

Iwan Baan Moments in Architecture



Exhibition Concept

**Vitra
Design
Museum**



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The Exhibition

Iwan Baan (b. 1975) is one of today's leading photographers of architecture and the built environment. His images document the growth of global megacities, explore traditional and informal housing structures, and portray buildings by prominent contemporary architects including Herzog & de Meuron, Rem Koolhaas, and Zaha Hadid. In autumn 2023 the Vitra Design Museum opened the first major retrospective of his work, presenting a vast selection of highlights from the Dutch photographer's oeuvre.

Ever since its inception, and even more so since the rise of mass media, photography has fundamentally informed the way we perceive architecture and the built environment. In the unprecedented flood of ubiquitous architectural images of the last 20 years, there may be no other photographer that has had a similarly profound influence on how we see and experience buildings through the lens of a camera. Baan's vibrant realism focuses on people and their relationships with the built environment. His observant eye presents architecture not as an abstract ideal, but as the setting of everyday life and an organic part of the urban fabric—be it suburban sprawl or the booming metropolises of Africa, America and Asia. The exhibition includes a variety of Baan's iconic works, many of which are familiar from magazines and books, as well as photographs of traditional and informal architecture from all around the world, from the round Tulou of southern China to the rock-hewn churches of Ethiopia. Thanks to the great scope of his vision, Baan's works offer a broad panorama of human construction and ways of living that impressively demonstrates the existential importance of architecture and urban design.

In its multimedia presentation, including print and digital formats, the exhibition invites visitors on a journey through Baan's rich scope of work from the last two decades, depicting his observations of the manifold manifestations of human habitats around the globe.

COVER:
National Taichung Theater, Taichung, Taiwan, 2016,
Toyo Ito & Associates, Architects

PREVIOUS PAGES:
Torre David, Caracas, Venezuela, 2011
New York City, USA, 2014

OPPOSITE PAGE:
Mikimoto Ginza 2, Tokyo, Japan, 2006,
Toyo Ito & Associates, Architects



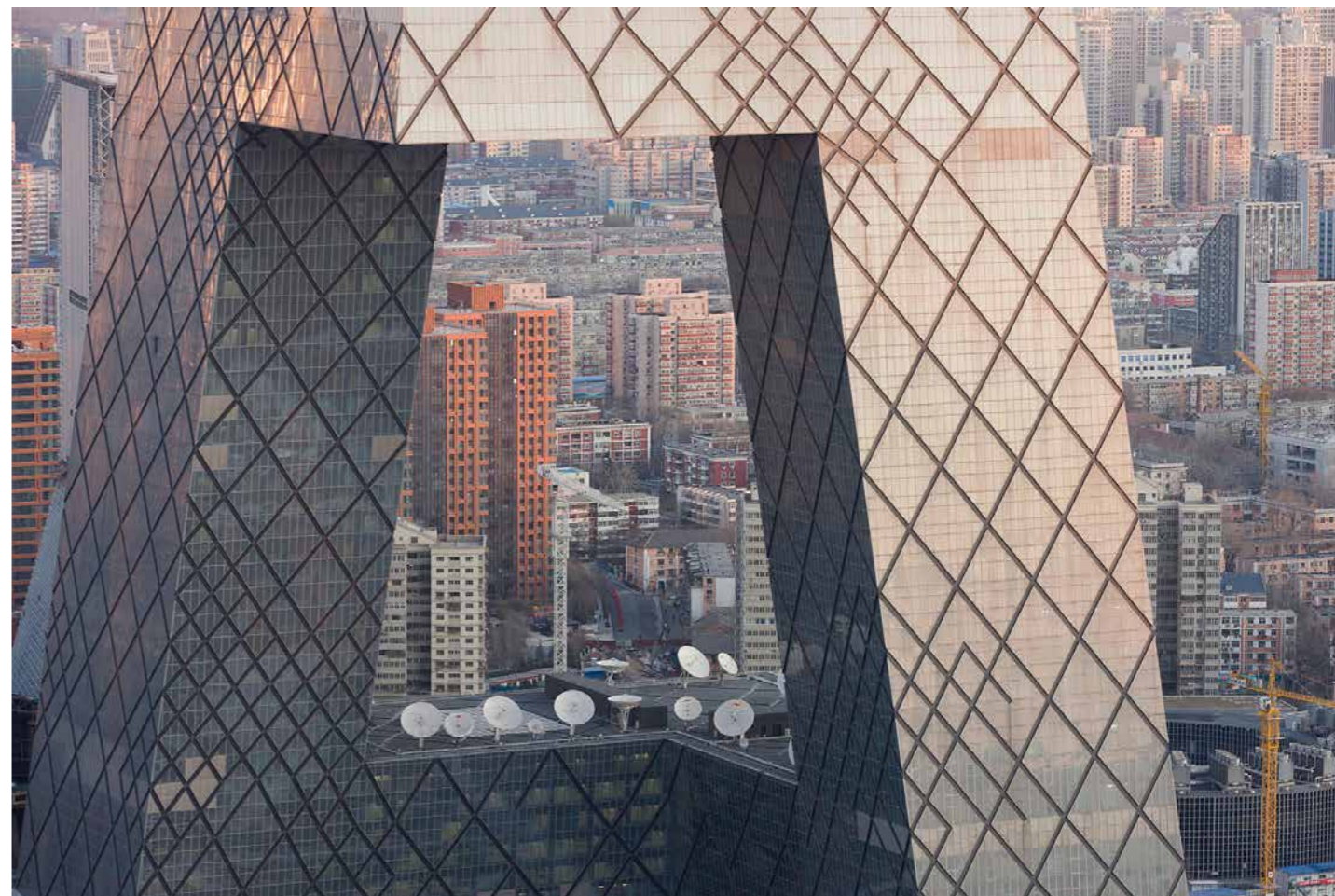


China

Baan fell in love with picture taking the very moment his grandmother gifted him an Agfa Clack camera for his twelfth birthday. After studying photography at the Royal Academy of Art in the Hague, he worked both in Amsterdam and New York following his interests in documentary photography and working with a publisher. His focus on architecture, however, emerged after he crossed paths with Dutch architect Rem Koolhaas in 2004.

The first section of the exhibition explores Baan's early projects that followed the construction process of the buildings Koolhaas, Herzog & de Meuron and other western architects realized in China in the mid-2000s – a time of rapid growth in the country that saw many European and American architects commissioned to transform the urban landscapes of Chinese mega cities such as Beijing.

