

ZOE  
ZENGHELIS:  
*FIELDS,  
FRAGMENTS,  
FICTIONS*

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# FIELDS, FRAGMENTS, FICTIONS

## Theodossis Issaias and Hamed Khosravi

“Zoe Zenghelis has been a painter and an architect throughout her professional life.”

—Kenneth Frampton<sup>1</sup>

Zoe Zenghelis has been a painter and an architect throughout her professional life.

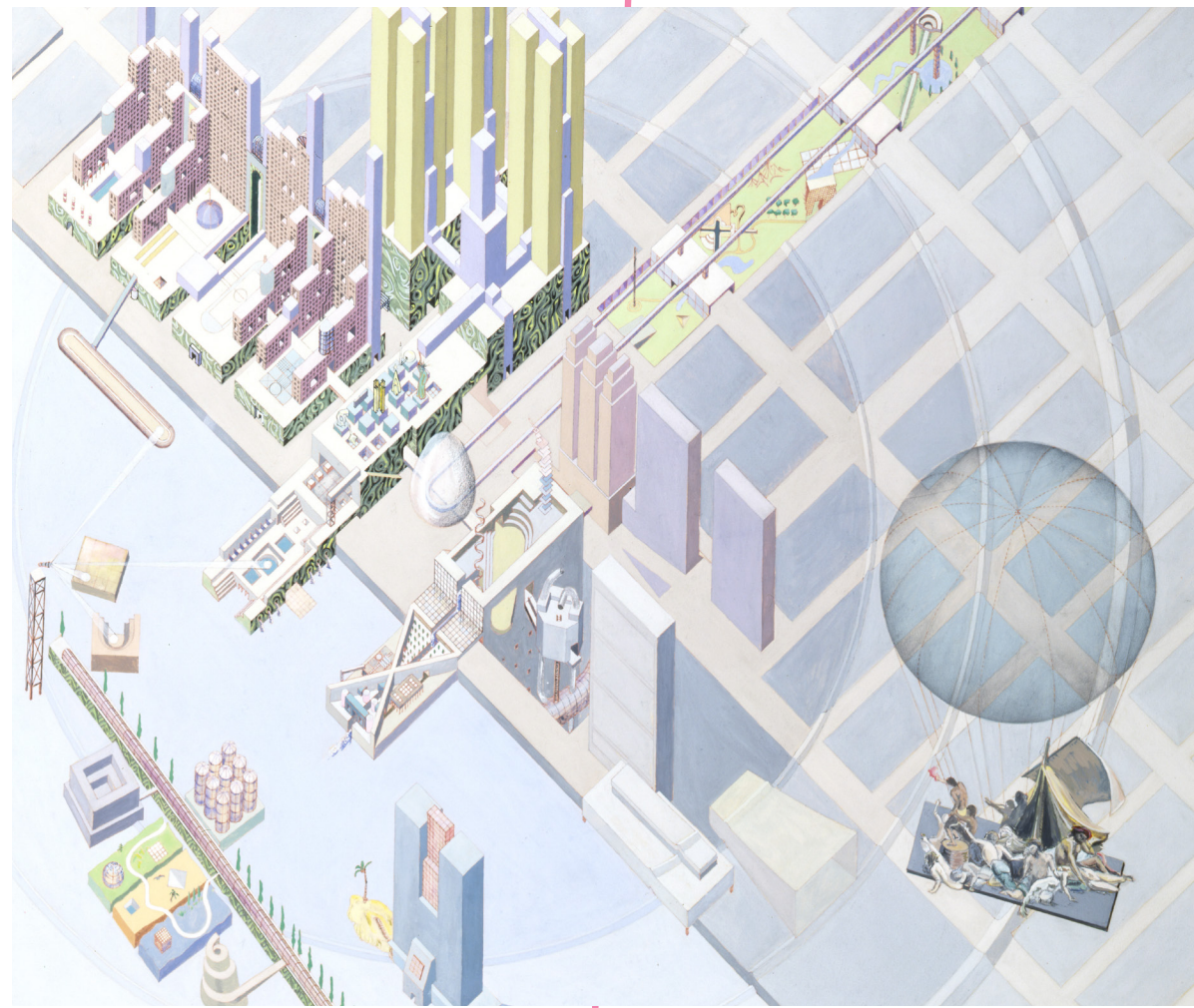
Zoe Zenghelis has been a painter throughout her life. To be precise, for more than 60 years of art practice, Zenghelis has remained consistent; she has been applying oil and acrylic on stretched canvas or cardstock to make images. With thick layers of paint, abstract geometries, assemblies of forms, and eruptive color palettes, Zenghelis meticulously composes pictorial surfaces. The limited flat surface of a painting is her stage from where she attempts, as she notes, “to express human emotion.” “On my stage,” she explains, “in the mist, at the dawn or under a layer of muslin, my geometrical elements dramatize themselves in the diffused light, mysteriously extenuating an atmosphere, a mood.”<sup>2</sup> Exploring this capacity of the medium of painting to capture and evoke emotions has been her primary, if not her only, preoccupation. In that sense, Zenghelis’s artistic inquiry returns to the fundamental question of how an artwork generates affect. It doesn’t intend to solve a problem, to raise awareness, to analyze a condition, or to provide social commentary, but to evoke visceral emotional responses from the viewer. This is an ideological and aesthetic proposition that Zenghelis develops within the context of the mid-century art scene in London. Studying painting and set design at Regent Street Polytechnic in London during the 1960s, she was attentive to the arguments of her teachers Frank Auerbach and Leon Kossoff. Just like her teachers, Zenghelis abandons grand narratives and refuses to deploy art in the service of institutional, social, or political projects. She is invested in the localized and synchronous event that takes place between a painting and a viewer—in how *to be present*, how *to look* and *to experience*.

Zenghelis, with determination and poetic force, brings this inquiry into the discipline of architecture. Both as a co-founding member of the Office for Metropolitan Architecture (OMA) and an art educator at the Architectural Association School of Architecture (AA), she approaches the profession as a painter, instilling uncertainty to the habitual modes of architectural thinking and making. Architecture, like most other spatial disciplines, is generally understood as a problem-solving

endeavor. This process entails a series of steps: first, architects look at the world and identify problems. Then, they instrumentalize their disciplinary knowledge to analyze with purported objectivity said problems and, subsequently, solve them. Common sensical and well-intentioned as this might seem, it is a process replete with fallacies. In a self-reifying cycle, the act of observing the world becomes indistinguishable from that of analyzing it. Models of reality are confused with reality itself—a map is confused with the territory, a grid plan with the city. A complex and messy world is reduced to abstractions that could be easily grasped and, eventually, resolved through architecture and its rational and efficient instruments. Zenghelis, alongside the other founding members of OMA, architects Rem Koolhaas, Elia Zenghelis, and artist Madelon Vriesendorp, put forth, collectively, a provocation: they declared that “there are no problems.”<sup>3</sup>

Elia Zenghelis and Rem Koolhaas came to this proposition by reflecting on the genealogy of modern architecture and reacting against the definition of the profession as a remedy, a prescriptive set of treatments to societal ills. For them, there were no problems to be solved by architecture alone. Madelon Vriesendorp enriched this provocation by turning to the playfulness of pop culture and celebrating the aesthetics and surrealism of the ordinary; Zoe Zenghelis did so by insisting on the possibilities offered by the medium of painting. Drawing from her own practice, she invited architects to untrain their eyes and look at the world anew; to allow for the unexpected beyond what the limitations and descriptive instruments of the discipline of architecture can permit. That is to say, she invites us to see forms, colors, and shapes, as well as buildings, cities, and landscapes for what they are on their own, in relation to each other, and in their poetic capacity to evoke emotions, from melancholy and terror to desire and happiness. This is perhaps Zoe Zenghelis’s utmost and enduring contribution to all spatial disciplines; an everyday practice that can potentially transform how *to be present*, how *to look* and *to experience*, and by extension to *perform creative work*.

In architecture’s historiography, the work of Zoe Zenghelis is commonly associated with abstract shapes, captured in precise compositions, coated in fields of blue, gray, and pink.<sup>4</sup> Although framed in crisp geometries, her work is inherently animated; lights and shadows lend a theatricality to the scenes as they unfold on the pictorial surface. Traces of these qualities can be found in her training as an artist. Zenghelis received her first lessons in painting from Orestis Kanellis, an expressionist painter of landscapes and everyday life scenes of rural Greece. In 1958, she moved to London to pursue studies in interior design and then stage design at Regent Street Polytechnic. However, as she recently exclaimed, “it was terribly old-fashioned and restrictive; we had to study one play for the whole term, and everything had to be exactly placed in



