



THE UNIVERSITY of EDINBURGH
Edinburgh College of Art

UOA C13

ARCHITECTURE, BUILT
ENVIRONMENT AND PLANNING



RESEARCHERS

Mark Dorrian & Adrian Hawker

OUTPUT TITLE

Metis : On the Surface

OUTPUT TYPE

Exhibition

DATE

2014 – 2015

01 / STATEMENT



FIG. 1
Exhibition entrance, Arkitetskolen
Gallery, Aarhus, Denmark, 2014.
Photo by Metis.

Metis : On the Surface is an exhibition of seven projects that range from installations to large urban restructuring proposals. The exhibition and the projects are by Metis, an atelier for art, architecture and urbanism founded by Mark Dorrian and Adrian Hawker at the University of Edinburgh in 1997.

The projects aim to connect architectural research, teaching and practice. As this exhibition attests, the projects research the city and the complex ways in which it is imagined, inhabited, and representationally encoded. The research produces rich, multi-layered outputs that resist immediate consumption and that are instead gradually unfurled over time through interaction with them. The work demonstrates a poetic but critical approach to the city that is sensitive to the city's cultural memory but is also articulated in relation to its possible futures.

Working between two contrasting scales, the exhibition itself constitutes an original research output. The seven projects have been redrawn, crafted, reinterpreted and combined into a complex topographical surface.

Visitors entering the exhibition encounter a vast drawing on which they walk, carpeting the floor of the gallery. Through this, an internal terrain is inserted within the display space, which is then inhabited by glass display tables that hold detailed drawings and models. The viewers of the exhibition thus not only see a series of projects, but find themselves – as they travel across scale and space – active participants in a speculative architectural imaginary, one in which the architectural object is always in communication with the broader historical, cultural, material and representational conditions of the city or landscape within which it is positioned.

The exhibitions ran from:

10 October – 14 November 2014.
Arkitetskolen Gallery, Aarhus, Denmark.

27 March – 6 April 2015.
Sculpture Court, Edinburgh College of Art,
(ECA), Edinburgh, UK.

02 / RESEARCH DIMENSIONS



FIG. 2
Metis : On the Surface installation,
Arkitektskolen, Aarhus, 2014.
Photo courtesy of Gert Skærland.

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FIG. 3
Metis : On the Surface installation,
Arkitektskolen, Aarhus, 2014.
Photo courtesy of Gert Skærland.



FIGS. 4-7
Metis: On the Surface installation,
Arkitektskolen, Aarhus, 2014.
Photos courtesy of Gert Skærhund.



FIG. 8
Metis : On the Surface opening
night, ECA, Edinburgh, 2015.
Photo by Metis.

03 / ORIGINALITY

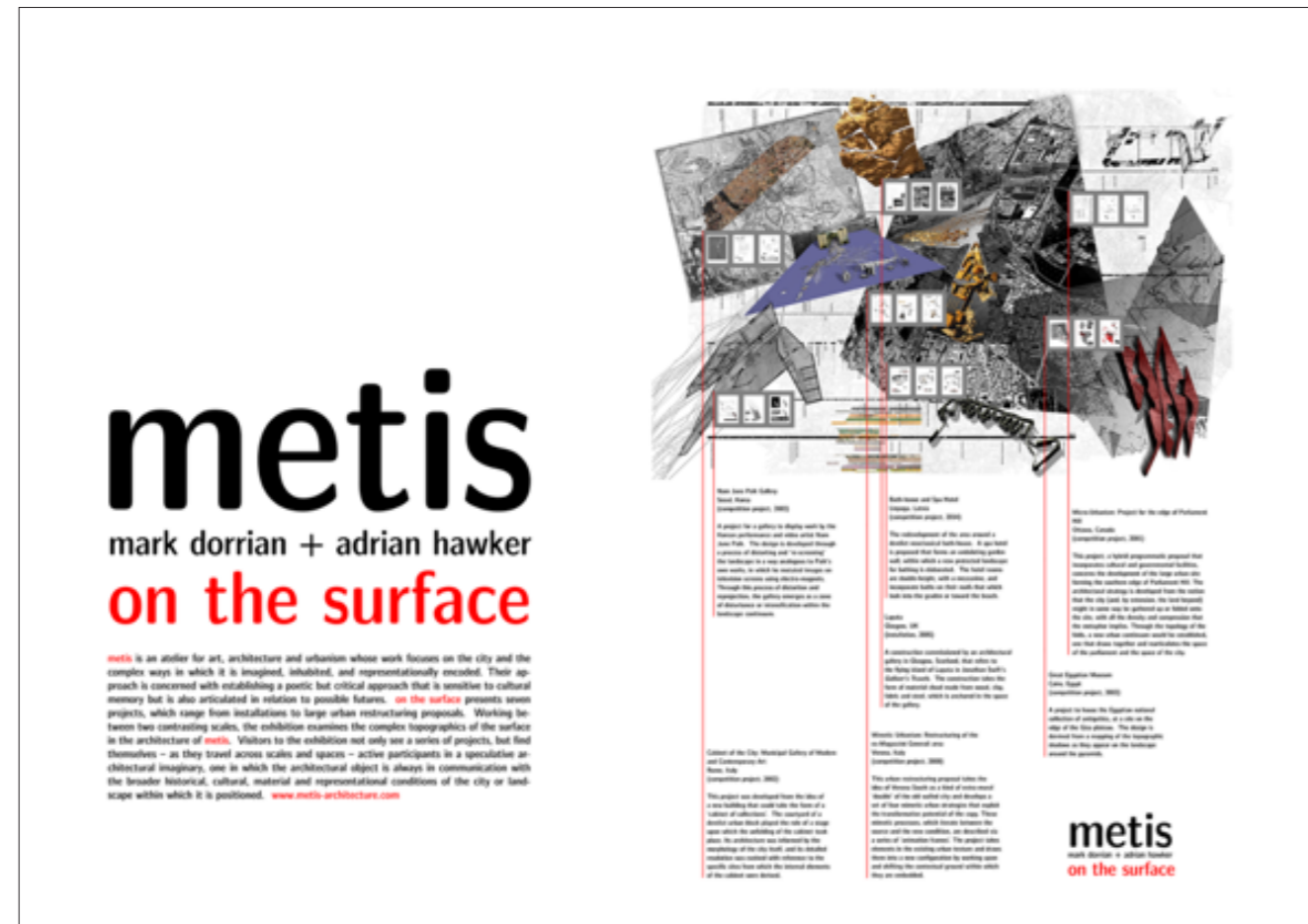


FIG. 9
Metis : On the Surface exhibition
brochure. Design by Metis.

In Bruno Latour’s influential essay ‘Why Has Critique Run Out of Steam?’, he develops an argument about the relation between ‘objects’ and ‘things’.

Objects are on the side of ‘matters of fact’ (determined, decided, mastered, inert), but things are sites where complex ‘gatherings’ of relations occur.

In *Metis : On the Surface* Metis investigated and demonstrated how to construct an architectural exhibition that works as a ‘thing’.

Any exhibition that involves a number of works is inevitably a complex gathering that brings together not only exhibits, within which multiple relations are already enfolded, but also people (producers, curators, technicians, visitors, etc.). However, this thingliness is often systematically suppressed – by, for example, curatorial approaches that take as their imperative the pre-eminence of the pristine exhibited object. *Metis : On the Surface* provides a model for how to restore thingliness to exhibitions and the curatorial task.

04 / RIGOUR

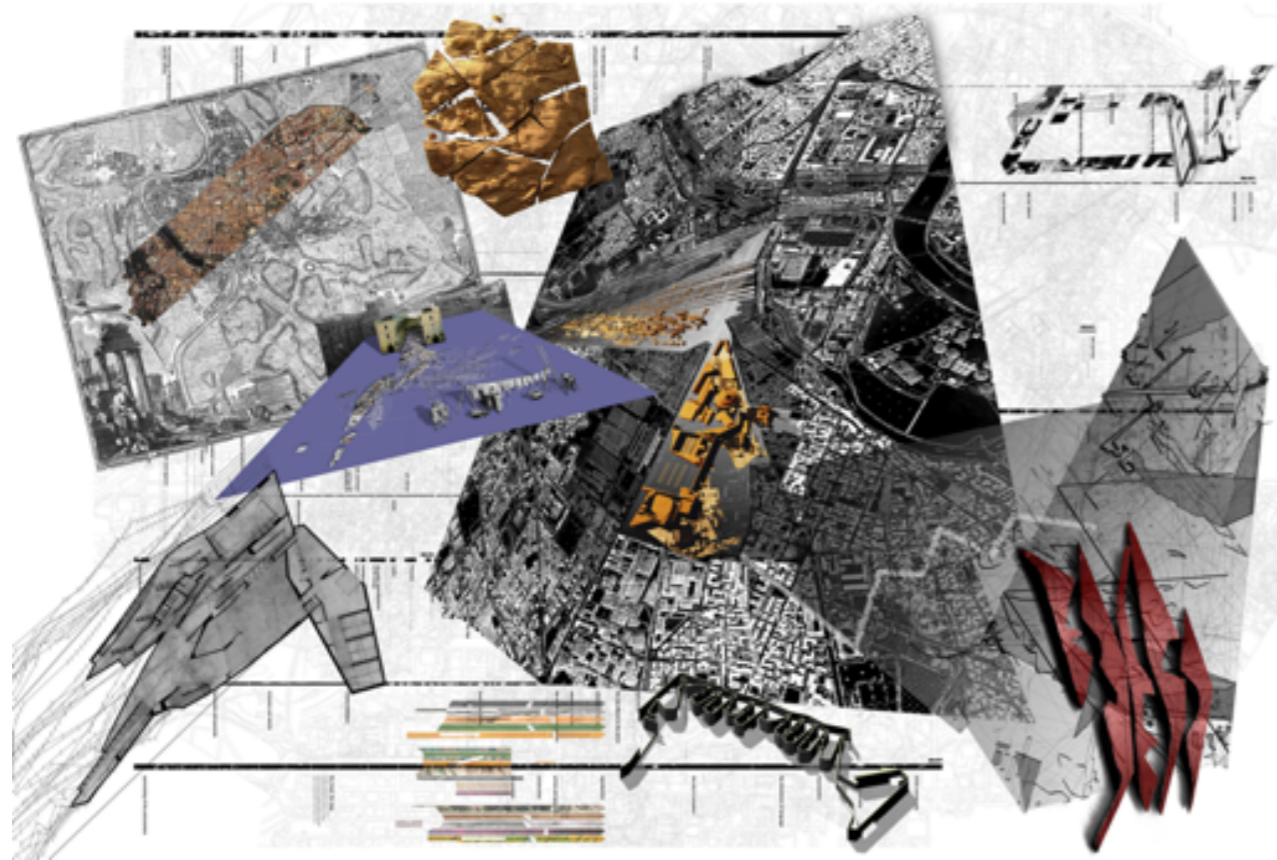
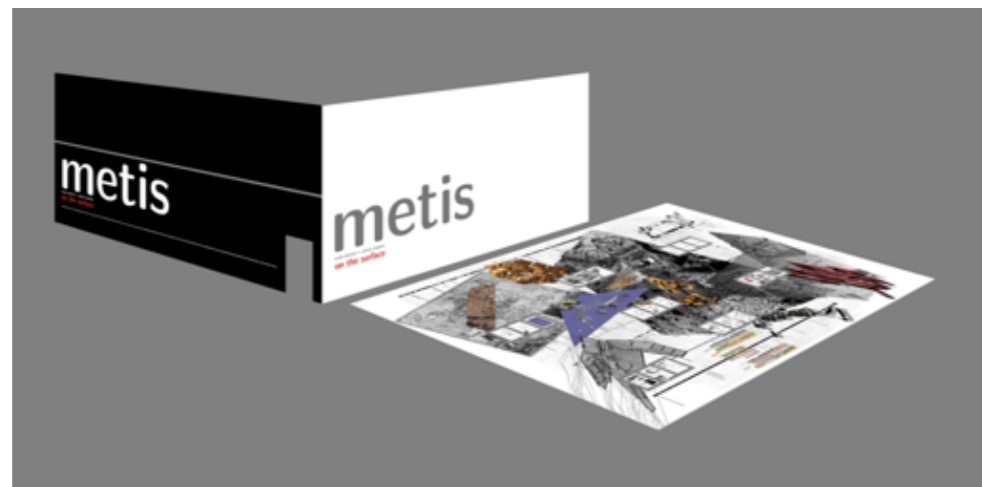