Here, visitors are invited to explore the beginnings of Baan's professional and personal fascination with architecture as a background to life, including a wide selection of as-yet unpublished photographs. It features two major building projects whose entire construction process Baan documented over several years: the CCTV Headquarters by OMA (2002–2012) and the Olympic Stadium by Herzog & de Meuron (2003–2008), both located in Beijing. Baan's pictures show not only the glossy façades but also the workers who raise the buildings from the ground up, documenting their work and their daily lives, often in difficult conditions. By putting a strong emphasis on life behind the scenes, Baan aims to explore the specific narrative of each of these places and their unique stories. The section includes additional projects which contextualize these impressive edifices and record a unique time in China's architectural development.



PREVIOUS PAGE:
Construction of the CCTV Headquarters, Beijing, China, 2007, OMA

OPPOSITE PAGE, CLOCKWISE:
CCTV Headquarters, Beijing, China, 2011, OMA

Construction of the National Stadium, Beijing, China, 2007, Herzog & de Meuron

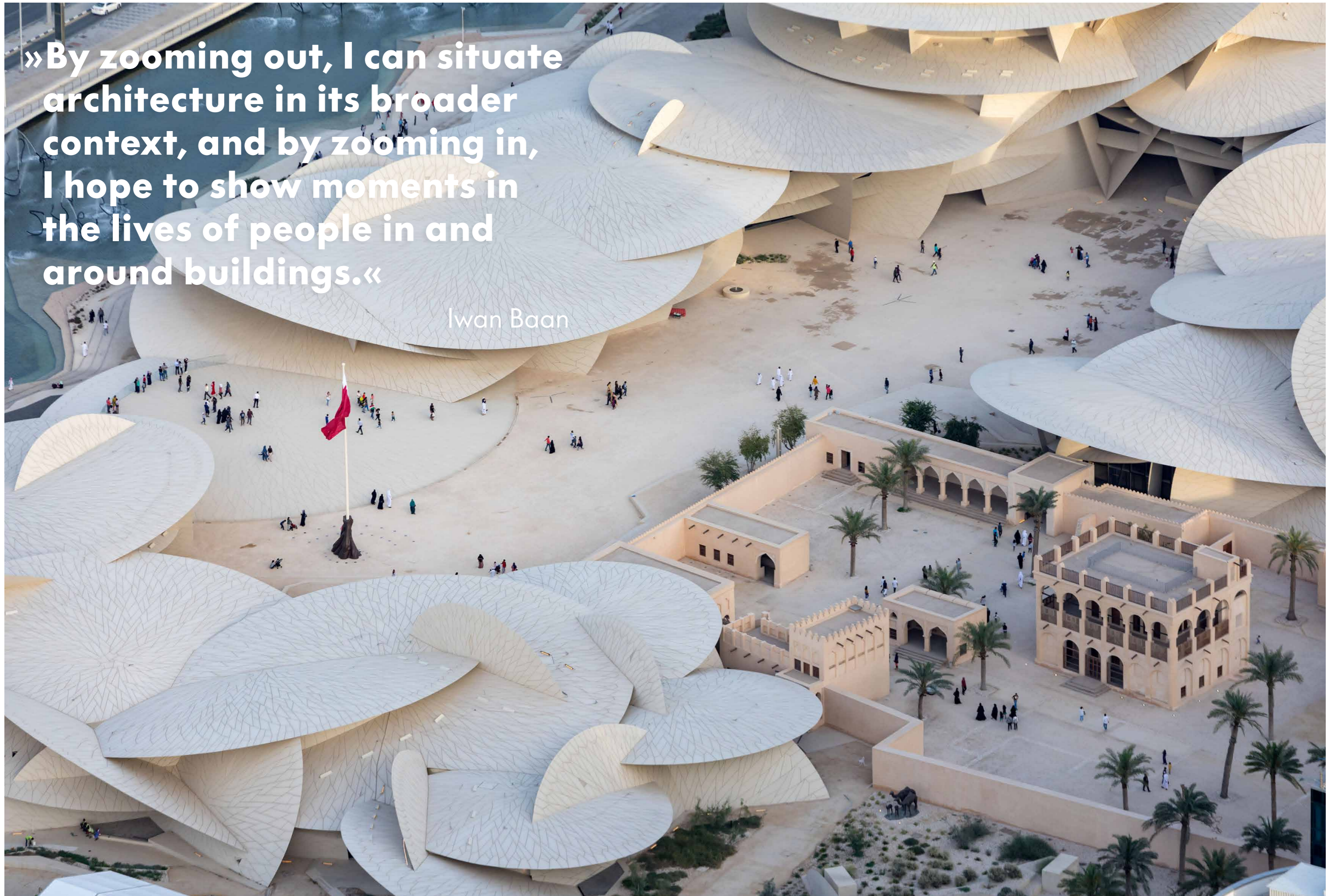
Harbin, China, 2013

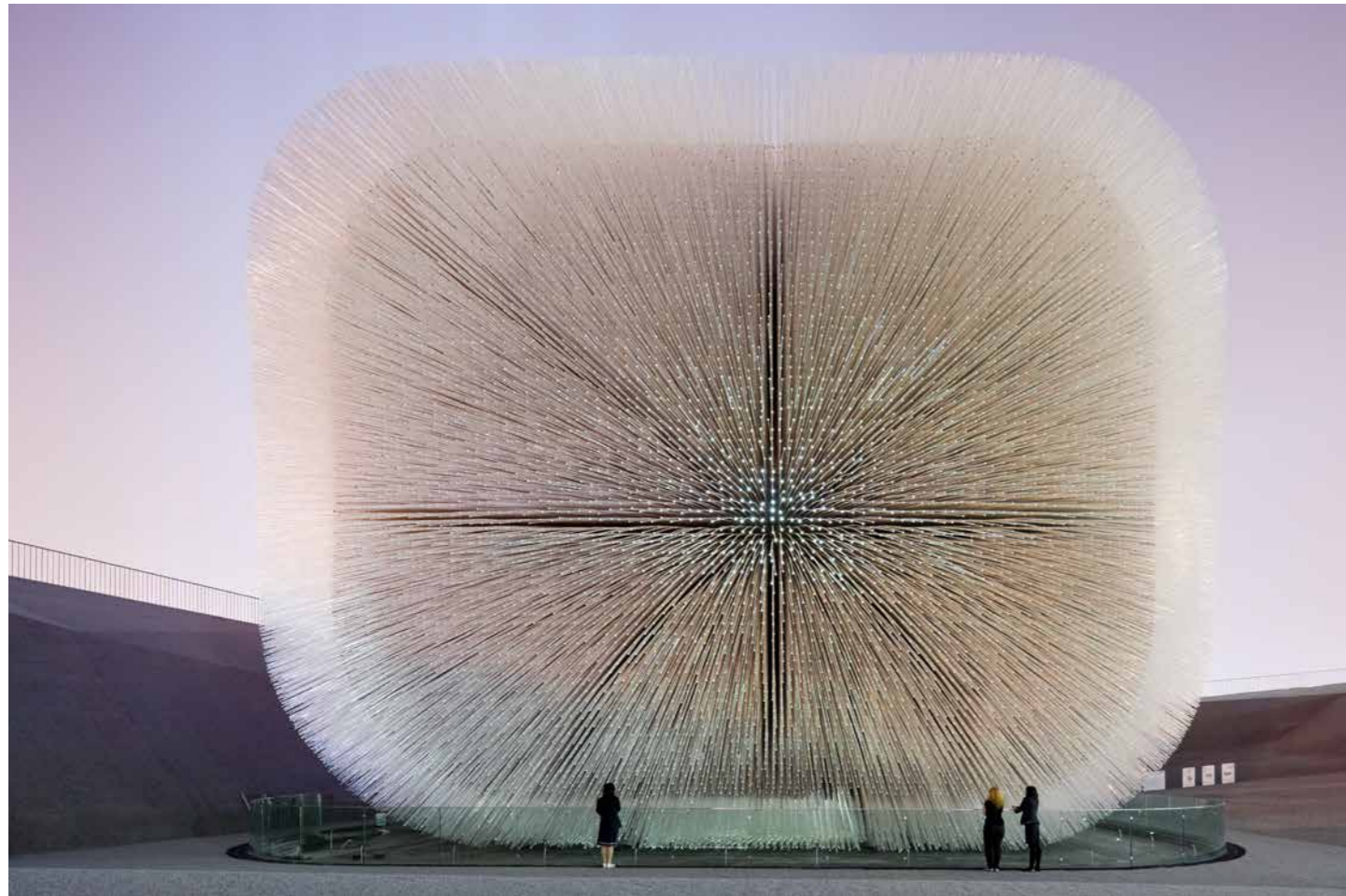
Harbin Opera House, China, 2013–16, MAD Architects

Construction of the CCTV Headquarters, Beijing, China, 2006, OMA

»By zooming out, I can situate architecture in its broader context, and by zooming in, I hope to show moments in the lives of people in and around buildings.«

Iwan Baan





Room 2

Perspectives

Ever since his first collaboration with Rem Koolhaas, Baan's vast and ever-growing network of collaborators and friends has included some of the world's most foremost contemporary architecture studios for whom he has become the photographer of choice to document their buildings. Combining such commissions with personal projects, Baan follows his unwavering curiosity, travelling the world and amassing a relentless canon of images and visual stories. Baan pays tribute to the human factor of each site by narrating the life and interactions that occur within and around a place. Unlike many classical architectural photographers, he does not aim to take that one »timeless« image, requiring the ideal weather or light conditions, but instead embraces the specific circumstances of each building at that particular moment in time. By zooming in and panning out, through the combination of his signature aerial shots – taken from a helicopter or, at times, with a drone – and a series of different perspectives and details, he captures the context and story of each building.

