014 (Film length 7:41)**

Heather Benning's dollhouse is a modest farmhouse on the Canadian prairies that appears to have been hastily abandoned by its residents. It looks like an enlarged miniature: The artist transformed a real house into a dollhouse. After six years of decay, the artist let it go up in flames and filmmaker Chad Galloway turned this event into a film.

#### **6. *Eigenheim*, Anja Dornieden & Juan David González Monroy, 2012 (Film length 16:11)**

Dollhouses from the GDR play the main role in this documentary: Slow close-ups move the viewer through the East German miniature world of the 1960s and 1970s. From a child's perspective, the houses convey the living ideals of the era. In addition to the moving images, fragments of interviews with old and new owners can be heard.

**7. *Dust & Dust Scapes*, Aram Bartholl, 2011 and 2013**

*Dust* is a 1:333 scale model of the spaces of one of the most played computer games in the world. Passionate gamers spend whole days and weeks in such environments; for Bartholl they have long been part of our cultural heritage: They appear more real than many other places such as artificially laid out supermarkets or airports.

**8. *Wait*, Lindsay Grace, 2005**

When you play video games, you are primarily focused on the tasks that the game prescribes. You rush past the architecture without taking a closer look at it. *Wait*, on the other hand, invites you to slow down and calmly observe. As part of Lindsay Grace's research project *Critical Play*, it deals with common game mechanisms and questions what we can learn from them and how they influence our behavior.

**9. *Another Day of Depression in Kowloon*, Yuk-Yiu Ip, 2012  
(Film length 14:36)**

As an example of the "machinima" genre (from the English "machine" and "cinema"), this film was shot exclusively in the world-famous first-person shooter video game *Call of Duty: Black Ops*. In this way the artist gains access to the lost, mythical part of his hometown and conducts field research in this virtual world.

**10. *The Continuous City*, Gareth Damian Martin, 2018**

British artist and game designer Gareth Damian Martin explores video game scenarios and captures projected scenes with a 35mm analog camera. The resulting images move between reality and fiction, between the digital and analog world. They testify to the ability of video games to create worlds that have absorbed real architecture.

**11. *London Developers Toolkit*, Sandra Youkhana & Luke Caspar Pearson (You+Pea), 2015**

The satirical app examines London's burgeoning skyline of phallic-looking apartment towers. It invites users to assemble their own megalomaniac skyscraper from prefabricated, iconic modules and to design obtrusive advertising material that can then be printed.

**12. *Play With Me*, Van Sowerwine & Isobel Knowles, 2002**

The familiar miniature idyll of this dollhouse seems harmless, but the artists completely dissect the lovely yet illusory world. At the first possible opportunity, unexpected scenarios that deviate from the norm unfold: It is a form of "critical play," a reflection on conventions, associations and ideas.

**13. *MärchenHaft*.**

***Puppenhäuser, schräge Typen und dolle Dinge*, Sabine Bloch, 2005–2006**

In her montages, which are based on photographs, photo artist Sabine Bloch constructs complex spaces of relationships that often only become apparent at second glance. In the *MärchenHaft* series she shows us how much the idyllic scenery of dollhouses deludes us into believing in an ideal world. Those who don't look the other way are confronted with atrocities and tragedies.

**14. *Isometric Screenshots*, Jon Haddock, 2000**

In his screenshots, Jon Haddock imitates the isometric representations and the pixelated style of the first version of the world-famous computer game *The Sims*. Dramatic events of world importance, such as the assassination of Martin Luther King, are mixed with fictional scenes such as the picnic from *The Sound of Music*.

**15. *Down and Out in Los Santos*, Alan Butler, 2015-**

*Down and Out in Los Santos* consists of screenshots from the well-known video game *Grand Theft Auto V*. The artist moves like a social reporter through the streets and uses his avatar's virtual smartphone to record poverty and homelessness. He criticizes both the aesthetic representations of street photography and the society that is apparently portrayed here so realistically.

**16. *Nova Alea*, Paolo Pedercini (Molleindustria), 2016**

*Nova Alea* sees itself as a criticism of the successful *SimCity*, which Paolo Pedercini regards as a model for many other urban development video games. Urban development in these games is mostly carried out from a technocratic, top-down perspective; socio-political and ecological aspects are ignored. Pedercini develops simple, abstract city simulations, each of which uncovers certain dynamics – in this game it is real estate speculation.

**17. *Operation Jane Walk*, Robin Klengel & Leonhard Müllner, 2018**

**(Film length 16:13)**

Artists Robin Klengel and Leonhard Müllner explore the subversive potential of video games and use the game stage for their own narration. They guide their guests to architectural icons of modernism and capitalism, and critically relate their (cultural) historical background in the real world.