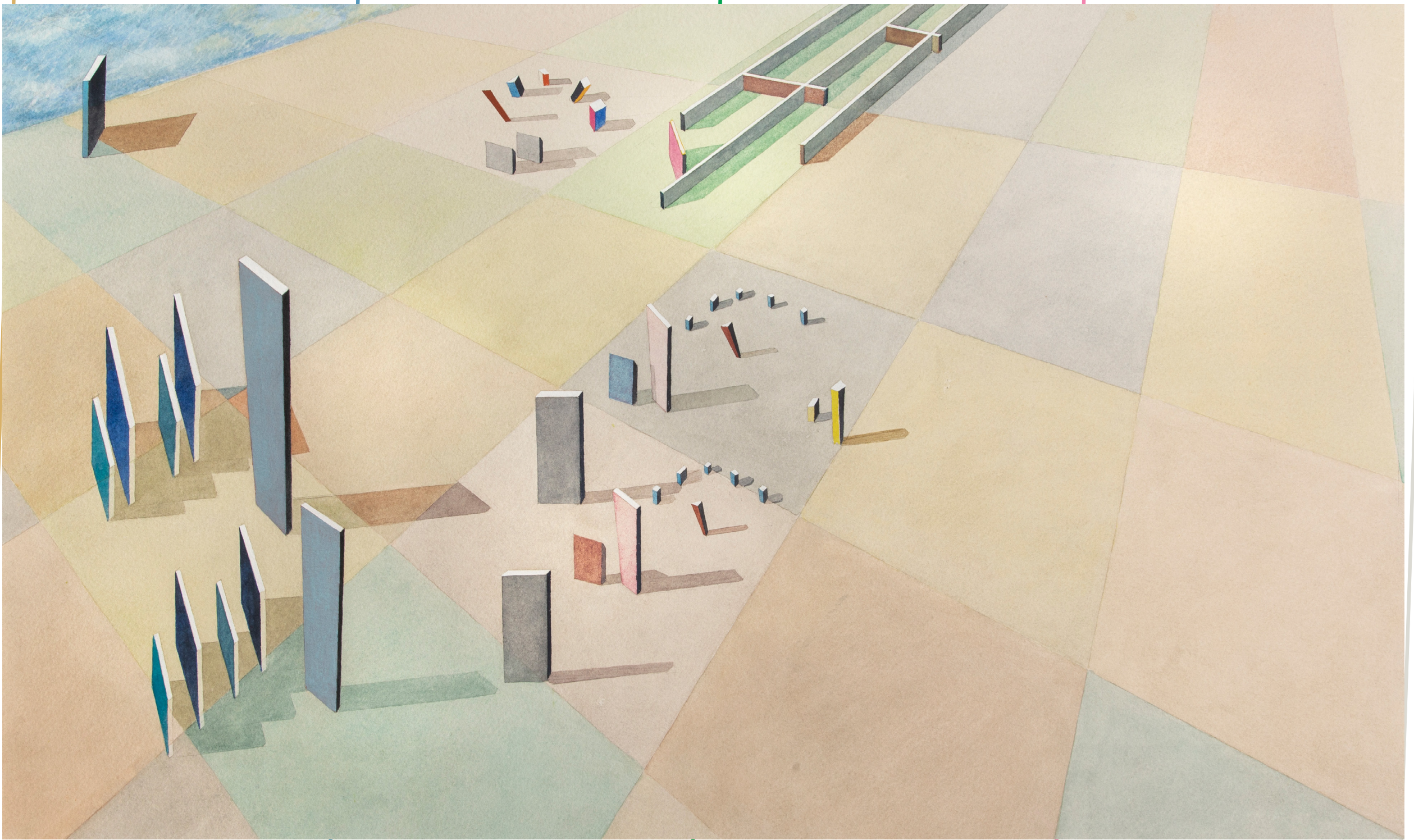
Zoe Zenghelis (OMA). *The Egg of Columbus Centre*, 1973. acrylic on card. 44 × 53 cm. Courtesy of Andreas Papadakis Collection. Academy Editions, London

the way that was written in the play.”<sup>5</sup> It was for this reason that she changed direction and focused her studies in painting at studios led by Auerbach and Kossoff, as well as Lawrence Gowing, and emerging artists-teachers who taught various techniques and media. The canvas soon became her stage and abstract shapes her protagonists. In her paintings, solid shapes melt in the air and mists crystallize into shards. In a perpetual movement, gaze is invited to leave the frame and follow lines as they collapse into off-balance grids of color and jagged planes, inviting the observer into a world of amorous mania and hopeful melancholia.

However, Zenghelis never abandoned the world of design. In 1972, she joined forces with her first husband, Elia Zenghelis, who was teaching architecture at his alma mater, the AA. They worked together with Elia Zenghelis’s student at the AA, Rem Koolhaas, and artist Madelon Vriesendorp to submit an entry to an architectural competition held by *Casabella* titled “The City as a Significant Environment.”<sup>6</sup> This marked the beginning of a collaboration that less than three years later became known as OMA. Their early work was a critical

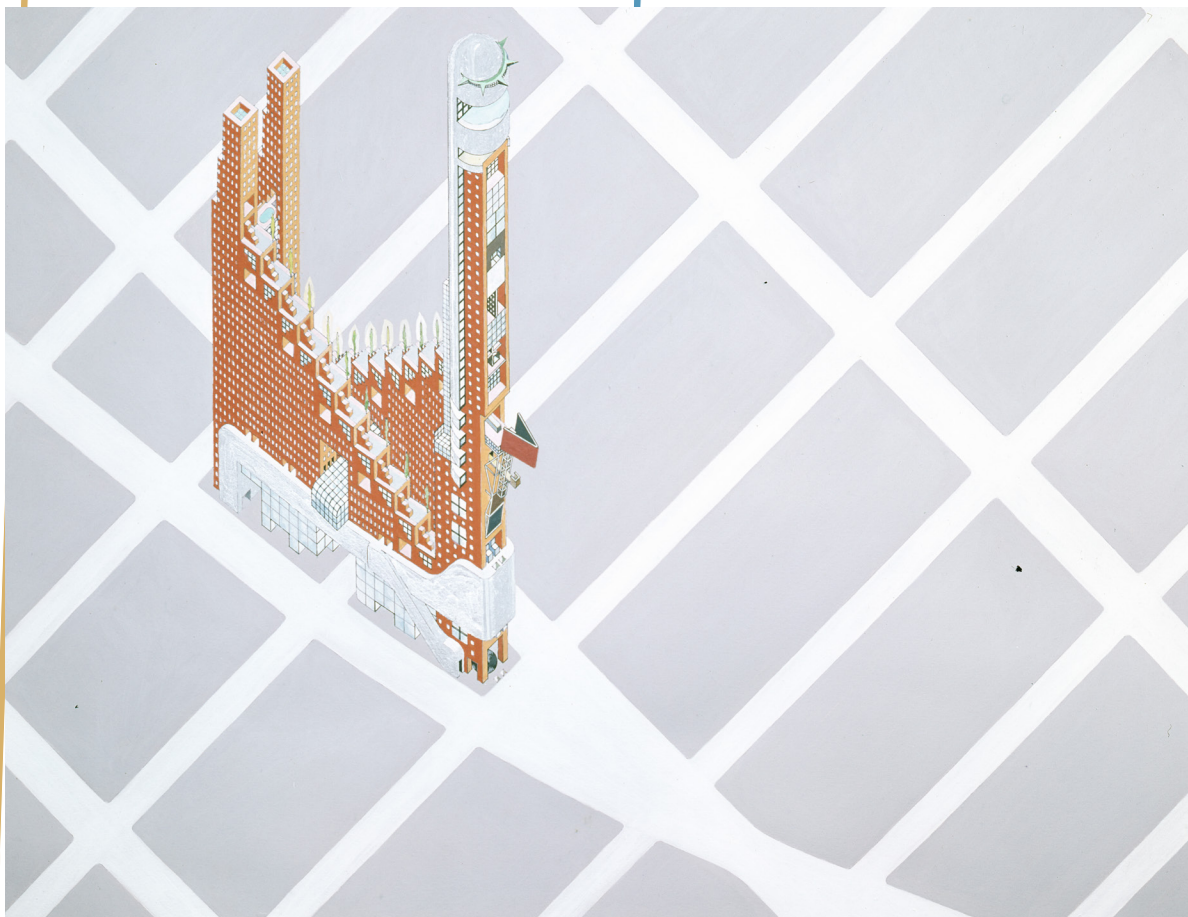
inquiry into the notion of space—and, in particular, the architecture of the city—which they read as the mere product of socio-economic structures. Yet, the four founding members were not interested in “problem-solving;” their aim was to dwell in the conflicts, release the spatial, social, and political forces, in order to liberate the discipline of architecture from its common constraints. In Zoe Zenghelis’s words, “the designs were a critique to the establishment. They were critical, theoretical, and shocking.”<sup>7</sup> In fact, OMA’s early works were realized through their images; they were visual manifestos and provocations that celebrated the chaos and multiplicity of urban culture. “The extraordinary richness and delicacy of OMA’s work defy description,” architectural historian Kenneth Frampton explained, and added that this ambivalence stemmed from the office’s attitude towards desire. Their work existed not to question it, but to fulfill it, presenting an alternative reality of radical potential equally critical of “positivistic production and populist kitsch.”<sup>8</sup> By deploying irony, playful polychrome, and Salvador Dalí’s “paranoid critical method,” OMA seduced the profession into a different way of thinking.<sup>9</sup> In her fourteen years of collaboration with OMA, Zenghelis painted some of the most iconic architectural and urban ideas of the second half of the 20th century; OMA’s urban manifesto for the bank of the East River in Manhattan,





Zoe Zenghelis. *City of our Choice [III]*, 2010. acrylic on card.  
60 x 87 cm; Private Collection





Zoe Zenghelis (OMA), *Hotel Sphinx*, 1975. acrylic on paper, 39 x 52 cm; Courtesy of Andreas Papadakis Collection, Academy Editions, London

*Egg of Columbus Centre* (1973), polemic social housing proposal for Times Square, *Hotel Sphinx* (1975), and OMA's famous entry to the competition in Paris, *Parc de la Villette* (1982) are only a few examples, among others.