The selection of works presented in the exhibition offers a glimpse into Baan's enormous portfolio of some of the most iconic architectural works to date – be it Zaha Hadid's MAXXI Museum in Rome or Sou Fujimoto's NA House in Tokyo – with a particular emphasis on his collaborative process and the accessible nature of his images.



PREVIOUS PAGE:
National Museum of Qatar, Doha, Qatar, 2019, Ateliers
Jean Nouvel

OPPOSITE PAGE, TOP TO BOTTOM:
Heydar Aliyev Cultural Centre, Baku, Azerbaijan, 2013,
Zaha Hadid Architects

UK Pavilion at Shanghai Expo 2010, Shanghai, China, 2010,
Heatherwick Studio

ABOVE:
House H, Tokyo, Japan, 2009, Sou Fujimoto Architects

**»As a visual storyteller, I am
attracted to cities, the traces
of their histories, and the
narratives of their citizens.«**

Iwan Boon





Room 3

Cities

Next to documenting individual structures, Iwan Baan explores the formation and growth, differences, and similarities of megacities around the globe. From New York City to Nairobi, from Tokyo to São Paulo, his images document the oftentimes chaotic liveliness of urban landscapes. In this selection of personal projects and collaborations that resulted in books and publications, he explores the chance encounters and unplanned moments that occur in a place, capturing the incredible diversity of the built environment and the different lifestyles unfolding within it. Many of the projects included in this section visualize the idiosyncrasies of these locations, from dynamic urban designs to densely knitted city grids and imaginative appropriations of existing spaces. Baan surveys how people worldwide adapt to their surroundings and mould them according to their individual needs.

The themes addressed in this section of the exhibition exemplify aspects of urban life that Baan investigates during his travels: from urbanization and global growth to the heritage of modernist architecture, and the dialogue with local communities. They invite viewers to encounter the many faces, places, cultures, and lives, the moments of humour and wonder, but also the decline of the natural environment and social injustice inherent in Baan's pictorial storytelling.