FIG. 10
Design of floor drawing of *Metis : On the Surface*, Arkitektskolen, Aarhus, by Metis.

FIG. 11
Concept drawing for *Metis : On the Surface*, Arkitektskolen, Aarhus, by Metis.



In the case of *Metis : On The Surface*, Metis sought to make the thingliness of the exhibition legible, through establishing a display strategy whereby all that was shown would exist on horizontal, as opposed to vertical, surfaces.

In the first instance, this meant engaging the overall space of the gallery with a 16 x 10.5m floor drawing, manufactured for the exhibition as a textile surface (in collaboration with the Danish company EGE). This established a zone, a kind of mat, within the building that acted as a space of encounter and gathering place for both projects and visitors to the exhibition. Upon this, not only did people interact with each other and the displayed work, but also the projects themselves encountered one another in new and reconfigured ways. It was crucial for the exhibition idea that visitors could step onto the floor drawing and be visually immersed in its laterally-spreading constructed field, thereby losing the kind of distanced relation that would allow the object of vision to be optically encompassed and settled.

The movement between scales was introduced through the over-scaled font of the exhibition title and the single line of miniature text that introduced the exhibition both through its content and as a graphic datum line that corresponded to the surface of the display tables which Metis designed. For each of the seven projects, a new set of three drawing compositions was prepared. Working in close collaboration with Richard Collins of ECA, highly crafted architectural models were fabricated for six of the seven projects (the seventh represented by fragments of the installation it depicted).

Floor drawing

Metis engaged the overall space of the gallery with a 16 x 10.5m floor drawing, manufactured for the exhibition as a textile surface.

Drawings

For each of the seven projects, a new set of three 560 x 760mm drawing compositions was prepared and printed on to cotton-rag paper.

See pages 20 – 33.

Floor drawing

FIG. 12
Test samples of *Metis : On the Surface* floor drawing produced by Ege Carpets. Photo by Metis.



FIG. 13
Test samples of *Metis : On the Surface* floor drawing produced by Ege Carpets. Photo by Metis.



FIG. 15
Visualisation of initial exhibition design, by Metis.

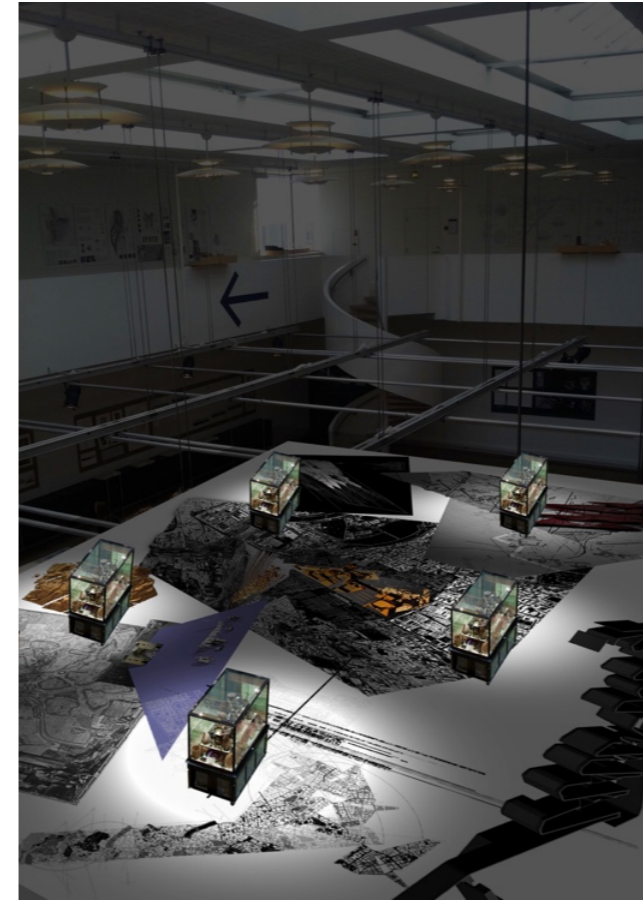


FIG. 16
Plan of floor drawing and display tables in gallery space, by Metis.

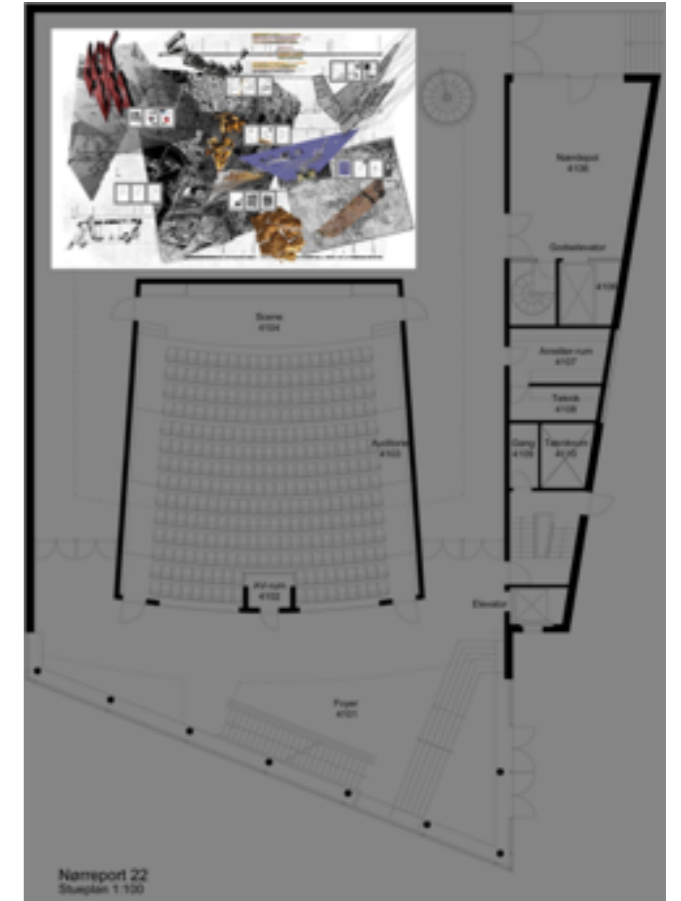


FIG. 14
Panorama of floor drawing in gallery space, 2014, by Metis.

Text

The movement between scales was introduced through the over-scaled font of the exhibition title and the single line of miniature text that introduced the exhibition both through its content and as a graphic datum line that corresponded to the surface of the display tables which Metis designed.