Zoe Zenghelis and Vriesendorp's approach to art-making redefined the visual culture of architecture and opened new possibilities for thinking about space and the built environment through the medium of painting.<sup>10</sup> Academic institutions took notice and sought to incorporate the two artists' exploration into their pedagogical programs.<sup>11</sup> In 1982, Zenghelis and Vriesendorp joined the Communications Unit at the AA and began their course Color Workshop, which they taught for 12 years. At the core of their teaching method was that painting was a mode of thinking and designing rather than a rendering tool, a visualization of a final outcome. Their course revolutionized how aspiring architects cultivated their spatial imagination. Black-and-white plans, sections, and axonometric drawings that had been the dominant visual language of architecture at the time, were replaced by fields of colors and play. Architectural projects that were designed, measured, and calculated to answer the lingering problems of 20th century metropolises, were turned into hedonistic visions and bursts of affect. It was through the movement of brush as a tool that the students' imagination found its liberation from disciplinary rigidity: landscapes turned into constructs and buildings dissolved into landscapes.

From 1985 to today, Zoe Zenghelis has concentrated more on her independent artistic practice. The two seemingly contrasting elements—stillness and dynamism—still co-exist in her work. If the former derives from the descriptive and representational characteristics of architecture, the latter perhaps stems from her training as a stage designer. Only now the work is unapologetically personal. “My buildings and houses have no connection with reality,” she confides. “They poeticize the urban environment. They are out-of-place buildings, exploring dream states, creating a new reality, turning the negative into something desirable.”<sup>12</sup> In a series of paintings entitled *City of our Choice*, tectonic plates are carried away by clouds, cities walk on idle fields, and buildings are suspended from the sky. If they appear more elusive, it is to disguise Zenghelis's urgent question: how will we create the cities of our choice?

<sup>1</sup> Kenneth Frampton, “ZZ at the AA,” ed. Hamed Khosravi, *Do You Remember How Perfect Everything Was? The Work of Zoe Zenghelis* (London: AA Publications, 2021), 235.

<sup>2</sup> Hamed Khosravi, *Do You Remember How Perfect Everything Was? The Work of Zoe Zenghelis* (London: AA Publications, 2021), 9.

<sup>3</sup> Elia Zenghelis recalls that “[u]nder the Smithsons, architecture projects were seen as problem-solving exercises. Problem solving was part of the architectural jargon, projects were called ‘problems.’ In fact, many remember Rem’s pronouncement, ‘It’s clear, there are no problems.’ Cynthia Davidson and Elia Zenghelis, “A Conversation with Elia Zenghelis,” *Log*, no. 30 (2014): 83.

<sup>4</sup> Andreas Papadakis's book series AD—*Architectural Design and Art & Design*—flourished during the 1980s and 1990s, with particular focus on the post-modernism and deconstructivism in art and architecture; and, they often featured the work of Zoe Zenghelis. For example, see *Zoe Zenghelis: Shapes in Space* (London: Academy Editions, 1992).

<sup>5</sup> Zoe Zenghelis in conversation with Edwin Heathcote, 21 January 2021.

<sup>6</sup> Their entry to the *Casabella* competition, *Exodus, or The Voluntary Prisoners of Architecture* (1972), did not win any prize, however, soon became known as one of the most iconic and polemic architectural projects of the 20th century. The project's initial idea stemmed from Rem Koolhaas's discourse on the Berlin Wall. Although the role of painting was minimal within *Exodus*, it was the beginning of an exceptional form of collaboration between the four founding members of the office. For a critical account on the project, see Elia Zenghelis, “Text and Architecture: Architecture as Text,” eds. Martin van Schaik and Otakar Mačel, *Exit Utopia: architectural provocations, 1956–76* (Munich: Prestel, 2005), 255–262.

<sup>7</sup> Zoe Zenghelis in conversation with Edwin Heathcote, 21 January 2021.

<sup>8</sup> Kenneth Frampton, “Two or Three Things I Know about Them: A Note on Manhattanism,” ed. Haig Beck, *Architectural Design (AD)*, AD Profiles: OMA, 47, no. 5 (1977): 317.

<sup>9</sup> The paranoid-critical method, often cited as an influence by the four founding members, was a way of perceiving reality that was developed by Salvador Dalí. It described an irrational path to knowledge based on a delirium of unsuspected connections and interpretations. See Rem Koolhaas, *Delirious New York: A Retroactive Manifesto for Manhattan* (Oxford University Press, 1978).

<sup>10</sup> In 1978, during an interview broadcasted on New York City's public radio station, and moderated by Mimi Poser, the Guggenheim's head development officer at the time, Vriesendorp and Koolhaas described OMA's relation to art and architecture in the following terms: “There is a strange bifurcation in the world of architecture; because there is very little work in architecture, there is a tendency, a schizophrenia, where part of it becomes art—pure art—and part of it professional architecture, and the two grow further and further apart. What we are trying to do is to straddle both traditions.”

<sup>11</sup> Simultaneously, cultural institutions and museums began exhibiting and collecting the office's work. Most notable among OMA's early exhibition was *The Sparkling Metropolis* at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum. Zoe Zenghelis's paintings for *The City of the Captive Globe* were praised by critic Paul Goldberger: “The [‘City of the Captive Globe’] scheme is an exceptionally beautiful drawing, rich in color and texture, and it is hardly meant to be taken literally. [...] It could all be chaos, but for the strength and order of the grid of the city's streets, which holds it all together. Now these are not new ideas, but they have never been expressed better in visual terms than in this drawing.” Paul Goldberger, “Guggenheim Unveils Surrealist City Views,” *The New York Times*, November 17, 1978, C1.

<sup>12</sup> Zoe Zenghelis in conversation with Hamed Khosravi, February 2020, op cit. Hamed Khosravi, *Do You Remember How Perfect Everything Was? The Work of Zoe Zenghelis* (London: AA Publications, 2021), 31.

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# RELATIONAL SURREALISM

Jennifer Samet

Zoe Zenghelis's painting practice is founded on an understanding of the creative potential of collaboration. Collaboration takes on multiple meanings in her work and includes her involvement with the OMA and her teaching in the Color Workshop at the AA. However, collaboration also encompasses the interactions of painting, place, and architecture; the relationships between forms; her multicultural experience as a British artist born in Athens; and the way that Zenghelis allows meaning to emerge through the painting process itself.

Her work recalls influential painter and teacher Hans Hofmann's theory that the act of painting was a call and response process, a "push and pull," to use his iconic phrase. Hofmann posited that each mark would generate or determine a reaction.<sup>1</sup> Zenghelis's compositions, with their tilting, shifting geometric planes, illustrate this back-and-forth by highlighting that everything exists in relation to something else. In Zenghelis's words, paraphrasing Claude Monet: "We assume a shadow is really a dark gray or black, but a face in shadow can be green or blue. The color of the material that the shadow is falling on determines the color of the shadow itself."<sup>2</sup>

Once we forego labeling or identifying objects by name, we are attuned to subtle tonal and color relationships; from these, the artist can create what Hofmann termed "plasticity," the illusion of three-dimensionality, the push-and-pull of forms on a flat surface. The essence of his idea was that forms exist plastically only when they exist in relation to one another. This is particularly pertinent to Zenghelis's paintings of architectural subjects, in which it is the push and pull that produces a sense of dimensionality. Zenghelis has said of her painting:

I avoid imitating objective reality and I try instead to poeticize the urban environment. Although sadness, emptiness, loneliness, and melancholy can be seen as negative moods, I try to turn them into something positive, beautiful, and seductive. My paintings are archi-sculptures based on the equilibrium and multiple use of planes, volumes, and color.<sup>3</sup>

By becoming an active collaborator rather than an architect of the scene, Zenghelis's content emerges, not through an a priori idea, but through the process. In her 1987 painting, *Forest*, the curtain of trees seems to arise as an outcome of the interactions between the faceting of the buildings and the energy of the cityscape. Zenghelis emphasizes a feeling of compression between the buildings

and this "forest," with exaggeratedly angular bare tree trunks and branches. It is as if the trees have spawned this geometry in the architecture, or vice versa.

Zenghelis considered *Forest* her homage to School of London painter Leon Kossoff. In a recent interview with curator Hamed Khosravi, Zenghelis said, "I, myself, do not position my paintings within the tradition of English modern painting or any other modernist tradition. Time will answer that."<sup>4</sup> In fact, while Zenghelis's work superficially does not look like that of Kossoff and Frank Auerbach, it shares concerns rooted to her educational background. Kossoff and Auerbach were young teachers at the Regent Street Polytechnic in London when Zenghelis was a student there. Kossoff wrote of London: "The strange ever-changing light, the endless streets, and the shuddering feel of the sprawling city lingers in my mind like a faintly glimmering memory of a long-forgotten, perhaps never experienced childhood."<sup>5</sup> Zenghelis's *Forest* has a similar feeling of a partly imagined sense memory: geometry and nature bumping against one another to create a world dense but fractured. The shadows cast on surfaces evoke missing foliage, or cracks in the facade.

A painting of the same year, *Walls*, foregoes the natural landscape and centers on geometric, architectural planes. However, it too contains a shadowy rupture. This linear form traverses the foreground and moves diagonally upward through deeper space. Part fissure, part shadow, part lightning bolt—the lines may reflect the energy of a fictional city or forebode doom. *Walls* has a muted palette of blue, yellow, rose, gray, and tan, with glassy planes refracting light. The ground, with its more thickly painted, repeated gray marks, is seemingly the most stable part of the painting, and yet it is where the cracks are born. *Walls* does not have one clear mood, which is a hallmark of Zenghelis's work. The planes seem to feed off each other like an exquisite corpse, a collaborative method where each participant does not know what came before. The scene, as it were, with its absence of human presence, invites our participation.