PREVIOUS PAGE:
Brasília National Library, Brasília, Brazil, 2010,
Oscar Niemeyer

OPPOSITE PAGE, TOP TO BOTTOM:
US borderwall, Tijuana, Mexico, 2018

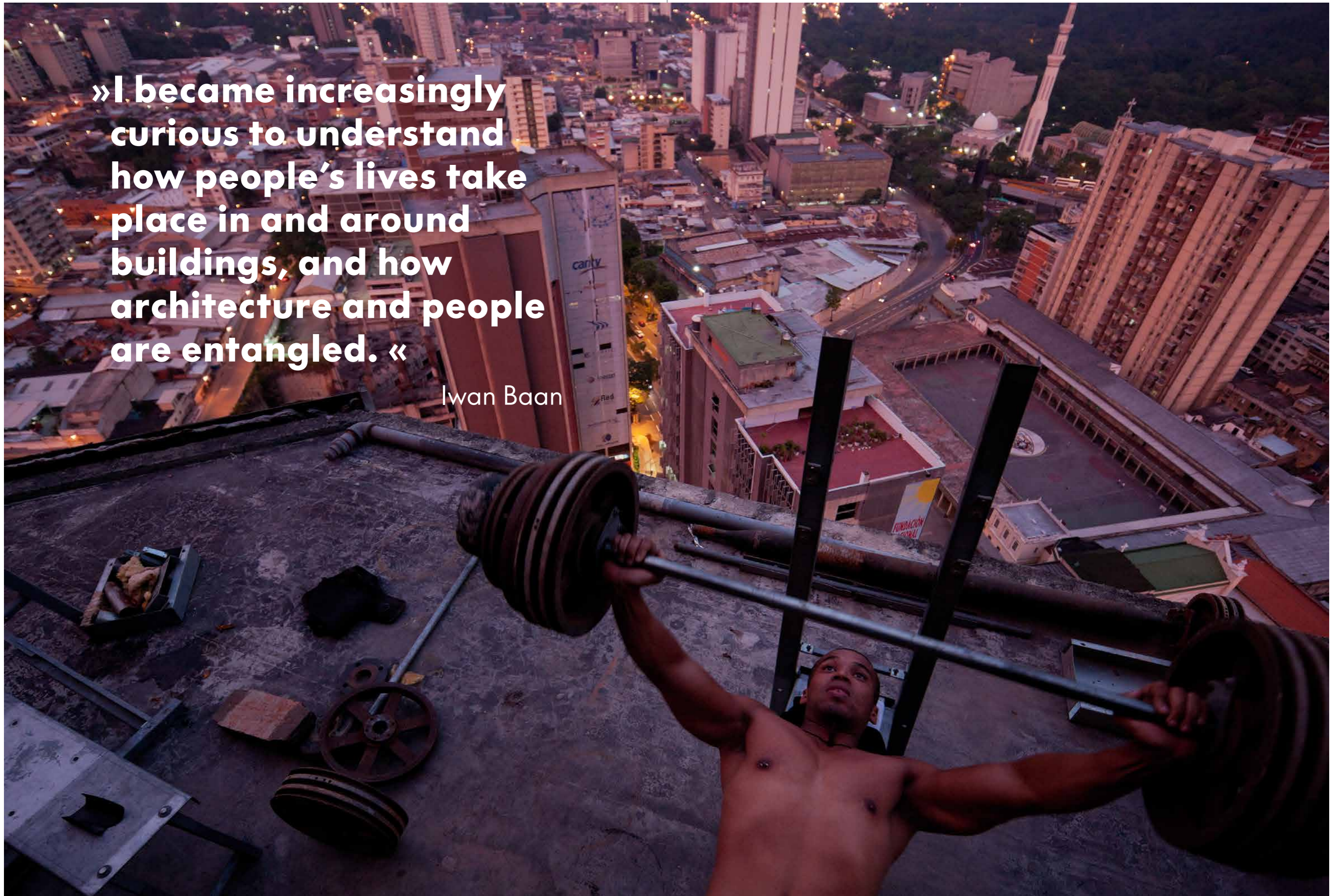
Rome, Italy, 2022

Los Angeles, CA, USA, 2010

ABOVE:
Lagos National Stadium, Lagos, Nigeria, 2018,
Isaac Fola-Alade

»I became increasingly curious to understand how people's lives take place in and around buildings, and how architecture and people are entangled. «