**18. *Rezone the Game*, Rolf van Boxmeer (Bosch Architectuur Initiatief) & Tessa Peters (Digitale Werkplaats), 2012**

*Rezone the Game* is a so-called "serious game": It combines gaming fun with reflection on problems in the "real" world. The object of the game is to combat vacancies in a specific neighborhood of the Dutch city of Den Bosch, which is shown as a model on the playing field. Residents are recognized as experts and co-designers of their own living environment.

**19. *Parquette*, Hans Venhuizen, 1991 and 2008**

The starting point for *Parquette* was the observation that no meaningful urban development can arise on a tabula rasa. *Parquette* therefore simulates a development process. In the course of the game, constantly growing framework conditions are created and the participants are asked, in consultation with one another, to position themselves. This enables the players to gain insight into the dynamics of urban development, the positions of the other participants, and the potential of the area.

**20. *Delft Campus Urban Game*, Milena Ivković & Stefan Nikolić (Blok74), 2015**

Developed from a long-term cooperation between an architect and a game developer, the hybrid game supports participatory planning processes. It combines the advantages of analog games with the additional functions of an app. The digital expansion gives players immediate feedback on their actions and leads to a more rapid adaptation to new situations.

**21. *Play the City Game Manual, Play the City, 2017***

The Amsterdam-based office *Play the City*, headed by Ekim Tan, specialized very early on in the development of games to promote participatory processes in the field of urban planning. They meanwhile have an immense collection of tailor-made game props that represent the most diverse spatial conditions and functions in a tangible way. Decision-makers, investors and other participants are brought together in the game, hierarchies are temporarily lifted and subject-specific (language) barriers are bridged.

**22. *Block by Block Playbook, Block by Block, 2021***

*Block by Block* is the application of the famous video game *Minecraft* to support participatory building projects in public spaces. It is an initiative of UN-Habitat, the housing program of the United Nations, which Mojang/Microsoft provides the software for. It is probably the world's most widely used game application for real construction projects. The focus is on sustainability, equality and justice, inclusion and refugee aid.

**23. *A Blind Legend, DOWiNO (Serious Game and Game for Change), 2015***

*A Blind Legend* is a video game with no images. It works on the basis of 3D binaural sound technology that reproduces extremely realistic spatial auditory impressions. Visually impaired people gain their first entry into the world of video games, while sighted people are catapulted into a completely new world where they have to do without their familiar, visual orientation aids.

**24. *Mystery on Fifth Avenue, Eric Clough (212box), 2008***

The game medium has been anchored in the architectural practice of Eric Clough and his office 212box for more than ten years. In 2008, the office was responsible for the general renovation and redesign of a 400 m<sup>2</sup> apartment in Manhattan. In his design, Clough integrated an extensive game: Secret codes, decorative puzzles and the objects needed to crack them have been embedded into furniture and fittings throughout the apartment. The narration forms the basis for the design and co-determines the appearance of the apartment.

**25. *Three Location-based Games from and about Vienna***

How can you uncover hidden stories and places in the city and make them accessible? Three game developers from Vienna answer this question with hybrid concepts at the interface between the "real" and virtual world.

***Die andere Stadt, Causa Creations, 2021***

*Die andere Stadt* ("The Other City") is an encounter with the past, the present and the speculative future of Vienna. Via a freely available app, interested people can experience, play and explore three different stories and their spaces.

***Die Vergangenheit ist jetzt, ArchäoNOW, 2019***

The game is a puzzle rally through downtown Vienna that uses "Augmented Reality" (AR) to resurrect buildings from the past that have disappeared. Created from a collaboration between archaeologist Miriam Weberstorfer (ArchäoNOW) and architect Franco Lanfur (VARS) in 2019, it was the very first game of this kind in Europe.

***Monster Hunt Vienna, City Games Vienna, 2022***

In this digital city game, you look for “monsters”: charming curiosities off the beaten track that belong to the soul of the city. These insider tips can be reached with the help of city maps, riddles, rhymes and GPS.

**The press release as well as high-resolution, rights free press photographs are available for download at [www.azw.at](http://www.azw.at).**

**Press contact: Katharina Kober, +43-1-522 31 15-23, [kober@azw.at](mailto:kober@azw.at)**

Public funding:

MA18 – Geschäftsgruppe Innovation, Stadtplanung und Mobilität

MA7 – Stadt Wien Kultur

Austrian Federal Ministry for Arts, Culture, Civil Service and Sport

Sponsor: Architecture Lounge