Zenghelis's paintings often lead us into a kind of dreamworld akin to the deserted landscapes of Salvador Dalí or cloudscapes of René Magritte. In Zenghelis's case, the cool rationalism of the architectural elements against a surrealist perspective heightens these contrasts. Architect and architectural historian Charles Jencks coined the term "surrational" to describe the OMA design *Hotel Sphinx*, a proposed urban hotel and mass housing complex with social clubs and cultural centers in Times Square, New York. The term "surrational" is also an apt way to describe the tendencies that Zenghelis embraces in her paintings, where geometry gives way to psychologically suggestive urban plazas.





Zoe Zenghelis, *Partitions*, 2001, oil on canvas, 50 x 96 cm; Private Collection

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Zoe Zenghelis, *Dall*, 2019, oil on canvas, 45 x 80 cm; Private Collection

*Shapes in Space* (1992) conjures an end-game cityscape, where buildings, sometimes acting as personages, lean towards a circular plane and another deep rupture, with a nothingness beyond. Again, Zenghelis describes this abyss with the most painterly strokes of the canvas, seeming to suggest that the abyss is the most human component. Her brushwork highlights the material aspect of the work and becomes a marker of the distinction between her independent paintings and her architectural renderings. Indeed, although Zenghelis was not a painter who worked with the thick impasto that distinguishes Kossoff and Auerbach, her architectural renderings are more thickly painted than is typical of this genre.

As a member of an architectural firm, Zenghelis was especially attuned to the inherent material and spatial aspects, and their psychological implications. In *City of our Choice [I]* (1994), Zenghelis uses a reduced vocabulary of forms and compositional organization to suggest the range of psychological impact possible through subtle modulations. The foundation is rows of rectangular tiles moving into the distance at far right. Planar architectural shapes appear in different formations: singular, coupled, and semi-circular groupings. The way that they lean or tilt toward one another; or

else stand in isolation feels human-like, reflecting isolation or community.

The material quality of her paintings also connects her work to the ideas of Russian Constructivism, particularly that of Kazimir Malevich, who sought to imbue the black square with meaning and content and was interested in removing all ties to representation by eliminating the horizon line.<sup>6</sup> In many of her later works, Zenghelis also eliminates both ties to architectural formations and the horizon line. She uses the relationships between geometric forms to conjure moods. Her painting *Happiness* (2000) is especially evocative in this way. Diagonal forms in an array of colors rain down through the painting, tightly clustered in the center, and gently spreading to the left and right. It is a painting about connection, abundance, and plenty.

The painter El Lissitzky would expand upon his mentor Malevich's ideas, developing a definition of his recurrent abstract form, the "Proun," which combines the monochromatic plane with architectural rendering. He stated, "Proun is no longer a picture and becomes a building that must be viewed (by moving around its outside) from all angles."<sup>7</sup> Lissitzky explored this idea with axonometric projection, wherein all planes of a drawn form are visible, to create the illusion of volume (as in a drawn cube). For Lissitzky, axonometric

perspective also symbolized a futuristic view into an infinite space of possibility and the imagination by moving beyond traditional Renaissance perspective. For Zenghelis, this method, which was fundamental in her architectural renderings, seems tied to her experience as an immigrant—a British artist who was born in Athens—working with artists and architects from a variety of backgrounds. Zenghelis explained this connection in terms of imagination:

OMA, and hopefully I, move towards the future, drawing inspiration from a state of perpetual change. OMA's modernity tries to be a continuous state of transformation in a continuously shifting world. OMA's paper architecture had such appeal because it represented ideas and imagination caused by our different backgrounds—the visual cultures of Greece and Holland mixed with our experience of living in Britain.<sup>8</sup>

Several of Zenghelis's paintings suggest themes of borders and boundaries, while others allude to open plans, crossings, and an expansive, unrestricted space. In *Partitions* (2001), an uncharacteristically naturalistic—almost trompe l'oeil—line of barbed wire runs across and over a plaza indicated by pathways into the distance. A row of jagged upright forms creates a sense of danger.

The recent painting *Courtyard* (2018) is more open and lacks obstacles. The "courtyard" leads to a porous structural skin touched by light and paint strokes, with a deliberately central open "window." Through her use of transparent, subtle color modulations and shadows, Zenghelis indicates an intermixing of people and culture. Auerbach and Kossoff (who were both from Jewish immigrant families) depict the city of London in a similar manner: suggesting constant movement and passage through the streets and using impasto paint as a signifier of layers of experience and the passage of time. Kossoff said, "London, like the paint I use, seems to be in my bloodstream."<sup>9</sup>

It is telling that when Zenghelis expressed her ideas about color in lectures, she used the example of Rembrandt, rather than a more obvious "colorist." Rembrandt's work was heralded by the School of London painters for its visceral, expressive qualities, where the soul of the sitter seems to emerge from the inner light of the painting. Zenghelis notes, recalling her paraphrase of Monet:

What we call white depends on what we compare it with. If we compare the white in a painting by Rembrandt where everything else in the painting is very dark except for a very luminous face with a bright white collar, with the color of a well-lit white paper, the Rembrandt white is almost brown. Nevertheless, it looks bright white because everything else is so dark. Every line on a painting is altered by every touch of color that you add in other places.<sup>10</sup>

Zenghelis gives primacy to this idea of relational painting. Colors, perception, and mood are not constants. They shift with context. She challenges a high modernist idea associated with the primacy of the individual. Though she jokes that the origins of her career began with "coloring the drawings" of Rem Koolhaas and Elia Zenghelis, her work speaks to the significance of inter-relationships, the push and pull in art and in community, and open collaboration.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Hans Hofmann, *Search for the Real: And Other Essays*, (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1967), 44. "The picture plane reacts automatically in the opposite direction to the stimulus received; thus, action continues as long as it receives stimulus in the creative process. Push answers with pull and pull with push."

<sup>2</sup> Hamed Khosravi, "Interview with Zoe Zenghelis," *Do You Remember How Perfect Everything Was? The Work of Zoe Zenghelis* (London: AA Publications, 2021), 28.

<sup>3</sup> Zoe Zenghelis, "On Color: Notes for a Lecture" (Architectural Association School of Architecture, London, ca. 1985), 3.

<sup>4</sup> Khosravi, "Interview," 33.

<sup>5</sup> Leon Kossoff, *Recent Paintings and Drawings* (London: Fischer Fine Art, 1972).

<sup>6</sup> Kazimir Malevich, "From Cubism and Futurism to Suprematism: A New Realism in Painting" (1916).

<sup>7</sup> El Lissitzky, quoted in Paloma Alarcó, "Proun 1C," Museo Nacional Thyssen-Bornemisza, <https://www.museothyssen.org/en/collection/artists/lissitzky/proun-1-c>.

<sup>8</sup> Zoe Zenghelis, "Roosevelt Island," *Drawing Matter* (February 17, 2019), <https://drawingmatter.org/roosevelt-island>.

<sup>9</sup> Leon Kossoff, *Leon Kossoff*, (London: Tate Gallery, 1996), exhibition catalogue, 36.

<sup>10</sup> Khosravi, "Interview," 28–29.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 21.

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Zoe Zenghelis, *Forest*, 1987, oil on card, 42 x 52 cm: Private Collection



Zoe Zenghelis, *Shapes in Space*, 1992, oil on canvas, 91 x 122 cm: Private Collection



# BUILDING A ROOM OF HER OWN

Sarah Akigbogun

*Color is fundamental to our perception of the world.  
Surprisingly many architects are indifferent to it.*

—Zoe Zenghelis<sup>1</sup>

In the early years of the practice, during the 1970s and 80s, the Office for Metropolitan Architecture (OMA) was a hyper-cool collective with the air of a rock band. The four members, known to each other as ZZ, EZ, Rem & Mad (Zenghelis, her then husband Elia, Rem Koolhaas, and Madelon Vriesendorp), were in fact engaged in an intense collaboration, with work and family life often overlapping. They communicated to each other frequently in letters between London, Paris, Athens, and New York. “I am very optimistic and full of beans,” wrote Koolhaas to Elia Zenghelis in anticipation of collaborating on *The Welfare Island* Competition in 1975.<sup>2</sup> Afterward, Koolhaas wrote to Zoe Zenghelis, “Somehow the balance of the four of us results in a paradoxical situation that much more people are actually against. [It] becomes irresistible.”<sup>3</sup> Together, the four created images which have become part of the architectural canon. Zenghelis’s painting was a critical part of establishing the visual identity of their work. Yet, Zenghelis is characteristically modest about her work, saying of her contribution to OMA, “Really, we were just coloring their drawings.”<sup>4</sup>

Zenghelis and Vriesendorp, founding members of the group, were far from simply “coloring” drawings. They were highly skilled artists, working a kind of magic. Zenghelis was interested in mood, form, and materiality. She worked with color and tone to create depth both of space and emotion, sculpting surreal, geometric worlds on canvas. Working sometimes in oils, at other times in acrylic or watercolor, she used the texture of paint and brushstrokes to produce atmosphere and imply materiality. This adeptness with color and texture elevated the stark black-and-white ink drawings typical of architects at the time. Zenghelis and Vriesendorp were integral to the creation of the iconic aesthetic of those early OMA images and can be considered remarkable artists within and without the architectural firm. Of *The City of the Captive Globe* (1972), in which towers of differing material quality sit atop granite plinths, Rem Koolhaas wrote to Zenghelis, “I sent you a rough sketch and I received a masterpiece back.”<sup>5</sup> Zenghelis’s painting transformed the drawings of Rem and Elia, such was its power.