Iwan Baan



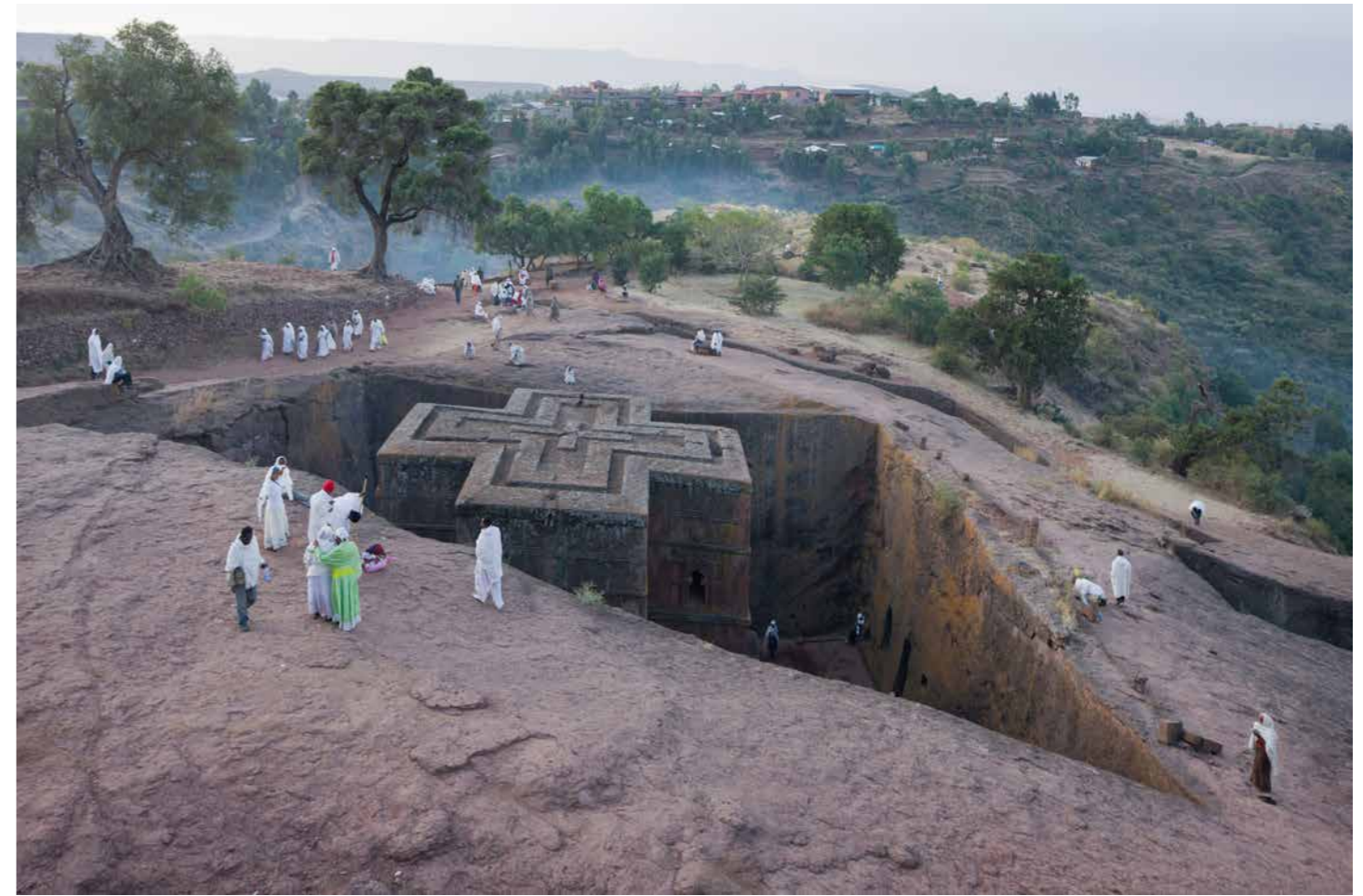
Continuities

Iwan Baan holds a particular fascination for traditional building techniques and the diversity of ways in which dwellings are created under completely different circumstances. Be it the traditional architecture of Burkina Faso or the Stepwells of India, many of the building practices seen in this section of the exhibition have existed for centuries and have been passed on from generation to generation. In all cultures across the globe, civilizations have learned to make use of the materials at hand to create homes for their people that provide shelter and adapt to the local climate and conditions. Many architects have drawn inspiration from building forms such as these, their use of natural light, local materials, and solutions to meet site-specific needs.

Next to these long-lasting rituals and practices, Baan's interest also extends to the even more impermanent forms of housing that exist only for a specific period of time – such as that constructed for the large Hindu Festival Kumbh Mela in Prayagraj,, India. Occurring only every 12 years and lasting for six weeks, this period sees an estimated 50 to 80 million pilgrims gather at the site of worship and set up an enormous impermanent city of tents.

Another example of the adaptation of an existing structure is the Torre David in Caracas, Venezuela. The tower – one of the world's largest vertical informal housing complexes – comprises 45 floors. When the local economy collapsed, the building – intended as a Financial Centre – was never completed and remained empty for years until it was taken over by squatters from the community. The residents portrayed by Baan reshaped the unfinished, exposed concrete into shops, homes, salons, and community spaces.

The projects exhibited portray naturally evolving and adapting civilizations, inhabiting spaces that are as varied as the needs of the people within them.



PREVIOUS PAGE:
Torre David, Caracas, Venezuela, 2011

OPPOSITE PAGE, CLOCKWISE:
Biéte Ghiorgis, Rock-Hewn church, Lalibela, Ethiopia, 2012

Torre David, Caracas, Venezuela, 2011

Grand Mosque, Bobo-Dioulasso, Burkina Faso, 2021

Kumbh Mela Festival, Prayagraj former known as Allahabad, India, 2013

Tiébélé, Burkina Faso, 2021

Facts

Exhibition floor space

600 – 1,000m² / 6,000 – 10,000 sq ft

Exhibits

Photography, film, and multimedia installations

Concept

Mea Hoffmann, Vitra Design Museum
Iwan Baan

Curator

Mea Hoffmann

Head of Exhibitions

Cora Harris
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Cora.Harris@design-museum.de

Exhibition Tour

»Iwan Baan: Moments in Architecture«
is available to international venues until
approximately 2028. The exhibition travels
including all exhibits, contextual films and
images, exhibition architecture and all
media equipment.

Dates

Vitra Design Museum, Weil am Rhein
21 October 2023 – 3 March 2024

Museo ICO, Madrid
7 June 2024 – 8 September 2024

Publication

The exhibition is accompanied by an extensive
book published by the Vitra Design Museum.



Editors: Mateo Kries, Mea Hoffmann

978-3-945852-58-3 (English)


978-3-945852-57-6 (German)

An exhibition by the Vitra Design Museum

**Vitra
Design
Museum**

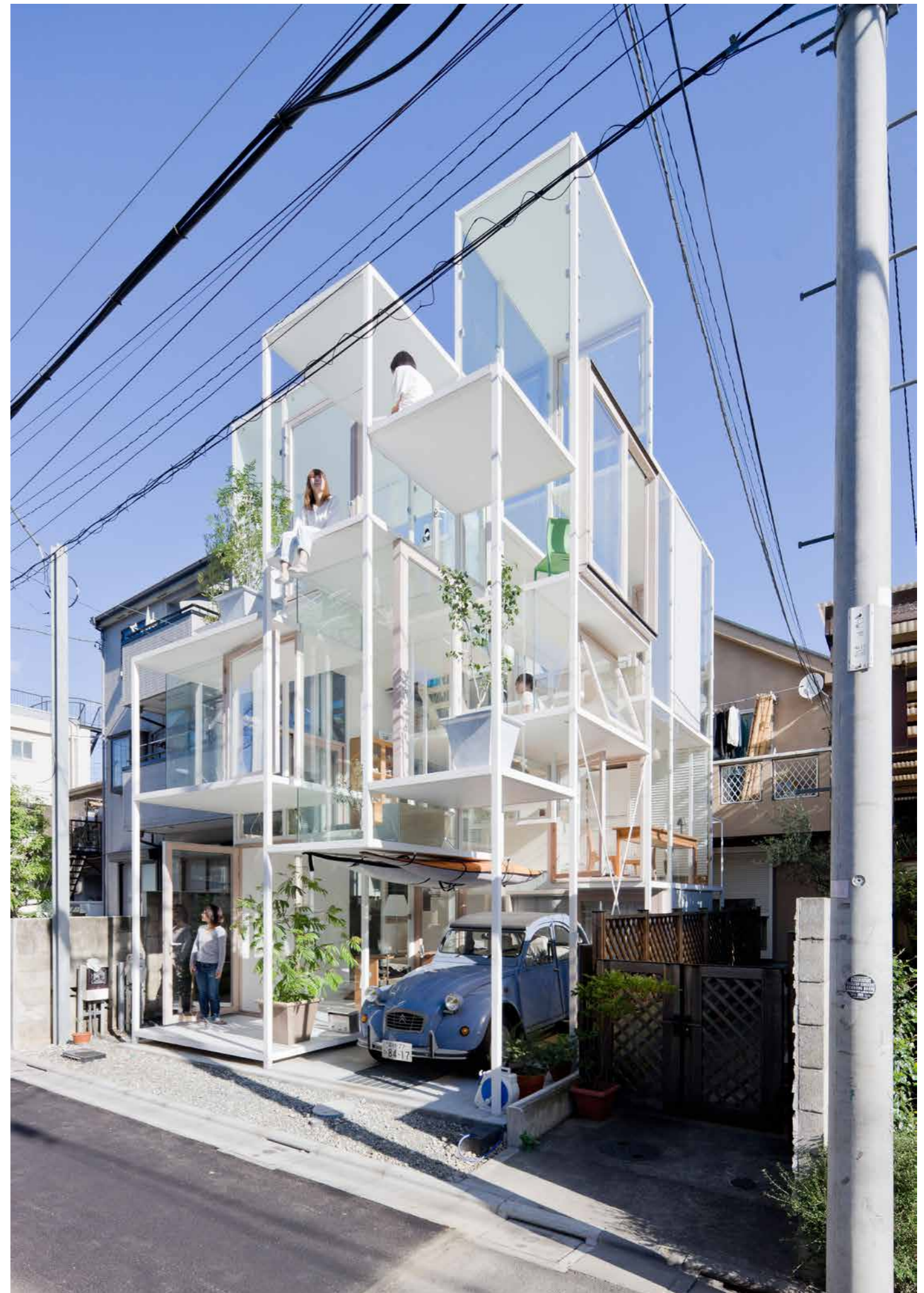
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Opposite page: House NA, Tokyo, Japan, 2011, Sou Fujimoto Architects