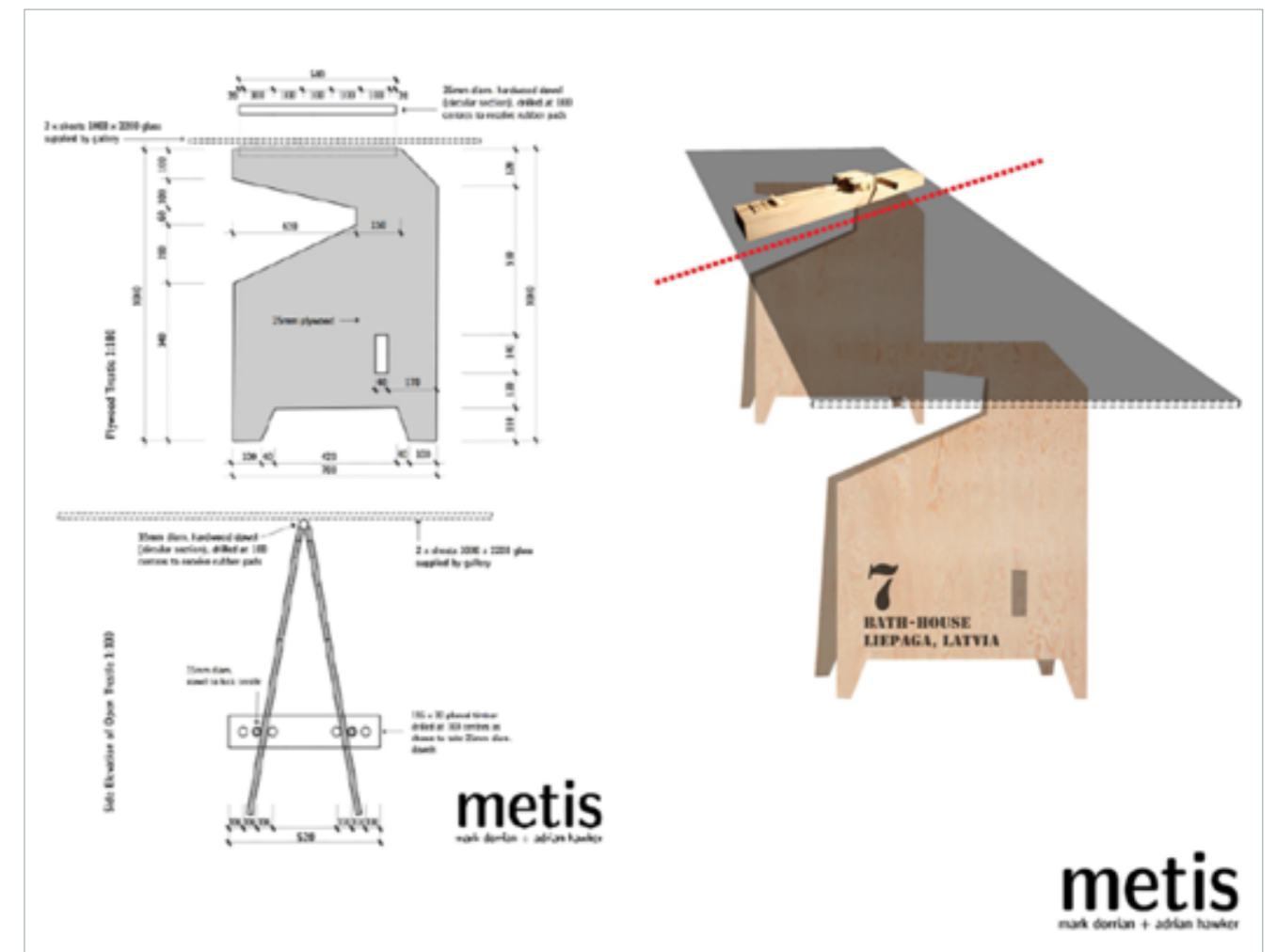
FIGS. 17–18
Text installation (above) and design (below) by Metis for gallery internal walls, Arkitektskolen, Aarhus, 2014. Photo and drawing by Metis.



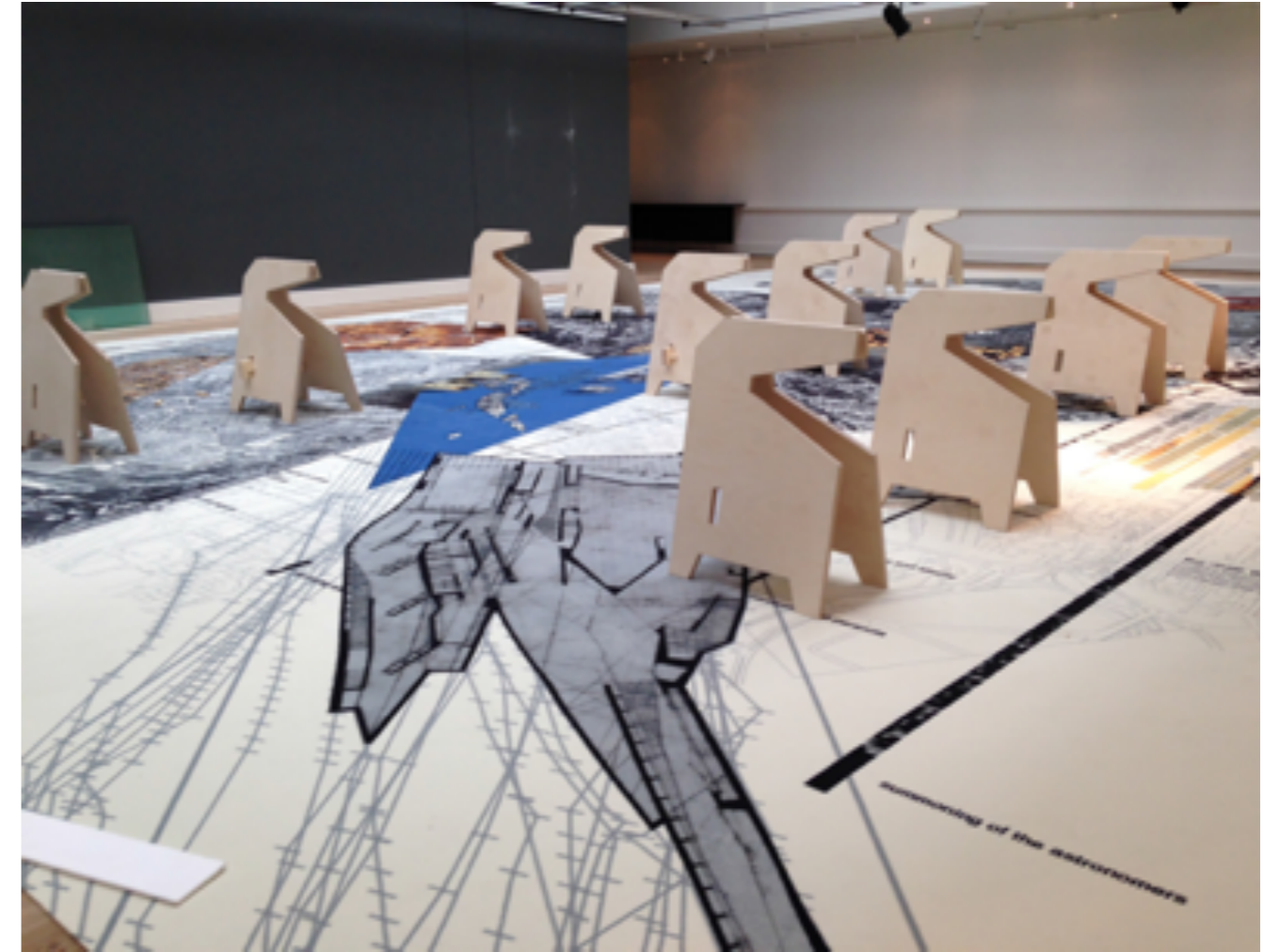
Display tables

Metis designed display tables for each of the seven exhibited works. The trestle-like adjustable plywood legs elevate two sheets of glass (1000 x 2020mm) to a reading height of 1060mm. Models were placed on the surface and drawings sandwiched between the glass allowing a simultaneous reading of small, fine representational detail against the greater field of the floor drawing.

FIG. 19
Working drawings of display tables for construction by the workshops of Arkitektskolen, Aarhus, by Metis.



Display tables



FIGS. 20–22
Installation of display tables at the
gallery of Arkitektskolen, Aarhus,
2014. Photos by Metis.

Drawings: Project 3

Re-Birth of the Bath House, Liepaja, Latvia.

The redevelopment of the area around a derelict neoclassical bath-house. A spa hotel is proposed that forms an undulating garden wall, within which a new protected landscape for bathing is elaborated.

The hotel rooms are double-height, with a mezzanine, and incorporate baths on their roofs which look into the garden towards the beach.

FIGS. 31-33
Re-Birth of the Bath House,
exhibition sheets 1-3, by Metis.

FIG. 34
Re-birth of the Bath House,
drawings and model in exhibition.
Photo by Metis.