The transformative nature of Zenghelis’s painting within OMA led to her being invited to

teach color at the Architectural Association (AA) in 1982, initially by Zaha Hadid, and then by Alvin Boyarsky, the then director of the school. Zenghelis says, “buildings are not black lines on white paper. Color is fundamental to the way we *perceive*.”<sup>6</sup> Along with Vriesendorp, she was part of a radical paradigm shift at the school, at a time when it fizzed with the energy of exploration and was seeking new ways to create and represent architecture in the pre-digital age.

After OMA, Zenghelis established herself as a painter in her own right, shedding the constraints of architectural rendering, continuing her own explorations, and focusing more on the tectonic qualities of color and abstraction. Architectural forms remain, but in later works, these are more abstract and seem to emerge from her own imagination, perhaps memories of Greece. These enigmatic paintings seem filled with the pastel greens and blues of the Aegean. They are paintings which transport: *Tatiana’s House* (1994) pulls one toward an infinite plane, a deep vanishing point, that disappears into a haze. The haze is recurrent across paintings, where worlds create shifts in emotional tone. Sometimes one is sun-kissed, as in *Three Houses* (2016) and *Four Houses* (2008), which engage in a game of pure tectonics and color, at other times one is lost in bleaker spaces such as the haunting *Awakening City* (1991), which evokes the cool alienation of the metropolis. In the *Compositions* series (2018), which become pure abstractions of color and geometry—like a musician exploring themes on a canvas—Zenghelis seems, joyfully, to just play.

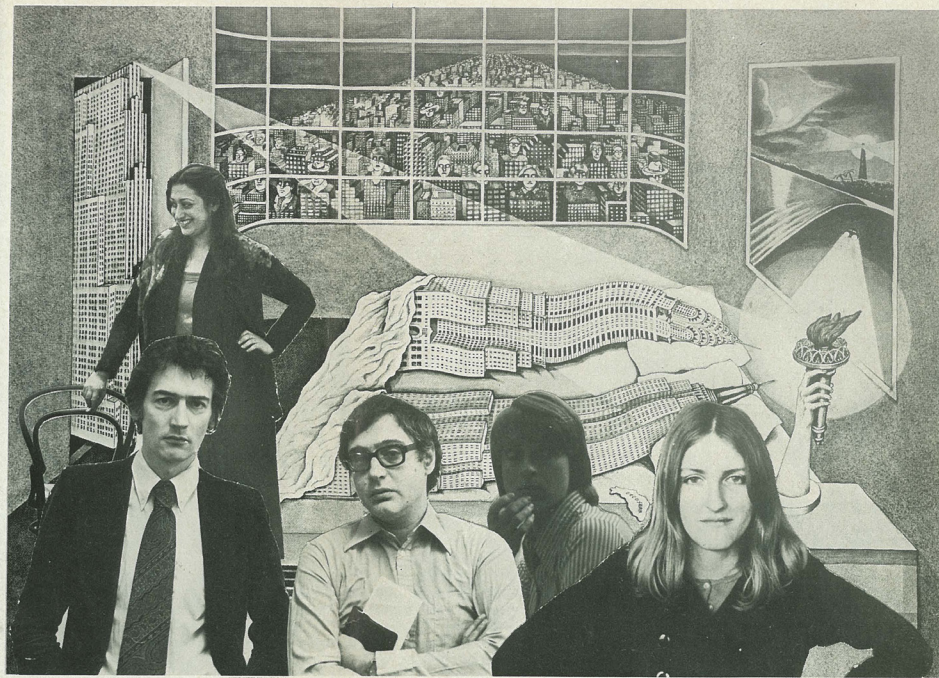
Zenghelis’s modesty, despite the power and distinctiveness of her work, is perhaps indicative of the relative way the contributions of men and women to architecture are viewed and valued by the profession and society as a whole. Women architects have often been edited out and given little space within the discipline. Hamed Khosravi describes this as a “systemic, androcentric negligence,” an erasure of the work of women by minimizing and failing to credit their contributions.<sup>7</sup> Despite OMA’s collaborative work at the time, forgetting women is something the profession of architecture does well. A singular perspective, often that of the default white male, defines its history. This has, until recently, meant that the work of people like Zenghelis has gone unrecognized.<sup>8</sup> It is perhaps an inherent danger of the collaborative process, which can swallow up the voices of contributors. This amnesia is also in part due to editorial, archiving, and curatorial selection processes, which have perpetuated the fiction of architectural design as the product of a single genius.<sup>9</sup> These practices have affected the entire global narrative around architecture, contributing to almost violent acts of omission.





Zoe Zenghelis at the Architectural Association, presenting the student work of Color Workshop, 1988-89; Courtesy of Architectural Association Archives





left to right: Rem Koolhaas, Zaha Hadid (standing), Elia Zenghelis, Zoe Zenghelis, Madelon Vriesendorp

O.M.A. IS REM KOOLHAAS, DUTCH, ELIA ZENGHELIS AND ZOE ZENGHELIS, GREEK, MADELON VRIESENDORP, DUTCH AND ZAHA HADID, IRAQI. O.M.A. STANDS FOR OFFICE FOR METROPOLITAN ARCHITECTURE. THE GROUP CONSISTS OF THREE ARCHITECTS AND TWO PAINTERS. THEY ALL LIVE AND WORK IN LONDON. THEIR WORK, WHICH TRANSCENDS THE MERE LEVEL OF ARCHITECTURAL THINKING INTO ALLEGORICAL NARRATIVE AND ICONOGRAPHIC MYTH, IS AMONG THE MOST INFLUENTIAL AND CONTROVERSIAL TODAY AND IS VERY MUCH DISCUSSED AMONGST THE ARCHITECTURAL AVANT GARDES IN EUROPE AND AMERICA. O.M.A., ACTIVE SINCE THE EARLY SEVENTIES, WAS OFFICIALLY FOUNDED ON JANUARY 7, 1975 TO "DEVELOP A MUTANT FORM OF URBANISM - NEW TYPES OF ARCHITECTURAL SCENARIOS WHICH WOULD RESULT IN THE REHABILITATION OF THE METROPOLITAN LIFESTYLE - WHICH ACCEPTS THE MEGALOPOLITAN CONDITION WITH ENTHUSIASM AND WHICH WILL RESTORE MYTHICAL, SYMBOLIC, LITERARY, ONEIRIC, CRITICAL AND POPULAR FUNCTIONS TO THE ARCHITECTURE OF LARGE URBAN CENTRES." IT IS THEREFORE NOT A COINCIDENCE THAT O.M.A. HAVE, FOR THE LAST FEW YEARS, CONCENTRATED THEIR ATTENTION ON MANHATTAN THE ARCHETYPE OF THE METROPOLITAN CONDITION. FOR, AS KOOLHAAS SAYS IN HIS FORTHCOMING BOOK, "DELIRIOUS NEW YORK". "MANHATTAN IS THE METROPOLIS ITSELF. MANHATTAN REPRESENTS THE APOTHEOSIS OF THE IDEAL OF DENSITY PER SE, BOTH OF POPULATION AND OF INFRASTRUCTURES; ITS ARCHITECTURE PROMOTES A STATE OF CONGESTION ON ALL POSSIBLE LEVELS, AND EXPLOITS THIS CONGESTION TO INSPIRE AND SUPPORT PARTICULAR FORMS OF SOCIAL INTERCOURSE THAT TOGETHER FORM A UNIQUE CULTURE OF CONGESTION", AND "THE TRUE AMBITION OF THE METROPOLIS IS TO CREATE A WORLD TOTALLY FABRICATED BY MAN, I.E. TO LIVE INSIDE FANTASY. THE RESPONSIBILITIES OF A SPECIFICALLY METROPOLITAN ARCHITECTURE: TO DESIGN THOSE HERMETIC ENCLAVES - BLOATED PRIVATE REALMS - THAT COMPRISE THE METROPOLIS. (Text continued on page 20 Photographs overleaf, pages 16, 17, 18, 19)

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Collage of OMA members (from right to left, Madelon Vriesendorp, Zoe Zenghelis, Elia Zenghelis, Rem Koolhaas, Zaha Hadid) featured in the first issue of VIZ (Visual Arts Fashion Photography Films Magazine), 1978

In her essay, *Room At The Top*, Denise Scott Brown writes, poignantly: "To the extent that gurus are unavoidable and sexism is rampant in the architecture profession, my personal problem of submersion through the star system is insoluble."<sup>10</sup> Scott Brown writes about being excluded from lists of contributors or as the author on projects, even when she and her husband had explicitly stated their respective roles. Architecture is seemingly so dependent on the image of the androcentric hero, that it must dominate the narrative to the obscuration of all others. Scott Brown was writing about editorial space, however the search for physical and temporal space in which to be able to have a creative voice has also long been a concern for women.

Virginia Woolf's 1929 essay, *A Room of One's Own*, makes an argument for a literal and figurative space for women, in the male-dominated world of literature. Woolf uses a fictional sister to

Shakespeare, Judith, to highlight gender inequities across time, which meant that historically women have not had access to the same opportunities as men. Judith, she argues, even if in possession of equal talent, could not have achieved what her brother William did. Women lacked money, power and, consequently influence, all of which denied them space to write. Woolf argued this patriarchal culture did not want to create room for women because it threatened men's superiority. These factors were the answer to what she calls the "perennial puzzle" of why "no woman [in the Elizabethan age] wrote an extraordinary word of literature, when every other man, it seemed, was capable of writing a song or a sonnet."<sup>11</sup> Woolf also alludes to classism, and today we must consider racism as a condition that creates barriers, both to entry and recognition in architecture.