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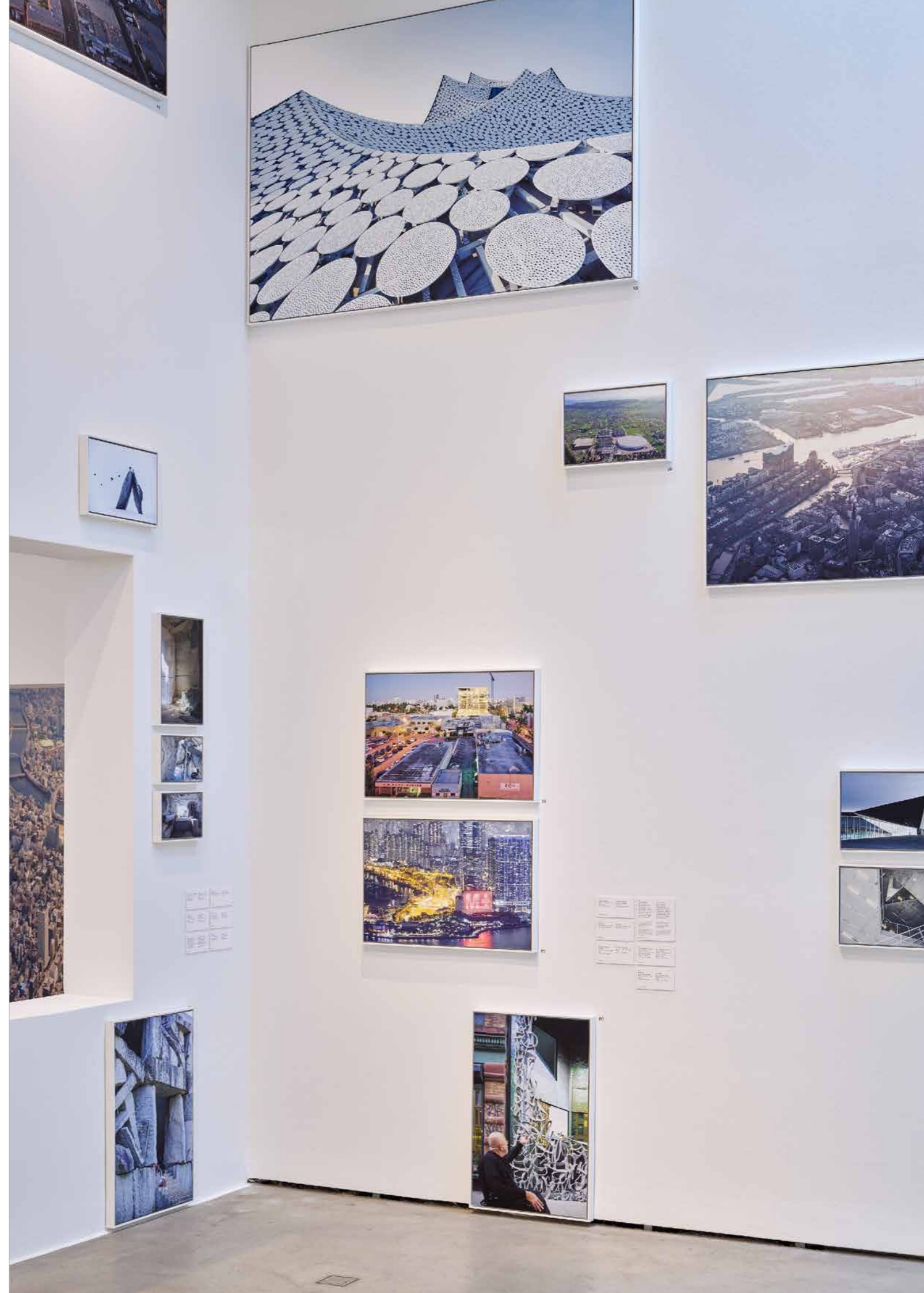
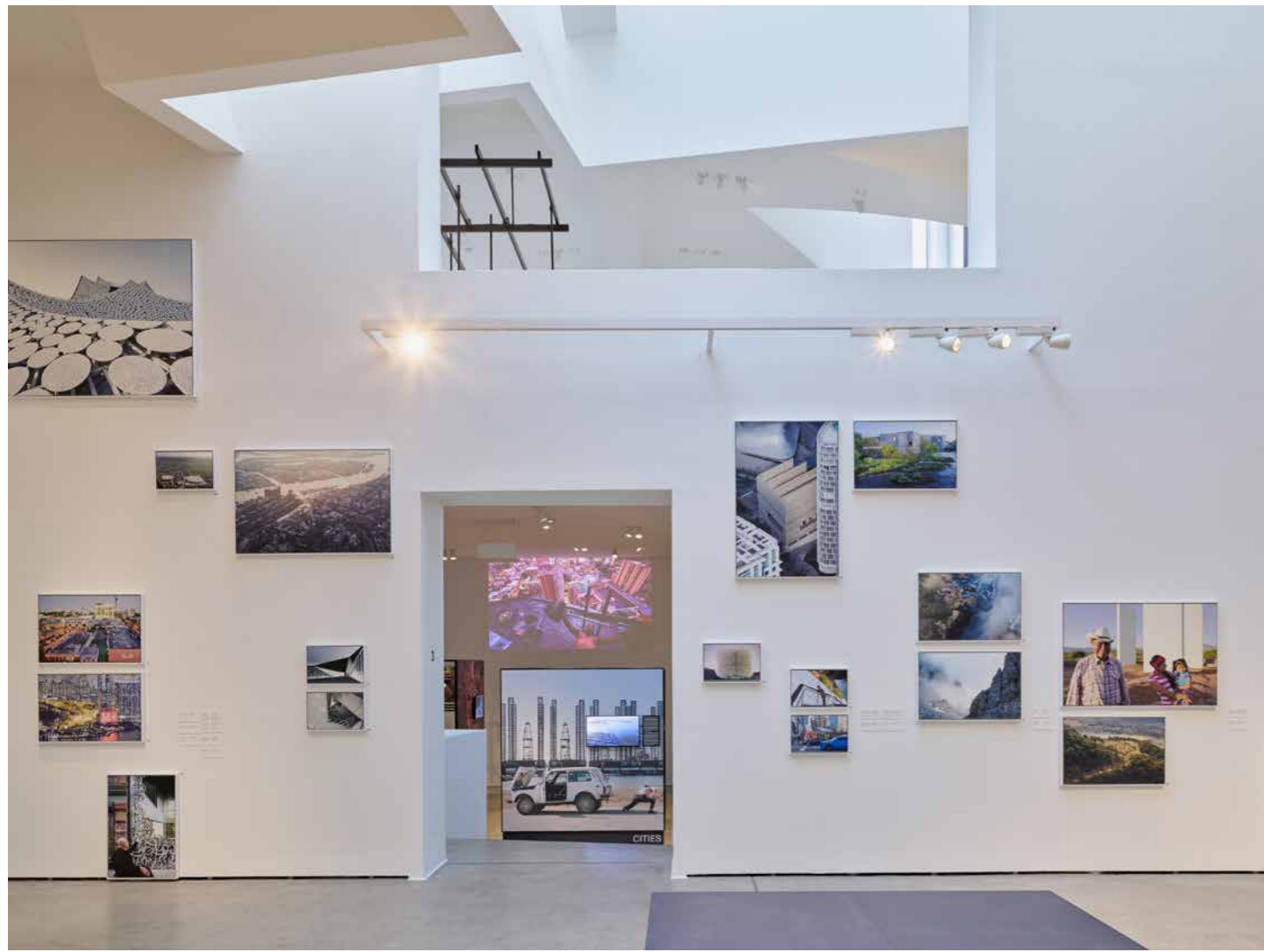