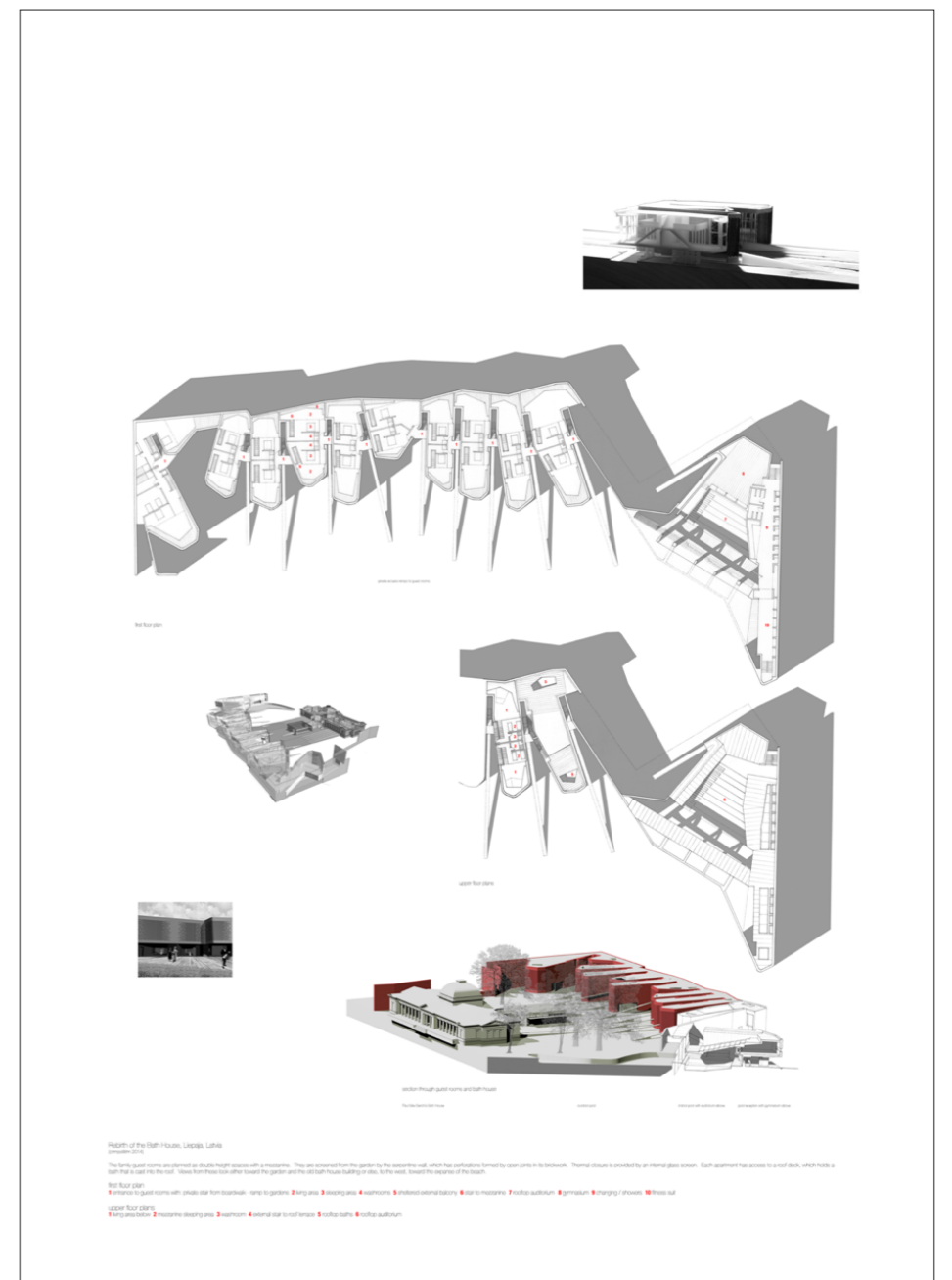
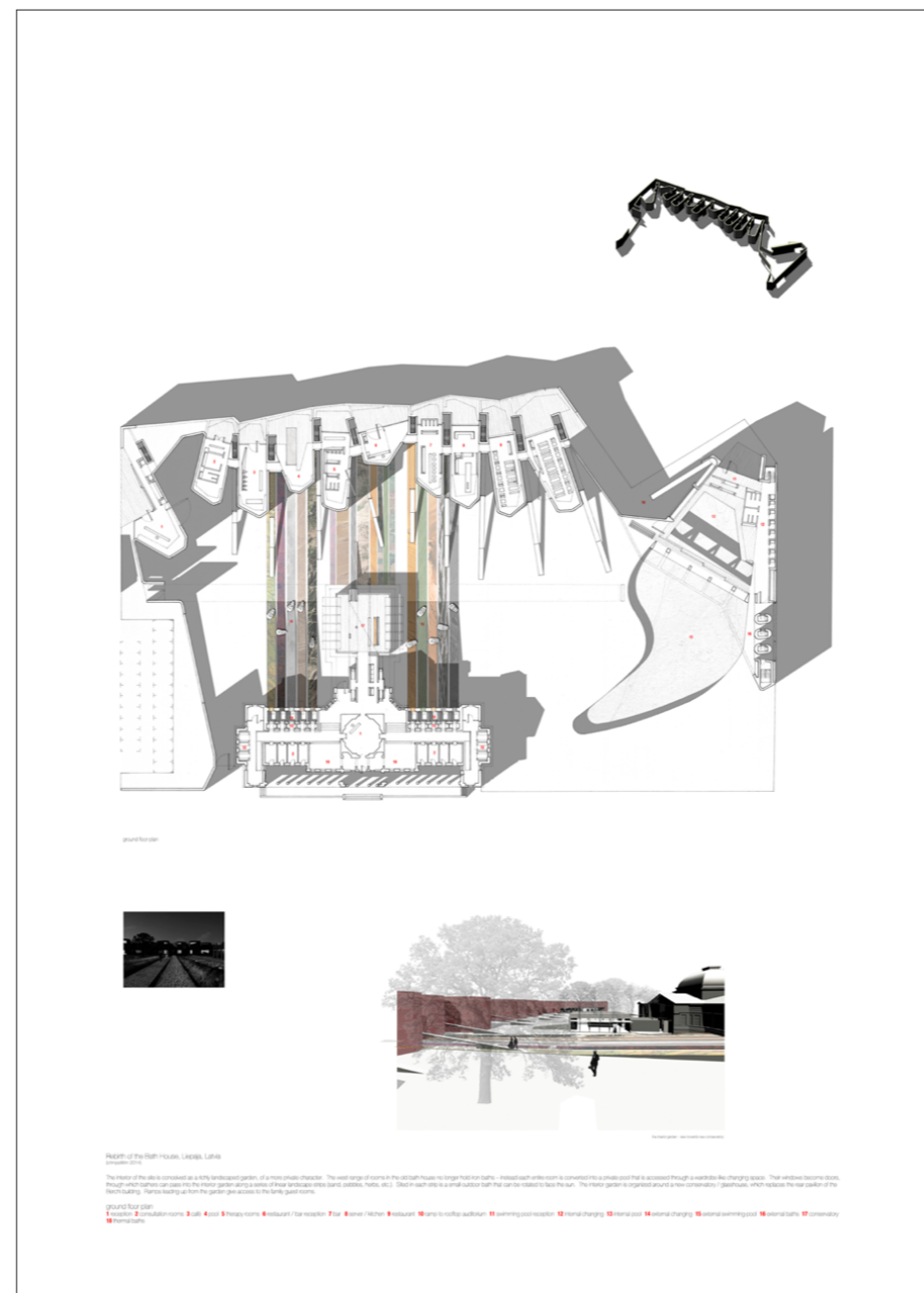
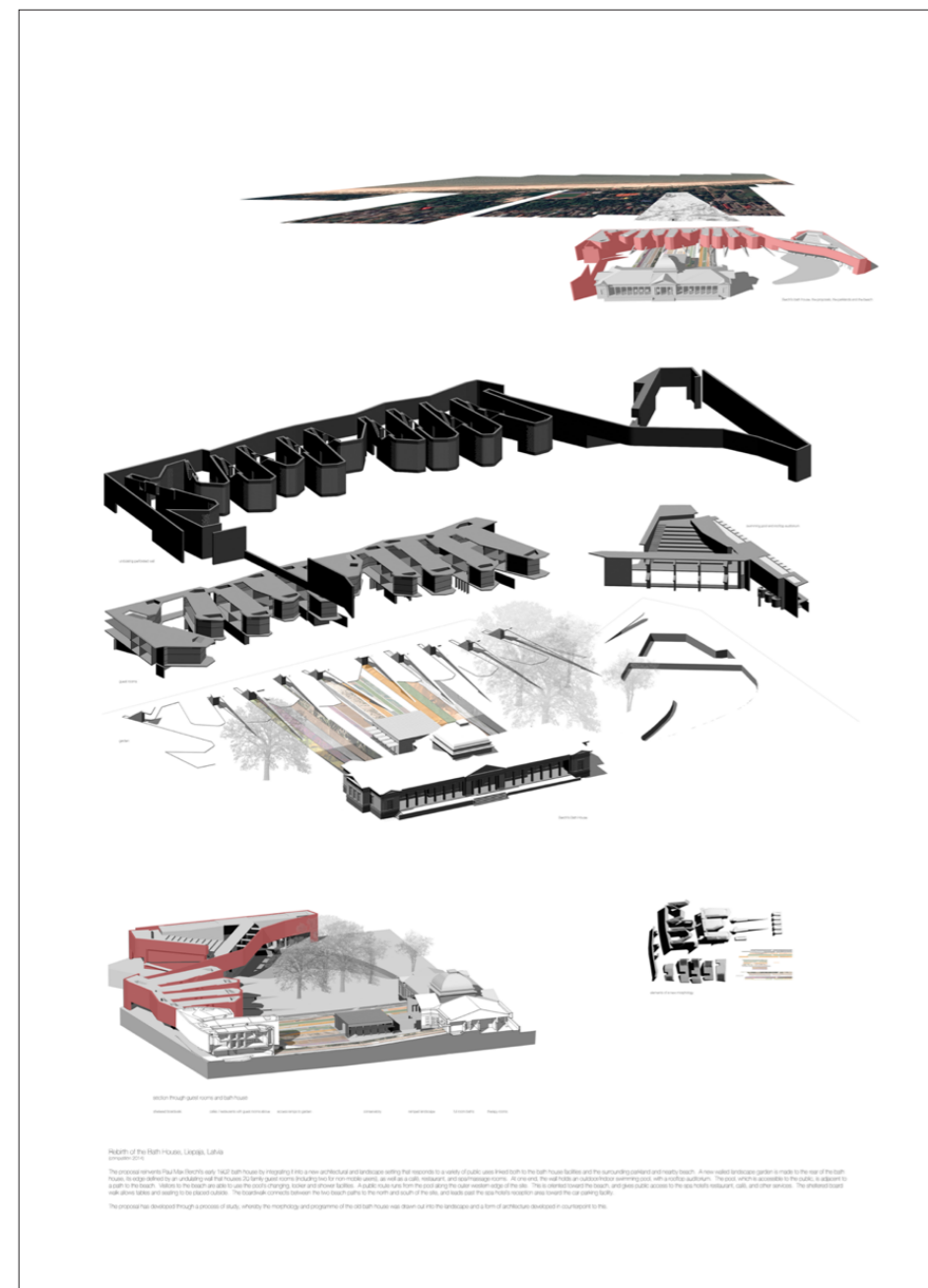
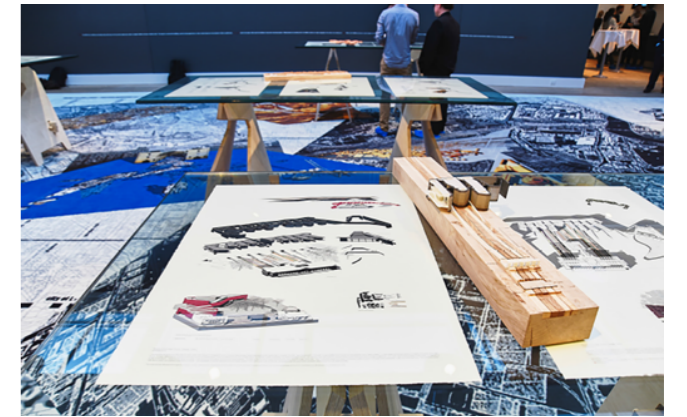
