



EXHIBITION

OSKAR HANSEN
OPEN FORM
30 JAN – 03 MAY 2015
OFFICIAL OPENING : 27 FEB 2015

OSKAR HANSEN: OPEN FORM

Devoted to the practice of architect, urban planner, theorist and pedagogue Oskar Hansen (Helsinki, 1922–2005, Warsaw), this exhibition traces the evolution of Hansen's theory of Open Form from its origin in his own architectural projects to its application in film, visual games and performative practices by other artists.

Hansen was a member of Team 10 whose theoretical framework, disseminated primarily through teaching and publications, had a profound influence on the development of architectural thought in the second half of the twentieth century, primarily in Europe. He presented his Open Form theory at Team 10's founding meeting – the Congrès international d'architecture moderne (CIAM) in Otterlo (The Netherlands) in 1959. More an 'attitude' than a theory, Open Form was initially conceived as a tool for designing architectural projects, but its evolution and application in education, film editing, visual games and performance led to a wide range of experiments based on the interaction with the other and the exchange and socialization of the artistic object at the centre of the creator's attention.

For Hansen the role of the architect in shaping the space was limited to the creation of a 'perceptive background'. Architecture was supposed to expose the diversity of events and individuals present in the space. Focusing on the process, subjectivity and the creation of contexts for individual expression, architecture was supposed to become an instrument that could be used and transformed by its users, and adapted easily to their changing needs.

The exhibition 'Oskar Hansen: Open Form' develops the idea of Open Form through

the main areas to which the architect applied it. Its three sections – 'Pedagogy of Open Form', 'Architecture of Events' and 'Politics of Scale' – are followed by a part entitled 'Tradition of Open Form', located in the mezzanine of the Serralves library and tracing the appropriation of the concept of Open Form in the works of other artists. The architecture of the exhibition, addressing various exhibition concepts by Hansen, becomes an integral part of the display.

OPEN FORM

The assumptions of Hansen's theory are summarized in a **visual lecture on Open Form** (1960) presented at the entrance to the exhibition. A collage, composed from pages of a catalogue accompanying Hansen's presentation at the 12th Milan Triennale, manifests his criticism towards standardization and inflexibility of existing architecture, and draws attention to the individual, with his/her specific expectations and needs. Graphic manifestoes are followed by a series of exercises – cubes put next to each other such that they remain independent and of equal importance, or elements introduced in varied backgrounds while maintaining legibility – which help to find the equilibrium between the needs of the individual and the community. The last image of this visual explanation, drawn by Jan Młodożeniec, summarizes all those assumptions in a neat metaphor: a group of birds build their nests on irregularly positioned perches; through different constructions they are able to adapt the available space to their specific needs and habits.

To clarify his concept of Open Form, Hansen elaborated also a series of binary oppositions. When juxtaposing Closed and Open Form, as it is presented on

a photo from the AICA congress in Wrocław (1975), he characterized the first one as dogmatic, hierarchical, didactic, object-oriented, possessive, imitative and invariable, recalling the iconic works of Le Corbusier as an example – works which, with their perfect finishing, served first and foremost as the monuments for their creator. The latter, on the contrary, was characterized by its openness to science, appreciation of the process of learning and gaining knowledge, egalitarianism, focus on human being, reliance on conscious choices, transformability, etc.

PEDAGOGY OF OPEN FORM

The first field of Hansen's activity that the exhibition explores is the Open Form education. During his tenure at the Warsaw Academy of Fine Arts, which lasted from the early 1950s to 1983, Hansen ran the Solids and Planes Composition Studio at the Faculty of Sculpture, the aim of which was to teach the students the basics of visual language. Orienting the curriculum of the studio towards his theory, he passed Open Form on to generations of students, encouraging them to pursue art practices beyond traditional disciplines.

Characteristic for Hansen's teaching practice were the **didactic apparatuses**, used in his studio since 1960s. The aim of those wooden instruments was to help students investigate questions related to composition or perception of visual phenomena seen through Open Form principles. Among numerous apparatuses for exercising *Rhythm*, *Legibility of a Complex Form* or *Multidirectional Compositions*, there was also an apparatus for the exercise *Legibility of a Large Number of Elements*, presented in the first room. By composing first a minimum, then a maximum number of cubes on a wooden board students were

learning how to achieve legibility in complex structures: 'The number of the elements in our environment is beyond our perceptual powers', Hansen explained. 'This exercise involves the task of seeking a means – grouping, relating, framing, applying backgrounds, etc. – to facilitate the perception of a large number of elements'. A different application of this apparatus can be seen in the film *Open Form: Hansen's Studio* (1971) by KwieKulik (the artistic duo formed by Przemysław Kwiek and Zofia Kulik), presented on the opposite wall. Hansen's teaching devices found there an extraordinary function, taking the role of instruments in a mute concert performed by his students. Two apparatuses hanging in the middle of the room – exhibition copies of the instruments constructed in 1985, and preserved in Hansen's house in Szumin and the Warsaw Academy of Fine Arts Museum – expanded the idea of framing. The visitors can test how they work by moving the elements and composing colourful frames to expose selected elements of the exhibition seen through the apparatuses.