I have discovered similar barriers during my own attempts to search the archives to find histories of women architects of color. They are largely absent. I have met many dead ends and frustrating voids, indicative of similar processes

of erasure. Women and people of color are almost entirely missing from our histories about architecture. The compound forces of patriarchy and racism meant that women, such as Ethel Bailey Furman, in 1920s Virginia, were prevented from authoring their own projects and, consequently, had to circumvent the system. In Furman's case, this initially meant getting private tutorship—because as a Black woman, she could not attend architecture school—and practicing under the name of the male contractors she worked with.<sup>12</sup> Women like Furman were also hampered by the fact that people of color were routinely omitted from articles in the architecture press in the United States during the early 20th century.<sup>13</sup> Although Furman is believed to have built an estimated 200 houses and churches across Virginia, few traces of her work remain.

What Furman, Zenghelis, Scott Brown, and others like them all share is that their names are missing from the projects they contributed to, and sometimes, even from those they authored. Though the reasons were different, the effect was the same. Absence. It may seem regressive or contradictory to argue for authorship and recognition, in an era when we are trying to move away from the notion of sole authorship in architecture, when even this essay rails against it. However, in case of historic omission, to be able to name would provide some small form of redress, balance. In so doing, it would enrich the discipline of architecture with a multiplicity of voices. Not doing so means the present generation, the future indeed, is robbed. Speaking as one of a generation who has come of age as an architect in the shadow of the solo, male, genius myth, it is a revelation to understand more about the process of the creation of these OMA paintings and Zenghelis's role.<sup>14</sup>

What is notable about Zenghelis is that through her work as an artist, a painter, she has claimed space in a way that is entirely unapologetic. It is significant though that this recognition came in a discipline other than architecture. In its organizational structures, architecture tends to mirror society and its constructed hierarchies: it is at times one of the most restrictive and conformist disciplines in the way it replicates and serves existing structures of power. This is due partly to the way architecture is financed and commissioned, which in turn has repercussions for what is valued, and therefore preserved through archiving. The collaborative processes by which architecture is produced also often results in participants being squeezed out, if not at the time, in retrospect. It is perhaps no surprise that a new generation of architecture practitioners and activists also seek to go beyond the constraints of the field, gravitating towards art-based practice to be seen and heard. This generation practices across boundaries and disciplines, not content to sit within the old systems.

Architecture is a collaborative endeavour and collaboration should be valued, but it should not be at the expense of underrecognized contributors.

It should not result in the quiet, even if at times unintended, appropriation of the work of others, submerging it into an overarching narrative, which omits their contribution. We need to make space for the voices and work of those from a perspective beyond the dominant narrative, including, and especially those of women. This includes physical and temporal space, so that the work gets made, as well as editorial and gallery space, so it is seen. In making such space, this exhibition reveals one of architecture's great talents, and gives a new perspective of one of its legends. It is part of a process of placing Zenghelis's work firmly in the narrative: a restorative, important, and continuing process of redress.

<sup>1</sup> Hamed Khosravi, *Do You Remember How Perfect Everything Was?: The Work of Zoe Zenghelis* (London: AA Publications, 2021), 29.

<sup>2</sup> Hamed Khosravi, *Do You Remember How Perfect Everything Was?*, 78.

<sup>3</sup> Khosravi, *Do You Remember How Perfect Everything Was?*, 81-82.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 23.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 247.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 29.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 57.

<sup>8</sup> Rachel Lee, "Women In Architecture," *A Transnational Assemblage* (London: AA Publications, 2018), 111.

<sup>9</sup> Credit to Zoe Zenghelis's work is repeatedly omitted in presentation and reproductions of the early OMA paintings as well as in the museum collections and archives, such as OMA archive, MoMA, and DAM.

<sup>10</sup> Denise Scott Brown, "Room at the Top? Sexism and the Star System in Architecture," MAS Context, May 6, 2020, <https://www.mascontext.com/issues/27-debate-fall-15/room-at-the-top-sexism-and-the-star-system-in-architecture/>.

<sup>11</sup> Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own*. (London: Penguin Books, 2004), 48.

<sup>12</sup> "Ethel Bailey Furman," Virginia Changemakers, accessed January 21, 2022, <https://edu.lva.virginia.gov/changemakers/items/show/167>.

<sup>13</sup> Dell Upton, *Architecture in the United States*, (Oxford: New York: Oxford University Press), 273.

<sup>14</sup> In recent years, the work of Madelon Vriesendorp, and her contributions to the OMA projects, were acknowledged through *The World of Madelon Vriesendorp*, an exhibition and publication curated by Shumon Basar and Stephan Trüby. In June 2017, the Architectural Association awarded her an Honorary Diploma "in recognition of her extraordinary contribution to the imagination of architecture."

Sarah Akigbogun is a multidisciplinary practitioner: an architect, filmmaker, and educator. Akigbogun is founding director of Studio Aki, named one of Wallpaper's Emerging Practices of 2021, and of theater collective Appropri8. She is an elected member of RIBA council, Vice Chair of Women In Architecture and founder of The XXAOC (female architects of color) Project. Akigbogun is currently an associate lecturer at Canterbury School of Architecture, and professional studies tutor at the Architectural Association. She was director of the film *She Draw-She Builds* and her current film explores the stories of female architects of color and seeks to discover the first Black female architect in the UK. Writing includes contributions to *Parlour*, *Inflection Journal*, *The AJ* and *BD*.





Elias Veneris and Zoe Zenghelis in the OMA office in Athens, 1982







# THICKENED BRIGHTLY PAINTED AIR

Zoe Zenghelis in  
conversation with  
Stefano de Martino  
and Alex Wall

The Office for Metropolitan Architecture is known for its critically acclaimed and provocative projects; yet it also offered an innovative model for collaborative work and creative affiliations. In addition to the four founding members and the short-lived partnership with Zaha Hadid (1977–1979), architects Stefano de Martino and Alex Wall were among the early and critical members of the Office. The two architects and AA graduates followed and expanded the painting and representational inquiry in architecture that Zoe Zenghelis and Madelon Vriesendorp had initiated. Although their association with OMA ended in the mid-1980s, the friendship between Zoe, Stefano, and Alex has lasted for more than four decades. The following conversation took place via Zoom on September 24, 2021, in preparation for the exhibition at Carnegie Museum of Art and has been edited for length and clarity.

**Stefano de Martino (SdM):** How marvelous to see you, Zoe and Alex!

**Zoe Zenghelis (ZZ):** It was fifteen years ago that I saw you Stefano in Berlin, but how long has it been Alex? Thirty? Thirty-five years? I don't remember exactly when you two joined the office.

**Alex Wall (AW):** Stefano was the earliest in this group. Is that right, Stefano?

**SdM:** That's correct. I joined in 1979 just after getting my diploma from the AA. I worked for a couple of years in Rem's and Maddie's flat. That was the office and I was the only person working there. Zoe and Elia were in the States at the time.

**ZZ:** You stayed for a while with Rem and Maddie, didn't you?

**SdM:** I stayed many days and weeks working through the night, if that's what you mean. But no, I didn't live with them.

**ZZ:** I remember Maddie saying that you're the best babysitter since you were always there.

**SdM:** Indeed, there were long days and weeks of working non-stop to meet the deadlines. I don't know why architecture is one of the things that people put so much pressure in doing the work. It's ridiculous. We see in the pandemic that it's absolutely not necessary to stress ourselves through days and nights in the office.

**ZZ:** That's why architects always try to convince their children not to become architects for that reason precisely. It's such a painful job that never stops.

**SdM:** It is all self-imposed pressure that doesn't do you any good. I can assure you.

**AW:** You're very right, Stefano. It's going out of fashion I would say.

**SdM:** Deeply. There are many other emergencies in the world. Today was this marvellous event organized by Greta Thunberg in Berlin, broadcasted globally to raise attention to the climate crisis and really urgent issues. While some people still think their little egos are more important than anything else happening in this world. This is unfathomable. This is another discussion though that we should have another time.

It's wonderful to see the news of your recent exhibitions, Zoe. Seeing your work played a significant role in looking at nature and landscape differently. It was by seeing how you perceived it and how you represented it through your work that helped me—and us—have a conscious relationship with our environment. Once you started making those wonderful paintings of the so-called Greek projects, and the work you were doing besides the OMA projects, with your own perception and production as an artist, I found them as amazing inspiration for my own work.<sup>1</sup>

**ZZ:** So did I, Stefano. I thought you were the best painter in OMA. Just incredible! Your talent was something else. We all thought so.

**AW:** Now you can imagine what it was like when I came to OMA later, in 1982, when different kinds of representations, yet equally strong, were being practiced daily.

Stefano, you made a very good point about Zoe's paintings, particularly referencing the Greek projects. I often refer to them in my courses, lectures, and writings on the four unrealized OMA projects on the island of Kefalonia.<sup>2</sup> Though extremely important for the development of OMA at the time, these [landscape] projects in Kefalonia have been forgotten due to the uncoordinated split between Rem and Elia. After the split, Rem and OMA lose a certain link, touch, or feel for landscape.