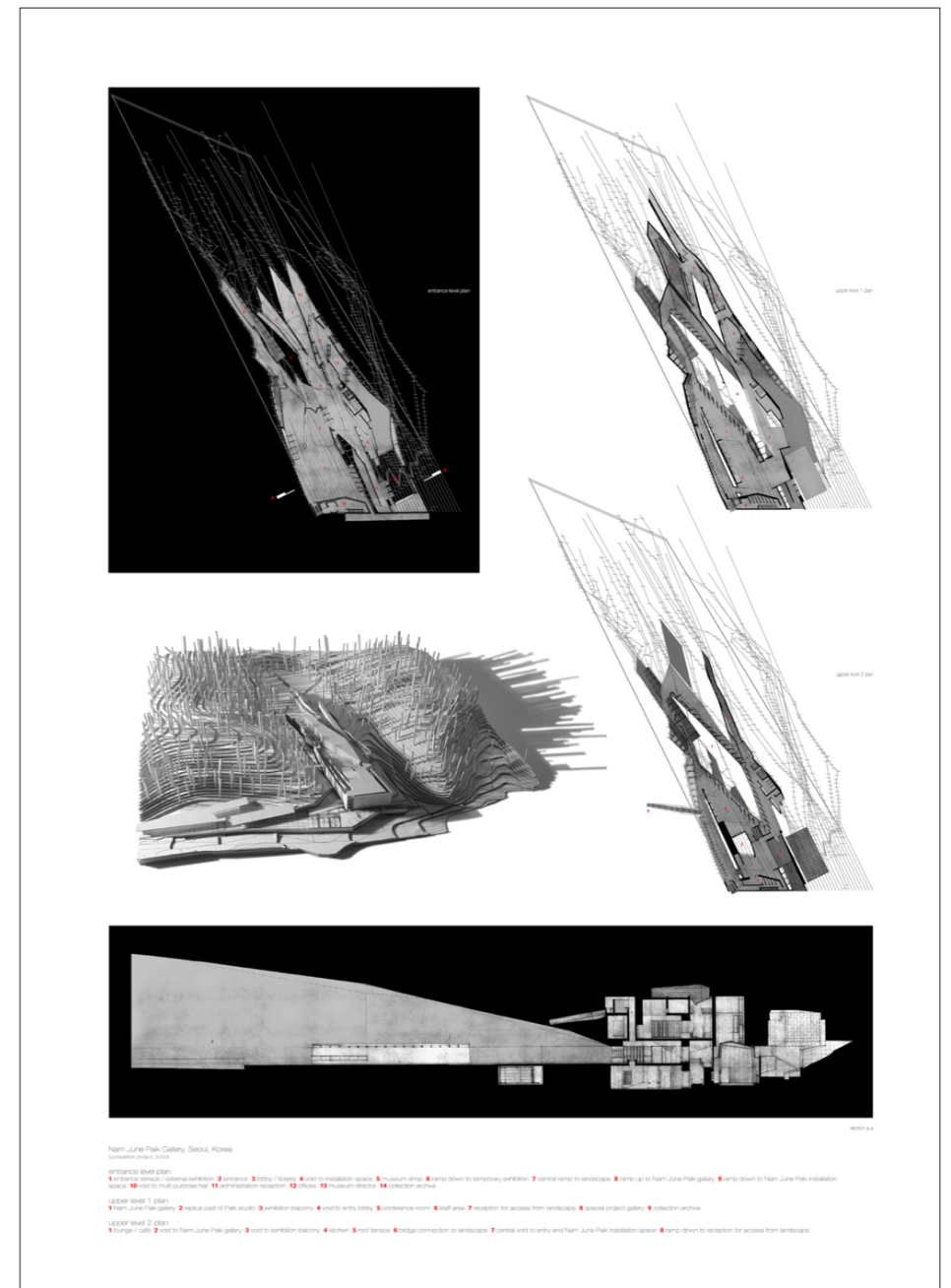
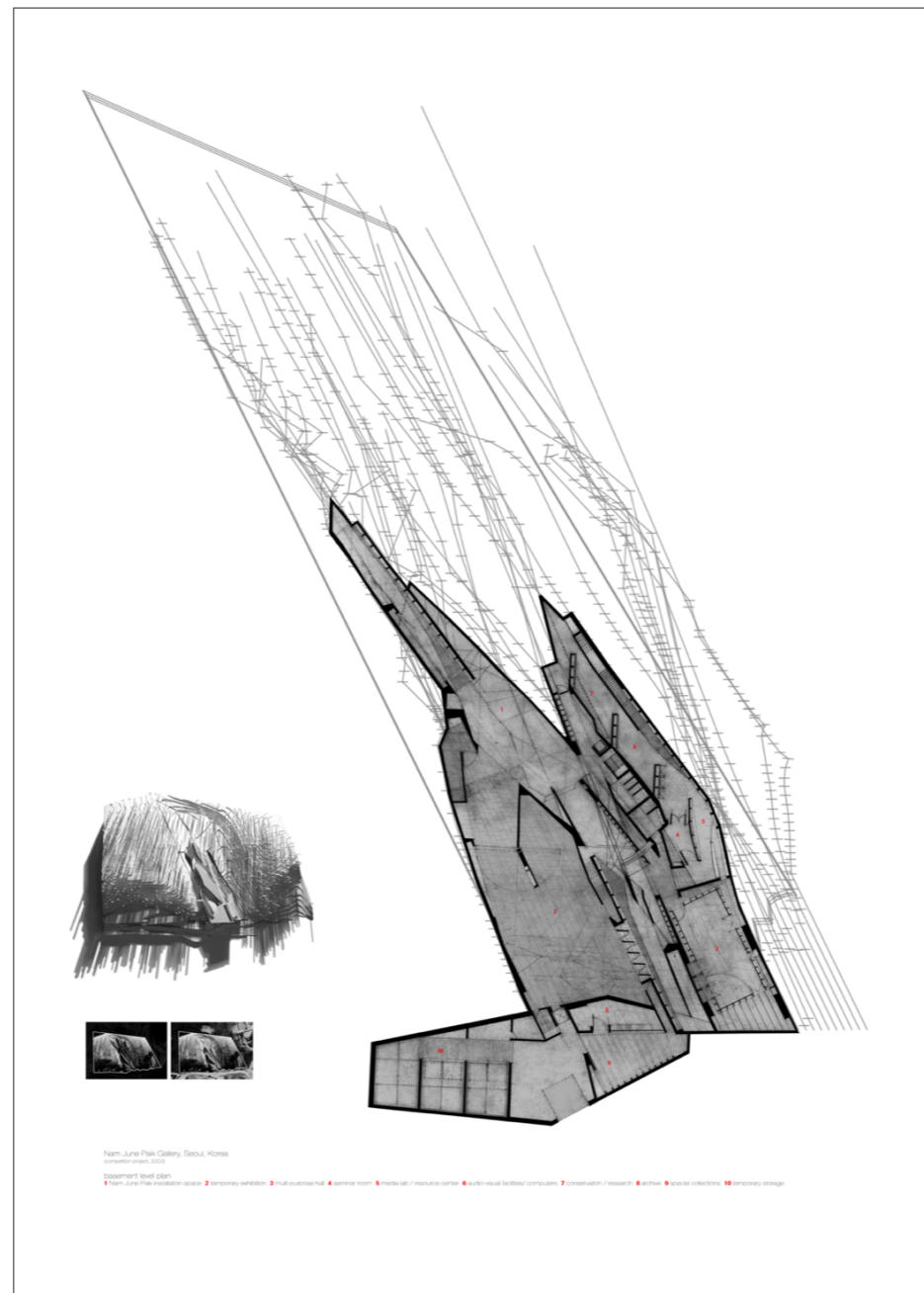
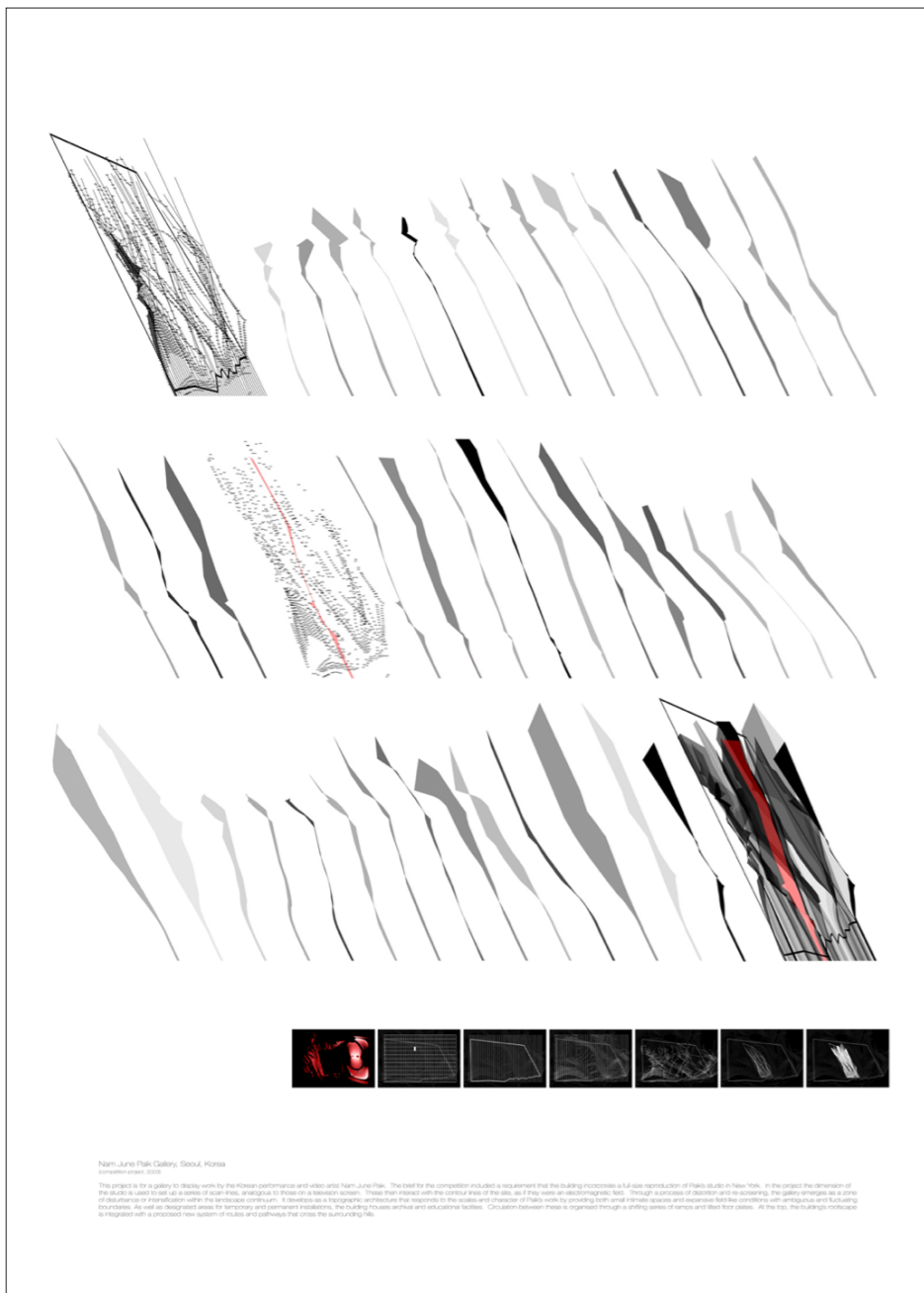