Installation Shots

IWAN BAAH
MOMENTE DER
ARCHITEKTUR
MOMENTS IN
ARCHITECTURE

A large, three-dimensional black metal grid structure is the central focus of the exhibition. It is composed of vertical and horizontal bars forming a series of rectangular frames. Various architectural photographs and blue-tinted panels are suspended from the grid at different heights and positions. The images include people working on construction sites, architectural models, and abstract geometric patterns. The structure is supported by several vertical posts that rest on small metal feet on the floor.







PERSPEKTIVEN PERSPECTIVES

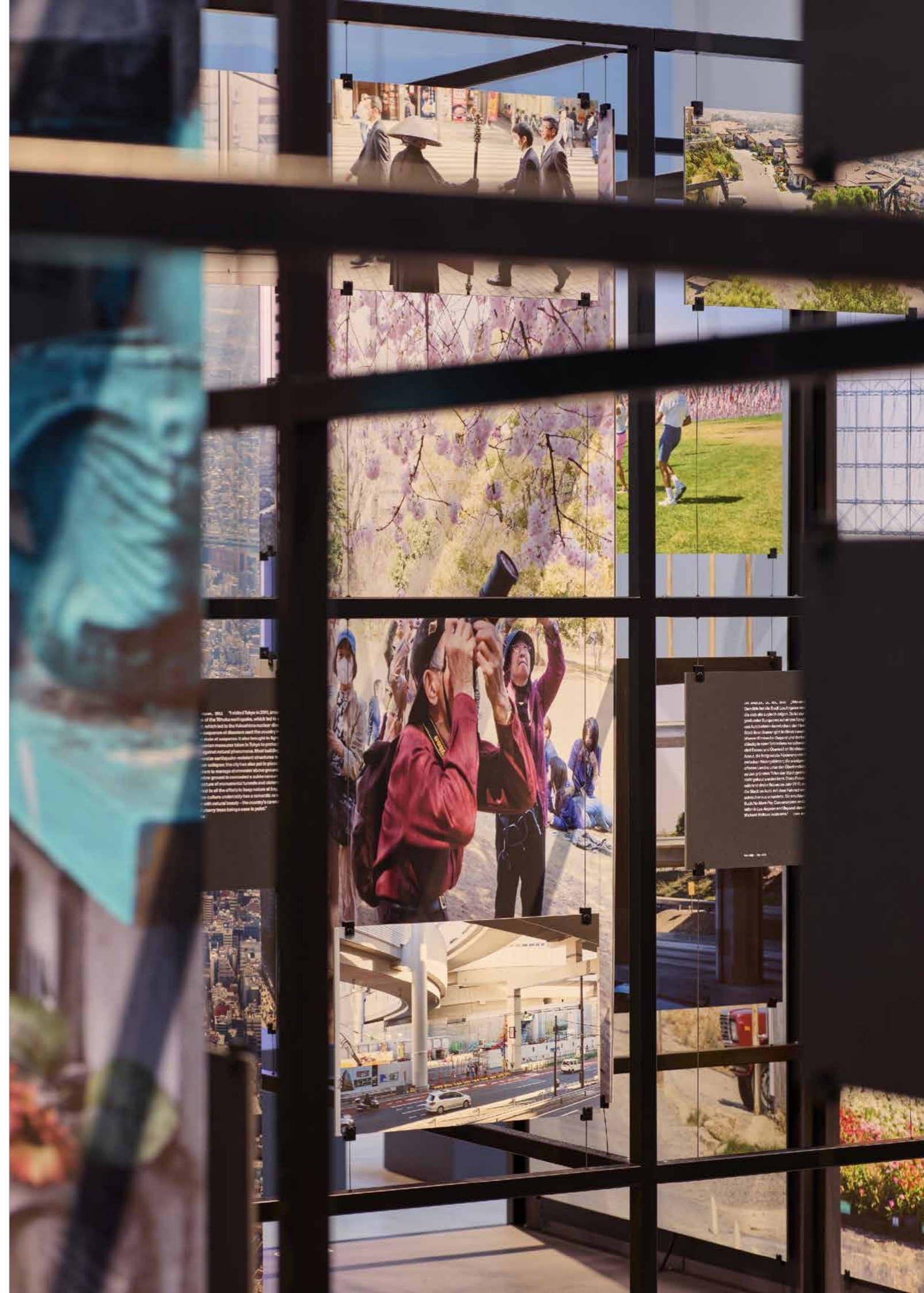
Überall über dem Meeresspiegel, Architekturprojekte...
Das Projekt ist ein...
Das Projekt ist ein...
Das Projekt ist ein...