These projects, unlike other OMA projects, are about landscape, and even more, they were about what Elia often describes as Arcadia transposed or,



Zoe Zenghelis (OMA), *Site Plan for 16 Villas on the Island of Antiparos, Greece*, 1983, oil and graphite on paper, 32 x 21 cm; Courtesy of the Alvin Boyarsky Archive, London





Zoe Zenghelis, *Cassata, after Parc de la Villette*, Paris, 1983, acrylic on paper, 53 x 86 cm; Courtesy of Drawing Matter Collections



as they were titled in *l'Architecture d'aujourd'hui*, "Arcadie: Le Paradis transposé."<sup>3</sup> For the redevelopment plans for *St. Gerasimos Sacred Plain*, the design elements such as paths and seating were presented in two-dimensional drawings—architectural orthographic representation and motifs—with the landscape in the background. That's one side of the project, but the other side is Zoe's painting, the painting of the sacred avenue and the St. Gerasimos monastery in the plain surrounded by mountains. In this painting, you could see how the design fits within its setting and performs within the landscape.

Then, in the painting for the redesign of the access and supporting infrastructure for the beach near Argostoli, you could see all the designed elements: platforms, pavilions, paths, that can hardly be grasped in a plan, relative to each other and the strong topography. The painting provides a view that you might gain from swimming out in the water or a bird's-eye view. We can see all these elements linked by what seems very tentative or modest gestures but together, they create a very strong network. That's just a very impressive quality about these two works. But Zoe's subsequent work introduces an idea of a parallel imaginative consideration of what our conventional architectural motifs are or could be.

If one tries not to use a formal critical observation, Zoe's studies could be described as "volumes in relationship to each other." Of course, the colors bring a new dimension and invites us in. Stefano, what do you think about these more abstract studies?

**SdM:** What I have always enjoyed about Zoe's work is that it doesn't seem to focus so much on any ideological position. It doesn't sit on a grand narrative as many works of OMA used to do. Rather, I find its greatest quality in describing and seeing things for their innate qualities. It's a question of light, color, texture, and how they reflect differently. All these make me look back to Zoe's landscapes again and again to see the colors of the olive groves and the shimmering of the water seen against the light [*1000 Olive Trees, Hotel Therma*], and the endless shades of color through which she sees that landscape and projects it.

There's a sensitivity to an ambience and inherent qualities of things. Beyond any way of rationalizing, Zoe's paintings are simply describing what surrounds you. It is a very sensory perception that puts you in a direct relationship with where you are [*Sacred Plain of Saint Gerasimos, Kefalonia*, 1984]. It is not about imagining that you're somewhere else, in another history, another time, rather, it makes you very aware of where you are at the moment and how you relate to things around you, and how they relate to you. There is something deeply involving and political in this way of seeing and representing.

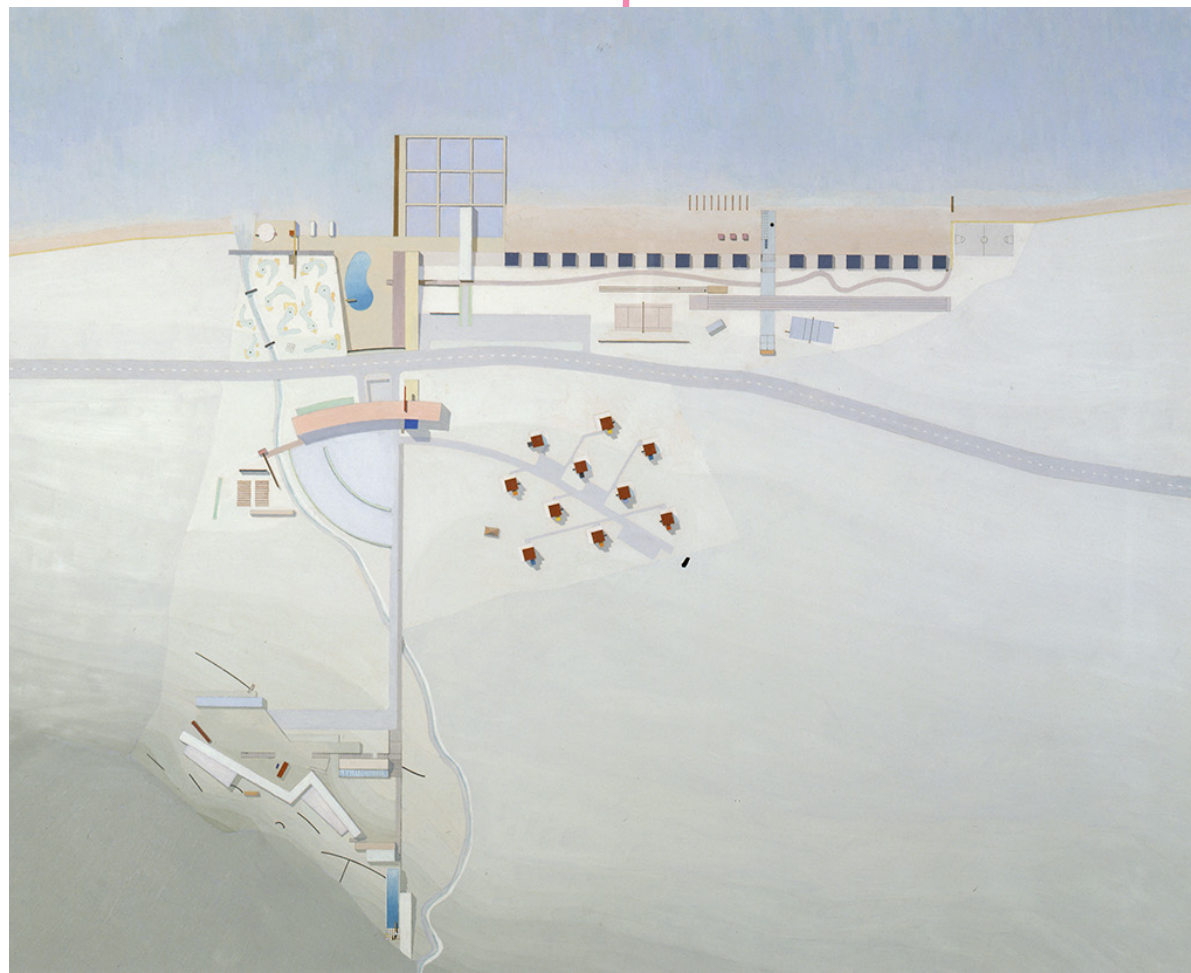
**ZZ:** Not to forget Alex's fantastic drawings. You can see that the combination of all of us was quite unique. When Alex joined, the whole ensemble was completed. His amazing skills in drawing was complementary to the paintings that we were doing. Remember [OMA's participation in the competition for the Parc de la Villette project, there are pages and pages of your drawings, of all plants, objects, figures, etc. I believe your gift is something amazing.

**AW:** I thought Stefano made a good point about the sensuality of Zoe's paintings even to the point of being so-called "painty"—that means the brushstroke and thickness of the paint being part of the composition and aesthetic of the painting. Her work was so different from Madelon's. I think Stefano's pastel paintings had the same kind of sensuousness, they were another category of its own. With pastel, you'd get an effect that dominates the lines. Even if they start from a crisp line-drawing, at the end, the pastel colors are dominating. I think on my side, it's more about the lines rather than the colors.

**ZZ:** I totally agree. Our works and skills were all complementary to each other and each one had its own characteristics and appeal. In fact, I am getting a bit upset this work is being solely associated with architecture. It was painting!

**AW:** Thinking about what you were just saying. At first, I found it a bit contradictory to what Stefano said in respect to how your paintings help him to understand and perceive the actual landscapes. But then I realized that it can actually work in the way both of you described. When a constructed or fictional landscape becomes a signifier of the actual one. In that regard, something that came to my mind was seeing the architectonic landscapes as thickened brightly painted air. The buildings are not like these hard standing volumes surrounded by nothing, they're thickened brightly painted air. Or remembering how Stefano described them: myriad olive trees changing shades, or the flickering water. We get a chance to consider all other things beyond the buildings. As if we have been mis-visually-reading space, whether it is in a city or countryside.

**SdM:** And these qualities that are so evident in natural elements are transcribed in Zoe's blocks, surfaces, and architectures. As if there are inscriptions of all these elements onto the human-made spaces. If there would be a mission for architecture to stop being architecture for its own sake, and rather be a medium—something that can also carry the qualities or aspire to attributes and properties that one finds elsewhere—it would then become an active agent that works



Zoe Zenghelis (OMA), *Hotel Therma, plan, Lesbos*, 1982, oil on paper, 84 x 104 cm; Courtesy of Andreas Papadakis Collection, Academy Editions, London



systematically with other forces instead of being a formalist gesture. Such a crossover from one to the other is a significant contribution that is implicitly present in Zoe's work.

**ZZ:** What you're saying, Stefano, is very true. In my work, I have always tried to make visible this coexistence of forces and spaces into composed settings. As you might remember, I made a painting after the famous La Villette that I called then *Cassata*. I was fed up with the complication of the project as so many things were happening in the design. So, I took the liberty of removing some of the elements that we designed for the competition and instead created a new landscape where the colors are more dominant and present.

**AW:** Another example of such an artistic reading of the project was in your painting on the plan of Villas in Antiparos. The villas themselves were drawn in architectural details and were arranged in triangular, square, or circular frames—a formal and convenient structure. But for me, this only becomes powerful in the swirling color of the landscape that blends them together.

Perhaps a visitor to your upcoming show at Carnegie Museum of Art should see it less as an exhibition of one of the OMA partners but a presentation of pure sensuous color, energy, and objects. In other words, they should enter your world first and their eyes are trained to see the colors and shades and perhaps the OMA paintings are exhibited somewhere in the back.