The next room of the exhibition presents how through Hansen's teaching Open Form theory shifted from architecture to visual arts and performative artistic practice, proving its applicability to different fields of cultural production. *Game on Morel's Hill*, presented in the form of a digital slideshow by KwieKulik, was an open-air exercise performed in 1971 during a meeting of the Young Creative Workshop in Elbląg. Discussions during this meeting led to a split between the participants. Przemysław Kwiek intervened in this situation, suggesting to postpone the conversation until the following day and to hold it outdoors. His intention to replace words with visual communication resulted in a performed battle of 'visual tactics'. Two teams were formed, the

Black and the Whites, later joined by the Reds, who came in unexpectedly. While one team was making a 'move' using the available props – 1.5-metre long sticks, a piece of white canvas approximately 1.5-metre long, and red canvas –, the other was watching and subsequently had to respond to it. The players made 14 'moves' in three hours. Initiated by the students, the performative, open-air exercises soon became an integral part of the curriculum of Hansen's studio – their later use as a teaching method is presented in a film, *Groping One's Way* (1975), by Piotr Andrejew.

Yet another 'educational tool' was **Hansen's summer house in Szumin**, presented in the photo documentation by Jan Smaga. Located amid the picturesque area of an oxbow lake of the River Bug, the house, whose construction began in 1969, was a perfect place to demonstrate Hansen's theory of Open Form. The house incarnated its key principles related to opening architecture to the human being and established a 'perceptive background' in order to emphasize everyday events. In the early 1990s the house became a location for a summer school organized by the Bergen School of Architecture, founded by Hansen's former student and assistant, Svein Hatløy. The film **Summer School in Szumin** (1991), shot by Alvar Hansen, documents one of those summer courses: group activities, talks and exercises performed on didactic apparatuses located in the house, even during meals, through which Norwegian students discovered the ideas of Open Form.

Besides Hansen's summer residence, his Warsaw apartment also contributed to the theory of Open Form. The extension of a small utility attic into an 80-square-metre maisonette, designed by Oskar Hansen and his wife, architect Zofia Hansen, became an inspiration for the studies of **active negative** (1957), reconstructed

from archival photos for the purpose of this exhibition. Active negative was a study of impressions from space presented in the form of a sculpture, an intuitive and emotional recording of the way in which the surrounding space was perceived by an individual. Developed first for the apartment on Sędziowska Street in Warsaw, according to Hansen it was to become one of the standard phases of architectural design. Preceding the technical stage of the project, active negative was to serve as a tool for shaping the time-space of interiors, which stimulated the imagination, guaranteed a diversity of impressions and encouraged the user to relate actively to architecture. As on many other occasions, Hansen applied this concept to pedagogy – the exhibition features photo documentation of some active negatives realized by Hansen's students.

Before the concept of active negative was born, Hansen experimented with **active and passive floor**, dividing the surface of the floor into areas that we actively perceive and those that are left beyond our perception. Introduced by Hansen to the design of the Polish pavilion at the 1956 Izmir International Fair, the concept of active and passive floor became an inspiration for the architecture of this exhibition. The presentation features original colour studies from the Izmir pavilion, as well as the studies of the **Choke Chain** – a structure composed of sticks and metal joints, used first in Izmir to exhibit textiles and extended in Hansen's solo show at the salon of the newspaper *Po Prostu* in Warsaw (1957), where it became an independent spatial structure joining the exterior and interior space, and embracing visitors and exhibited objects in a piece of *environment*. A fragment of the *Choke chain* reconstructed in the corridor prefigures the next section of the exhibition.

ARCHITECTURE OF EVENTS

The area of design where the architects and designers from socialist Poland had the greatest artistic freedom was the exhibition design. Pavilions and exhibitions for international fairs were supposed to create a modern image of People's Poland abroad. Thus the government was more eager to commission them to designers who would otherwise be sidelined due to their affiliation with Western architecture and modernist approach. After his scholarship in Paris (1948-50), where he worked under Fernand Léger and Pierre Jeanneret, Le Corbusier's cousin and associate, and a scandal provoked by a modern interior design which he and Lechosław Rosiński proposed for the Warsaw city hall, Hansen also found himself among those sidelined designers. The designs of pavilions and exhibitions became for him a kind of asylum – and accidentally also a perfect place to experiment with Open Form.