FIG. 35
Nam June Paik Gallery,
 drawings and model in
 exhibition. Photo by Metis.

FIGS. 36-38
Nam June Paik Gallery,
 exhibition
 sheets 1-3, by Metis.



Drawings: Project 4

Nam June Paik Gallery, Seoul, South Korea.
 A project for a gallery to display work by the Korean performance and video artist Nam June Paik. The design is developed through a process of distorting and 're-screening' the landscape in a way analogous to Paik's own works, in which he mutated images on television screens using electro-magnets. Through this process of distortion and reprojection, the gallery emerges as a zone of disturbance or intensification within the landscape continuum.

Drawings: Project 5

Micro-Urbanism: Project for the edge of Parliament Hill, Ottawa, Canada.

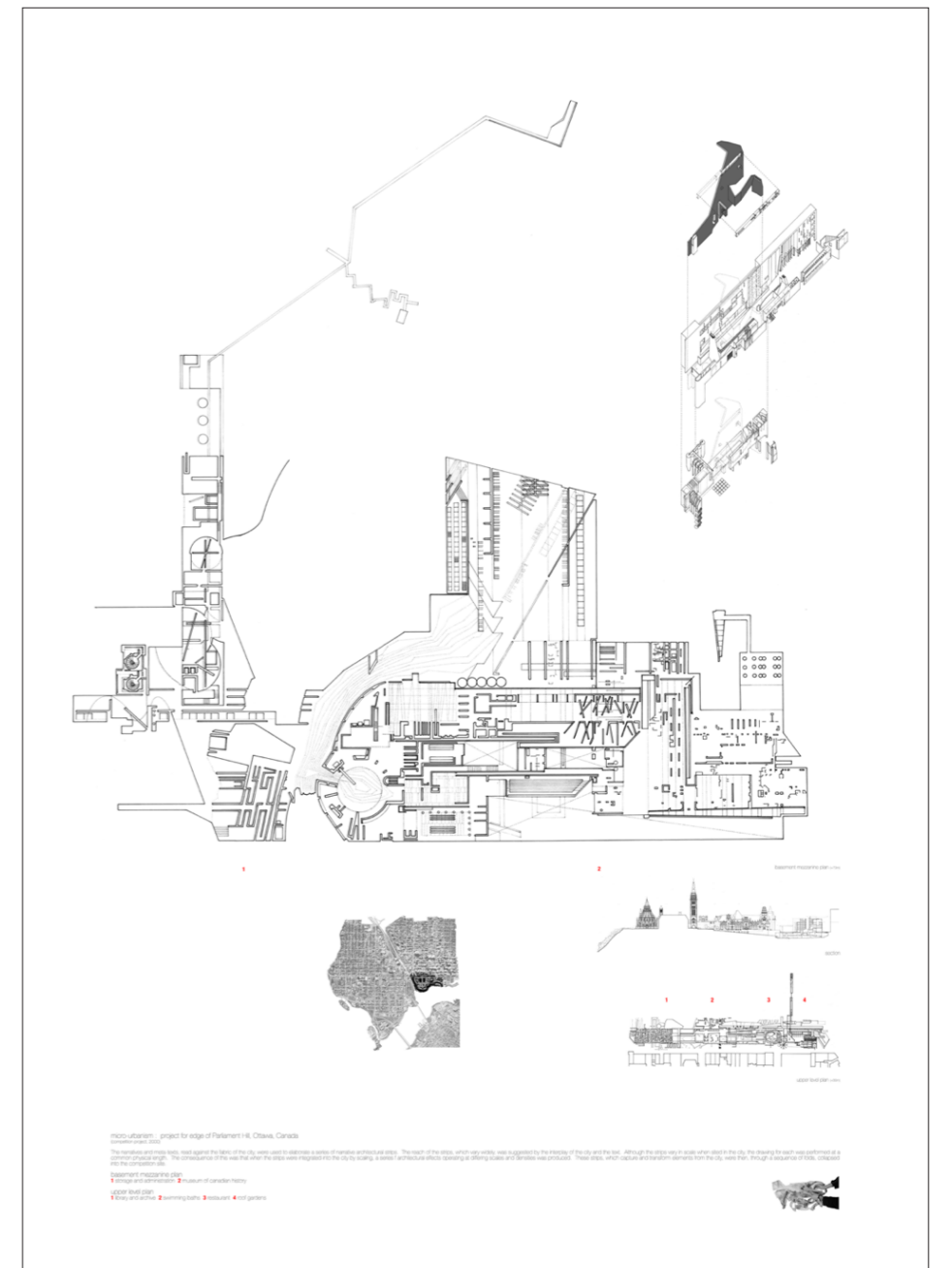
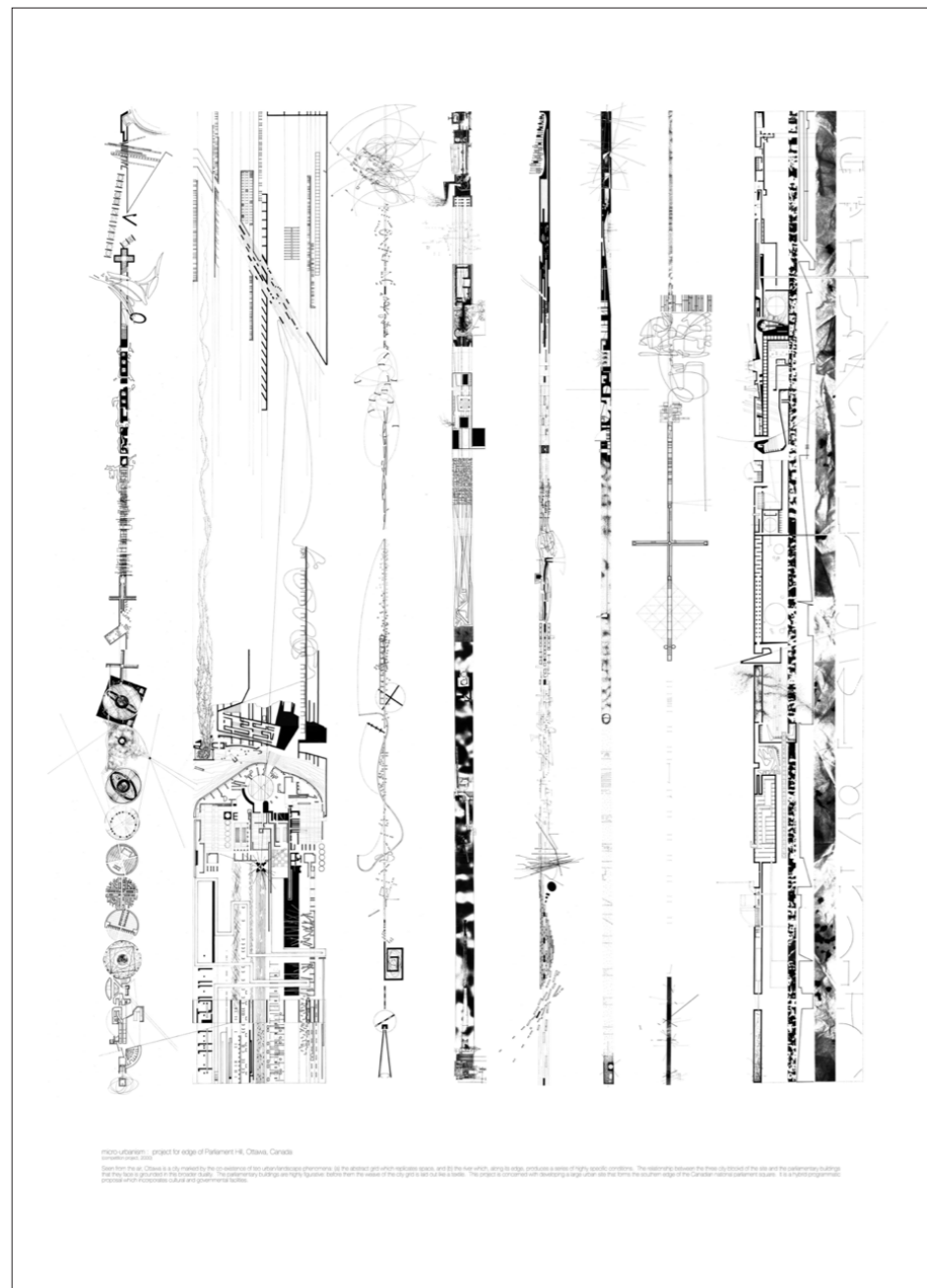
This project, a hybrid programmatic proposal that incorporates cultural and governmental facilities, concerns the development of the large urban site forming the southern edge of Parliament Hill.

The architectural strategy is developed from the notion that the city (and, by extension, the land beyond) might in some way be gathered up or folded onto the site, with all the density and compression that the metaphor implies. Through the topology of the folds, a new urban continuum would be established, one that draws together and rearticulates the space of the parliament and the space of the city.