**SdM:** Even in the office there was, consciously or not, an influence of Zoe's paintings in the OMA projects and how we approached the design. We were all exposed to these great paintings and the creative process of making them. I remember becoming very aware of what it felt like using different kinds of paper to draw. Whether smooth or rough, to see the effect of applying different colors or testing pencil or pastel and seeing how different they would shape a line, or what texture you would get from it. Whether it is closed form or open, transparent, or translucent, they all, at least for me, indicated relationships that can be made between ourselves, our imagination, and reality. In one way, we can also say that it is all about architecture. It is about different ranges of spatial relationships or interfaces.

**AW:** I also think the work is a kind of provocation because it is another kind of representation and other language compared to the conventional representational language of making buildings or city plans. I am, for example, thinking of

Zoe's influence on the OMA's Rotterdam office that resulted in Willem Jan Neutelings's return to the tradition of Dutch and Belgian cartoons, or Kees Christiaanse doing watercolor, or other people finding other languages of representation.

**ZZ:** It was also fun to experiment with all these methods. It was also the same when together with Maddie, we were teaching at the AA. Our class was so popular because, for everybody, it was a discovery. A way to express their own enthusiasm through painting.

**SdM:** What you and Maddie were doing was a phenomenal contribution to architectural education at the AA. It was also very necessary especially at the time that everything was shifting toward digital media and this was just a flip side of it.

**AW:** I gave a lecture talking about some of these works that was called "Before Perspective and After the Digital." It was at the dawn of all these digital media and at the time when architect Greg Lynn and many others were developing "parametric" design using new software. There is, I think, nothing like the communicative force of non-digital media, the haptic sense of paint in comparison to printed computer-generated drawings.

**SdM:** Well Alex, I wouldn't be so dismissive of the qualities of new media. I think what is important is to have that experience or knowledge that you talked about in your background which makes you approach the digital technology differently. To some extent, I am trying to do that myself. To explore digital forms of representations that would have not been possible by using other media. That makes me able to push its limits. I certainly learned from Zoe and Maddie's classes as well as from my own students. Encouraging to do paintings, models, hand-drawings, and collages and then asking students to do the same with computer programs, algorithms, and software. In fact, through their analogue experience, they were able to create something innovative digitally. It was very interesting to see that they started exploring the limits of things they can do manually and physically by their bodies to the things that could be generated through digital media.

**ZZ:** You can indeed end up with something completely different when a different medium is used. This was very fun!

**SdM:** It is a pity that we cannot hug each other in Zoom.

**AW:** Hopefully there will be a lot of hugging in Pittsburgh.

<sup>1</sup> During OMA's participation at the competition for Parc de la Villette (1982), and while tensions between the four founding members were growing, Elia Zenghelis, with the support of architect Elias Veneris, opened a branch office of OMA in Athens to carry out projects in Greece. Zoe and Elia Zenghelis did not move to Athens but stayed in London and travelled to Greece occasionally for meetings, site visits, and presentations. Most of the "Greek projects" were located in islands of the Aegean and Ionian Seas, beginning with a commission by Ion Siotis, for a group of villas in Antiparos, a small Cycladic Island [see painting "Site Plan for 16 Villas on the Island of Antiparos, Greece," 1983], followed by the design of a hotel in the island of Lesbos [see also painting "1000 Olive Trees, Hotel Therma, Lesbos," 1985.] It was also during the early 1980s that PASOK (Panhellenic Socialist Movement) won the Greek parliamentary elections, establishing a long-standing ideological and cultural hegemony. For the remaining years of its short existence, OMA Athens developed projects in the island of Kefalonia, directly commissioned by the democratic-socialist government. On Antiparos project see Cynthia Davidson and Elia Zenghelis, "A Conversation with Elia Zenghelis," *Log*, no. 30 (2014): 97–98. On OMA's work in Greece see Platon Issaias, "Kefalonia Is for Lovers," in *Do Your Remember How Perfect Everything Was?: The Work of Zoe Zenghelis*, ed. Hamed Khosravi (London: AA Publications, 2021), 178–207.

<sup>2</sup> The redevelopment plans for *St. Gerasimos Sacred Plain and Koutavos Bay*, and the redesign of the access and supporting infrastructure for the beaches of *Skala and Platys Gialos*.

<sup>3</sup> In multiple forums, namely public lectures and teaching workshops at the School of Architecture at Yale University, Bartlett School of Architecture—UCL, the AA in the last decade, among others, Elia Zenghelis returns to this notion of inverted nature; for him nature exists only through its cultural construction.

**Stefano de Martino** combines his work with a long-standing commitment to education. He was dean of the faculty of architecture University of Innsbruck, where he was a full professor and chair of the Institut für Gestaltung. In 1983, he was invited by Alvin Boyarsky to teach at the Architectural Association, running intermediate and diploma units until 1991. Stefano de Martino was educated at the Bartlett, University College London and at the Architectural Association. As associate of OMA (1979–83), he worked on projects including "Boompjes," "Parc de la Villette," and "Exposition Universelle," contributing to the image and critical approach through exhibitions and publications.

**Alex Wall** is design critic in landscape architecture at the Graduate School of Design (GSD), Harvard University. Before his tenure at the GSD, he was professor of practice at University of Virginia where his research project "Resilient Settlement and Productive Aquatic Landscapes" focused on framing long-term development strategies for Virginia's coastal communities. Between 1998 and 2013, he was professor of international urban design at KIT, Germany, where he focused on design and planning at the intersection of urbanization and climate change. Between 1982 and 1989, he worked at OMA in London and Rotterdam, after which he was an associate professor of architecture at the GSFA, University of Pennsylvania. He received his diploma at the Architectural Association, London.

**Zoe Zenghelis** was born in Athens, Greece, where she studied painting and drawing with Orestis Kanelis. Later, she studied interior design, stage design, and painting at the Regent Street Polytechnic, London in the 1960s. Zenghelis started her painting career as a founding member of OMA (Office for Metropolitan Architecture) and painted for presentations, exhibitions, and publications. Gradually, she worked more on her own paintings and less on architectural presentations. In the 1980s, Zenghelis became known as a painter in her own right, exhibiting in Britain, Europe, and the US. Her OMA work has been exhibited in many museums and galleries including the Museum of Modern Art, Institute for Architecture and Urban Studies, the Guggenheim Museum, Venice Biennale, and the Pompidou Centre in Paris.



## PROGRAMS

### WORKSHOP: HOMESCAPES— CITIES, COLOR, BELONGING Led by Sarah Akigbogun

April 30, 2022  
10 a.m.–1 p.m.

### Carnegie Museum of Art Theater and Studio

“The idea of place, where we belong, is a constant subject for many of us.”  
—bell hooks, *Belonging: A Culture of Place*

Inspired by the exhibition *Zoe Zenghelis: Fields, Fragments, Fictions* (March 26, 2022–July 24, 2022) multidisciplinary practitioner Sarah Akigbogun leads an interactive design workshop called HomeScapes—Cities, Color, Belonging.

Zoe Zenghelis’s work is full of depictions of her homeland, Greece, and explorations of the metropolis, depicting the mood of place with intense use of color. Taking her work and these themes as a point of departure, this workshop will explore the notion of home as something we carry with us; as we travel, go about the day to day, move from one country to another. Working with filmmaking and performance, this workshop will explore what it is to arrive, move through, and settle, briefly, in a place.

The workshop is co-presented with the Carnegie Mellon University School of Architecture.

This event is generously supported by the Steiner Visitor Invitation Grants through the Frank-Ratchye STUDIO for Creative Inquiry.

The Frank-Ratchye  
**STUDIO**  
for Creative Inquiry

\$15  
Space is limited; please register in advance at [cmoa.org](http://cmoa.org). Fee includes museum admission.

### GALLERY MEET AND GREET

April 30, 2022  
1:30–3 p.m.

### Heinz Architectural Center

Join us in the gallery for an informal tour and conversation guided by the artist Zoe Zenghelis and the organizers of the show, Theodossis Issaias, associate curator, Heinz Architectural Center, and Hamed Khosravi, architect and educator at the Architectural Association School of Architecture.

Free with museum admission.

### IN CONVERSATION: ZOE ZENGHELIS

April 30, 2022  
3–5 p.m.

### Carnegie Museum of Art Theater

Join Zoe Zenghelis in a roundtable conversation with the museum’s associate curator, Heinz Architectural Center, Theodossis Issaias, architect and educator Hamed Khosravi, and multidisciplinary practitioner Sarah Akigbogun on the occasion of the exhibition *Zoe Zenghelis: Fields, Fragments, Fictions*. Zenghelis will discuss her artistic process, educational methods, and collaborative work as co-founding member of the architectural firm Office for Metropolitan Architecture. A reception at the Café will follow the roundtable conversation. The event is presented with the Carnegie Mellon University School of Architecture and coincides with the 75th Annual International Conference of the Society of Architectural Historians in Pittsburgh.

Free and open to the public.  
Please register in advance at [cmoa.org](http://cmoa.org)



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All works by Zoe Zenghelis are © the artist and appear courtesy of the artist.

The design methodology behind this printed program and the exhibition graphics engages with Zenghelis's practice in a speculative and narrative way. An invented line-based device appears as a navigation system, divider, and contemplative space for resettlement; it appears crossing the fold and unfolding, in between turns and glances, flips and pauses. We encourage visitors to explore the exhibition by following the relevance between Zenghelis's voice, images, colors, and words.

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The image features three vertical lines of different colors: a gold line on the left, a blue line in the middle, and a green line on the right. These lines are thin and extend from the top to the bottom of the page. The text 'CARNEGIE MUSEUM OF ART' is located in the bottom right corner, positioned between the blue and green lines.

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