2

3







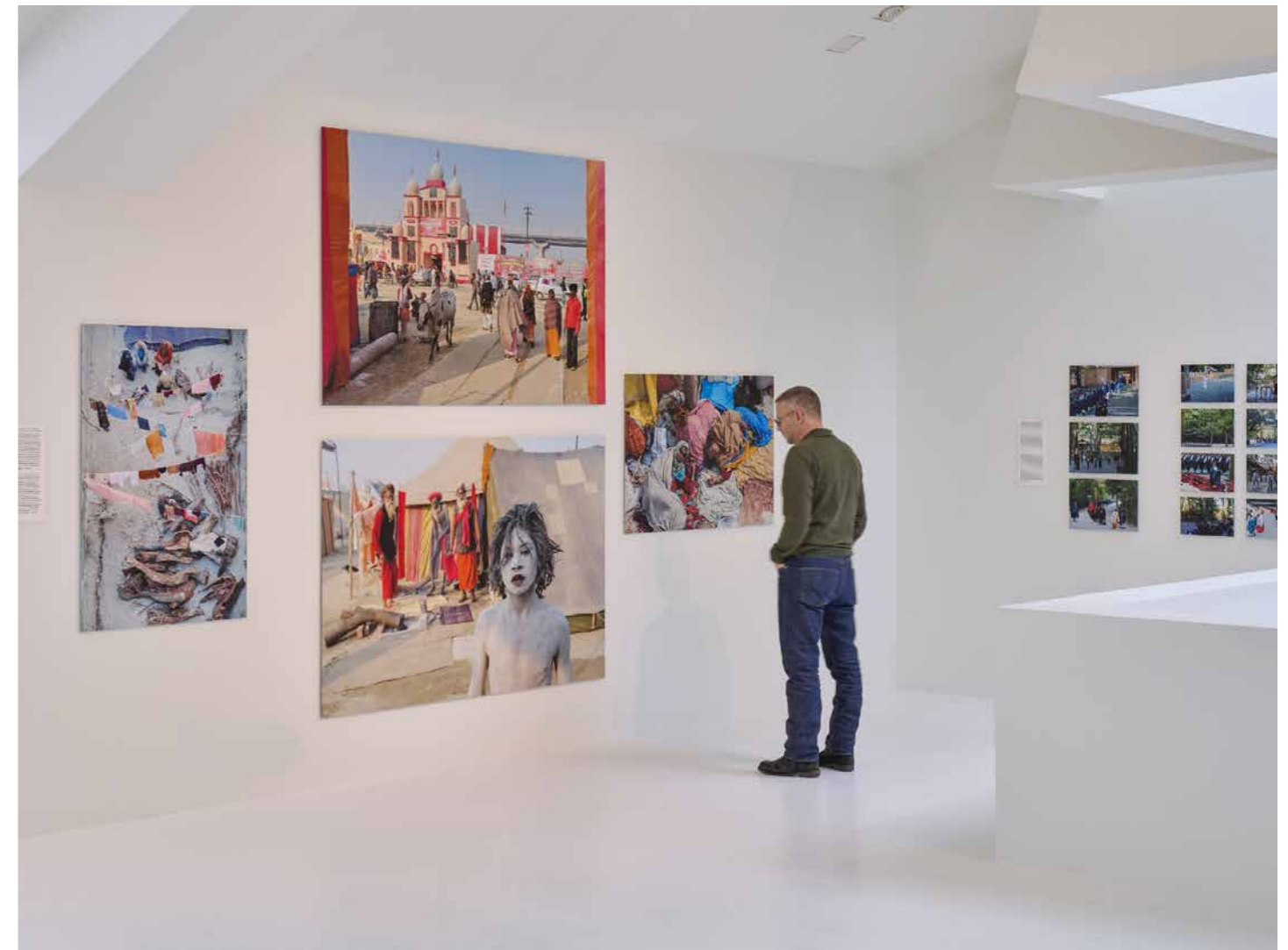


KONTINUITÄTEN

Die Kontinuität ist ein zentraler Begriff in der Kunstgeschichte. Er bezeichnet die Fortdauer von künstlerischen Stilen, Motiven oder Themen über längere Zeiträume hinweg. In der zeitgenössischen Kunst wird dieser Begriff oft kritisch hinterfragt, da die Kunstwelt zunehmend von globalen Einflüssen und kulturellen Austausch geprägt ist. Dennoch bleibt die Kontinuität ein wichtiges Element, um die Entwicklung der Kunst zu verstehen.

CONTINUITÉS

La continuité est un concept central en histoire de l'art. Elle désigne la persistance de styles, motifs ou thèmes artistiques sur de longues périodes. Dans l'art contemporain, ce terme est souvent remis en question, car le monde de l'art est de plus en plus influencé par des échanges culturels globaux. Néanmoins, la continuité reste un élément clé pour saisir l'évolution de l'art.





Video

Iwan Baan Moments in Architecture

**Vitra Design Museum
21.10.2023 – 03.03.2024**



**Isaac Fola-Alade, Tadao Ando, Tatiana Bilbao
Estudio, Bjarke Ingels Group (BIG), Alfred
Boeke, Christo & Jeanne-Claude, Le Corbusier,
DEMOGO, Diller Scofidio + Renfro, Balkrishna
Doshi, Olafur Eliasson, Ensemble Studio, Sou
Fujimoto Architects, Frank Gehry, Grafton
Architects, Heatherwick Studio, Herzog & de
Meuron, Junya Ishigami, Arata Isozaki, Toyo
Ito & Associates, Architects, Kéré Architecture,
Jean Francois Lamoureux, Jean-Louis Marin,
Michael Maltzan Architecture, MASS Design
Group, Oscar Niemeyer, Ryue Nishizawa,
NLÉ, Ateliers Jean Nouvel, OMA, SANAA,
SelgasCano, SO-IL, SO-IL FREAKS, SOM, Steven
Holl Architects, Studio Mumbai, URBANA,
Rachel Whiteread, Zaha Hadid Architects**

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