FIG. 39
Micro-Urbanism drawings and model in exhibition.
Photo by Metis.



FIGS. 40-42
Micro-Urbanism, exhibition sheets 1-3, by Metis.



Drawings: Project 7

Mimetic Urbanism: Restructuring of the ex-Magazzini Generali Area, Verona, Italy.

The urban restructuring proposal takes the idea of Verona South as a kind of extra-mural 'double' of the old walled city and develops a set of four mimetic strategies that exploit the transformative potential of the copy.

These mimetic processes, which iterate between the source and the new condition, are described via a series of 'animation frames'.

The project takes elements in the existing urban texture and draws them into a new configuration by working upon and shifting the contextual ground within which they are embedded.

FIGS. 47-49
Mimetic Urbanism, exhibition sheets 1-3, by Metis

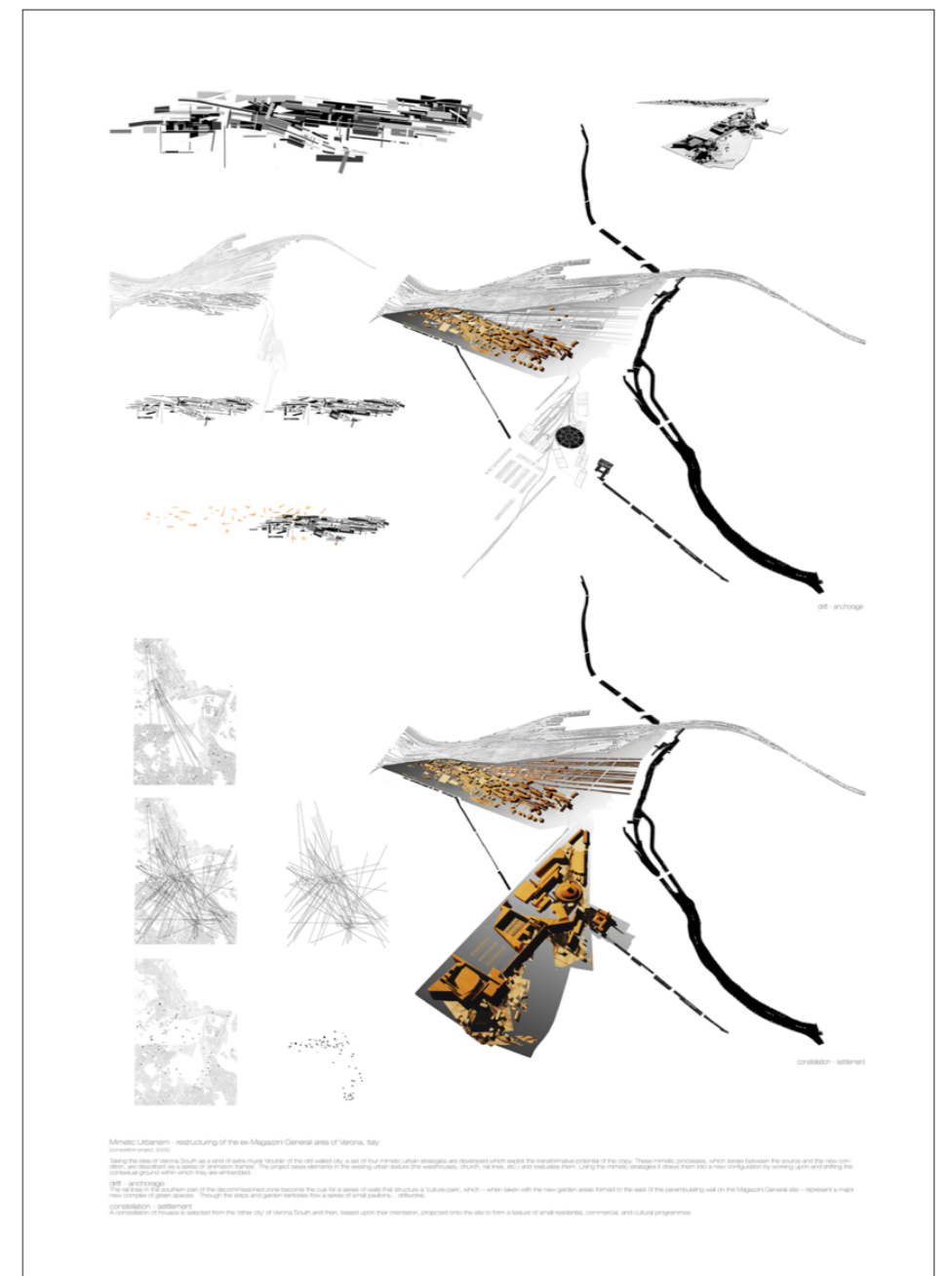
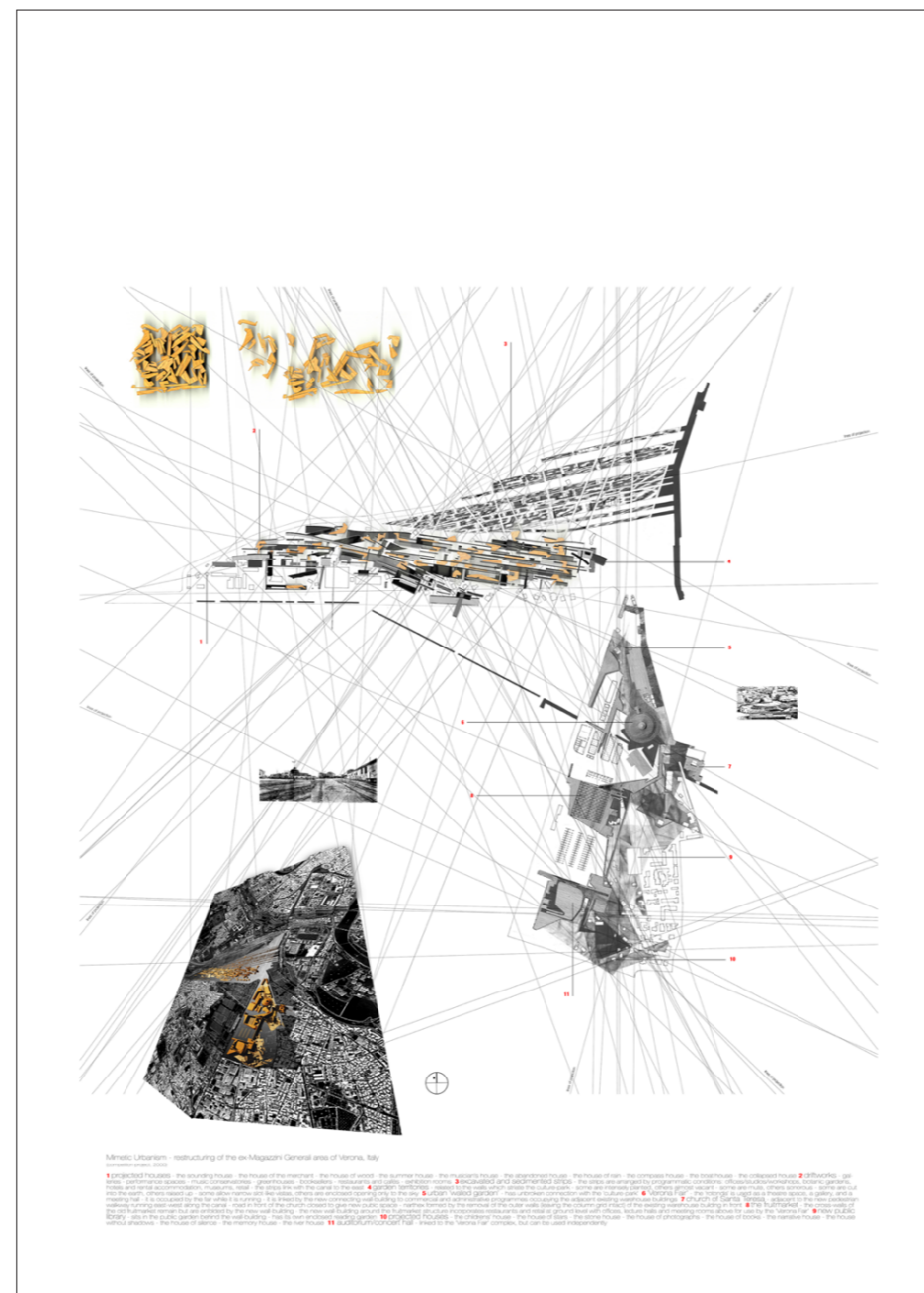
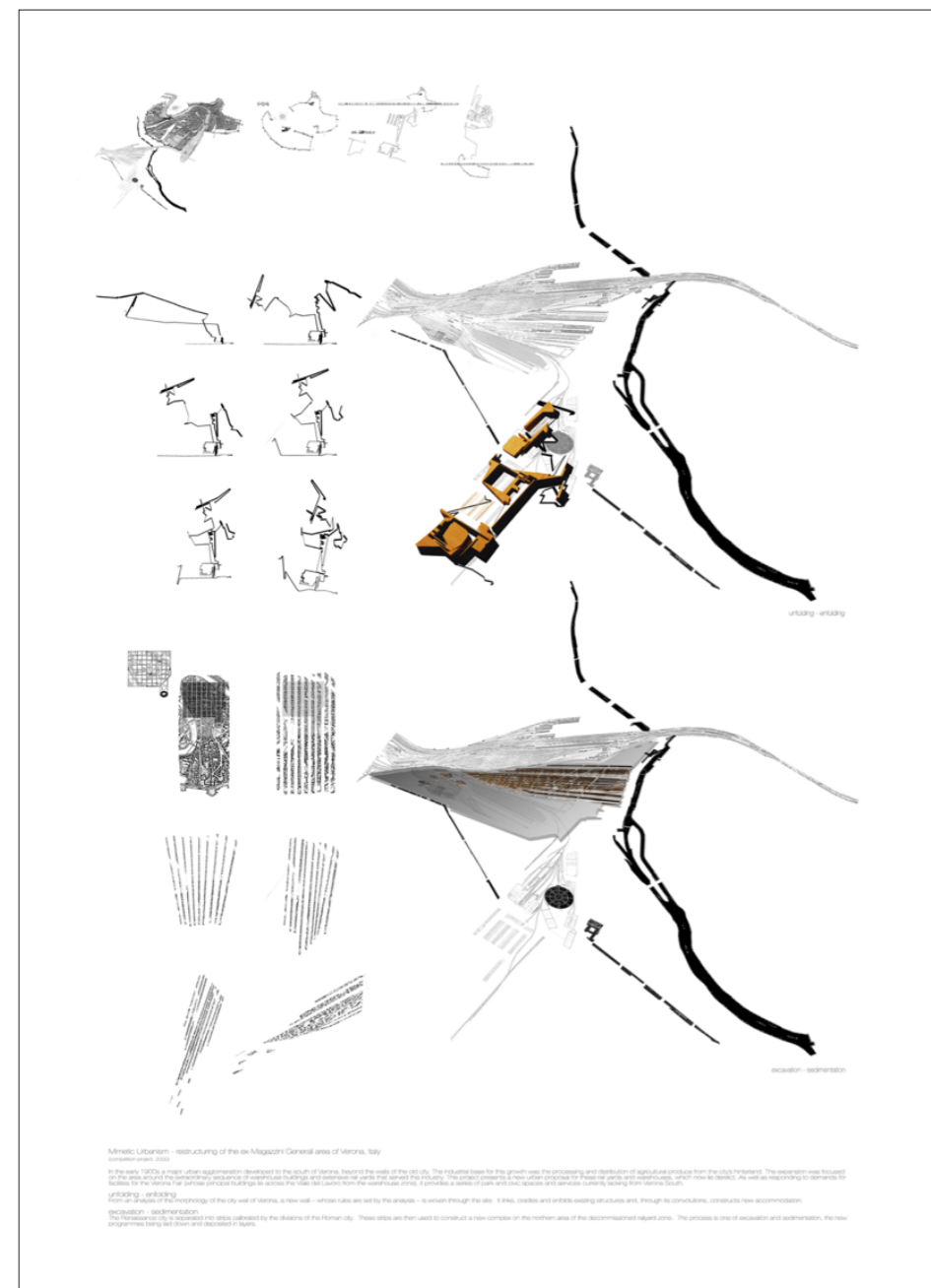


FIG. 50
Mimetic Urbanism, drawings and model in exhibition. Photo by Metis.



Models

Working in close collaboration with Richard Collins of ECA, highly crafted architectural models were designed and fabricated specifically for the exhibition for six of the seven projects (the seventh represented by fragments of the installation it depicted).

In 2019 the Canadian journal *On Site Review* published an essay by Richard Collins on the fabrication of the *Metis : On the Surface* exhibition models.

FIG. 51
Model fragments for *Re-Birth of the Bath House*. Image Metis.

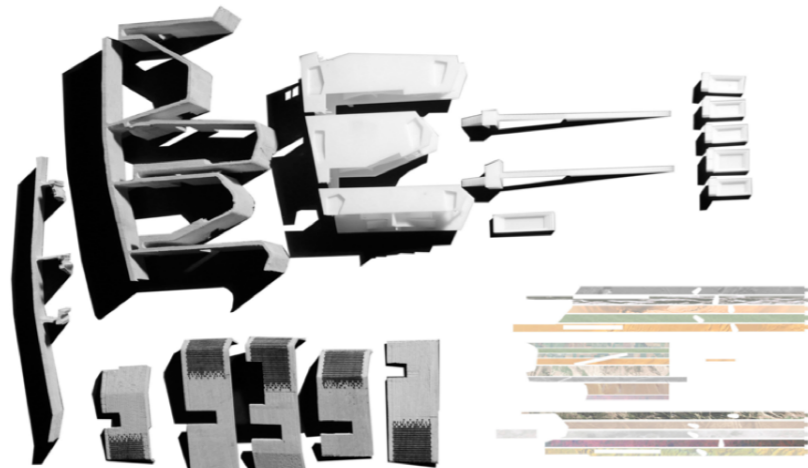
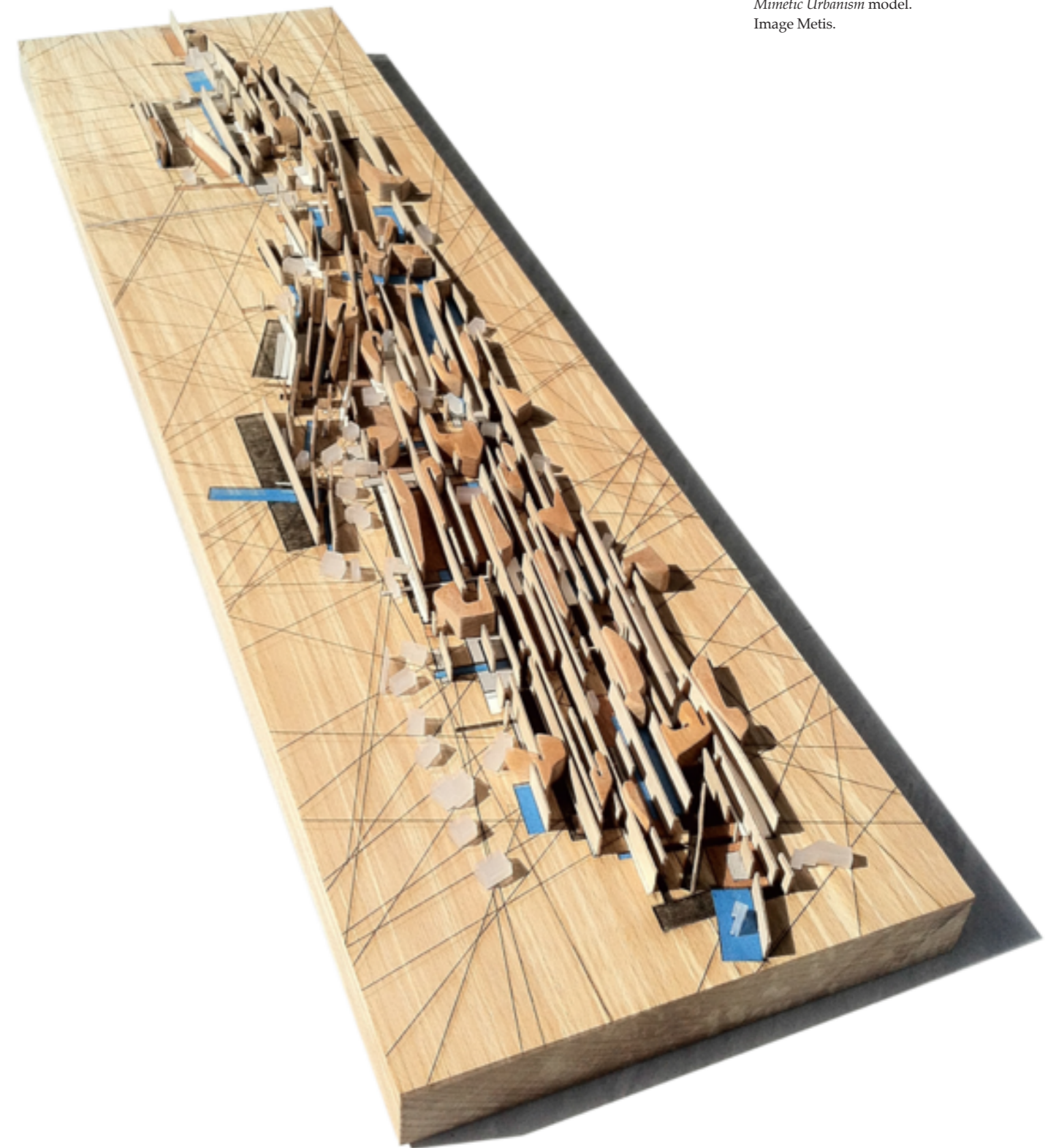


FIG. 52
Metis : On the Surface models under construction in the ECA workshops, 2014. Photo courtesy of Richard Collins.



FIG. 53
Mimetic Urbanism model. Image Metis.



05 / SIGNIFICANCE

The exhibition was instigated by the Danish curator Karen Kjærgaard upon reviewing the published works of Metis.

It has been shared internationally being the subject of academic reviews, papers, publications, lectures and further exhibitions. It was the subject of a 2015 review essay by Claudia Carbone in *ARQ* and appeared in a review of Arkitektskolen Aarhus by *Domus*. It was the thesis of the keynote lecture at the 2015 Interstices Annual Conference: 'The Urban Thing', AUT/University of Auckland which published an associated essay by Metis entitled 'The exhibition as an "Urban Thing"'. See Appendix, page 38.

In 2019 the Canadian journal *On Site Review* published an essay by Richard Collins on the fabrication of the exhibition models and, in 2020, a review of *Metis : On the Surface* by Stephanie White. The exhibition featured in chapters by Sophia Banou in the 2016 book, *Drawing Futures* and the 2020 book, *Companion to Contemporary Drawing*. See Appendix, page 38.

In 2015 the exhibition was re-installed in the Sculpture Court, ECA and in 2019 images from it were selected for the Festival of Architecture exhibition, *Drawing Attention* in the Roca Gallery, London.



FIG. 54
Metis : On the Surface review of
 Arkitektskolen Aarhus in Italian
 journal *Domus*, edition 991, 2015.
 Photo courtesy of Claus Pedersen.

06 / APPENDIX

Reviews

The Exhibition as an 'Urban Thing',
Interstices: Journal of Architecture and Related Arts
16 (2015): 7-16.

Review of *Metis : On the Surface* at Arkitektskolen
Aarhus in Italian journal *Domus*, edition
991, 2015.

Review essay of *Metis : On the Surface* by Claudia
Carbone in ARQ volume 19, 2015.

Drawing Futures essay by Sophia Banou featuring
Metis : On the Surface, 2016.

Review essay of *Metis : On the Surface* by Richard
Collins in *On Site Review* 35, 2020.

Review essay of *Metis : On the Surface* by
Stephanie White in *On Site Review* 36, 2020.



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