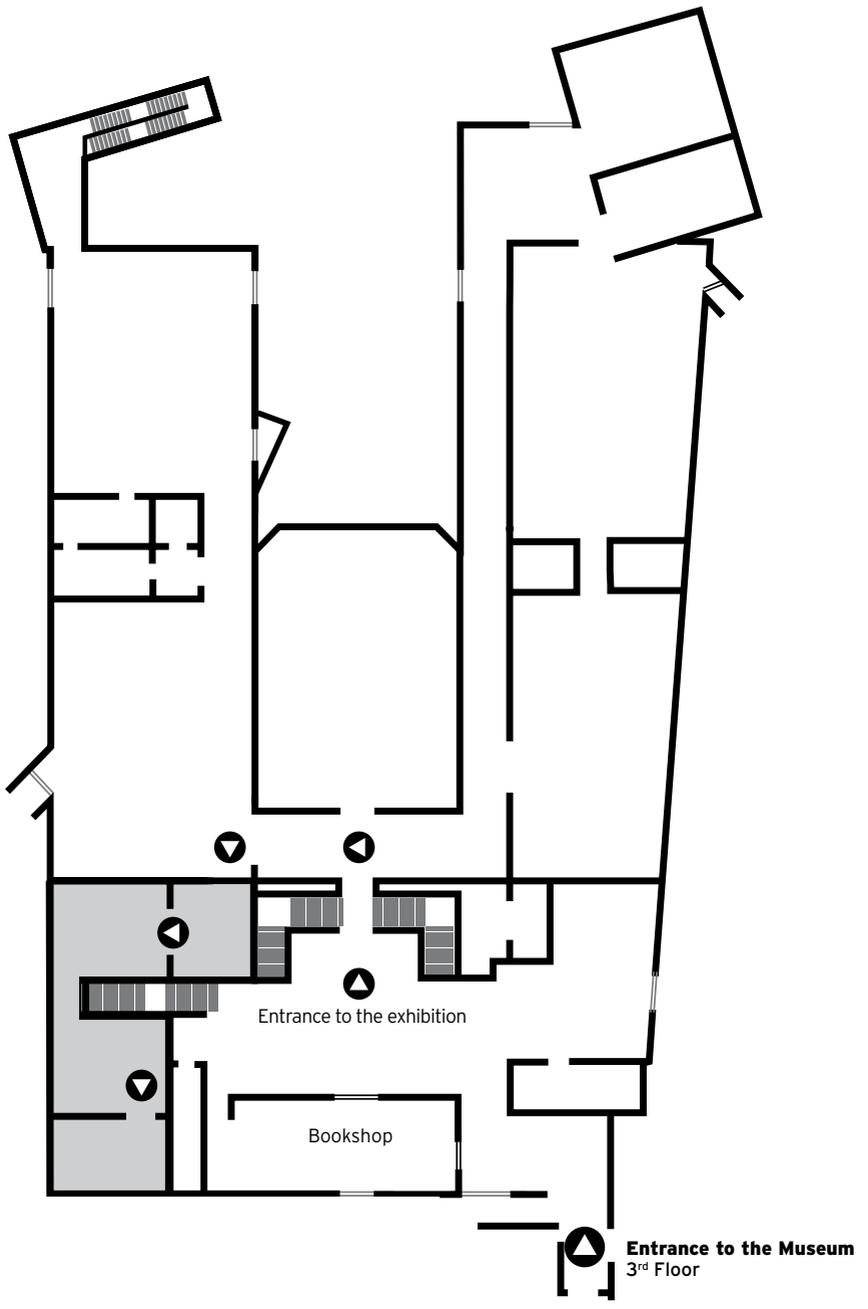
The exhibition features one of his numerous pavilion designs – a pavilion ***My Place, My Music*** designed together with his wife, Zofia, for the Contemporary Music Festival in Warsaw in 1958. A never executed pavilion, as Hansen described it, ***My Place, My Music*** 'pictured the spatiality of music'. The speakers located in multiple spikes of the pavilion created an environment through which listeners could walk, selecting audio sources coming from different directions, composing individual soundtracks through their moves and experiencing music in space.

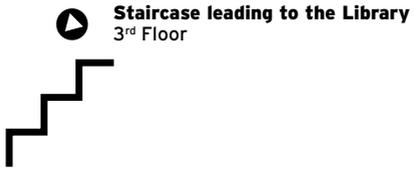
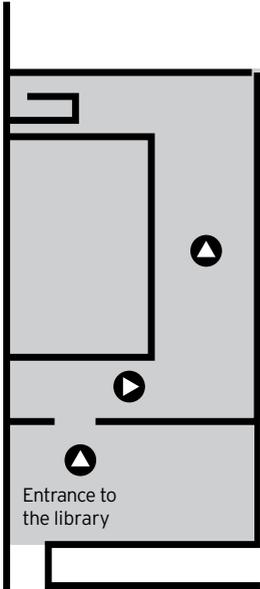
Hansen's pavilion designs that included references to biological structures allowing infinite expansion were noticed by architect Yona Friedman, who invited him to the Groupe d'Étude d'Architecture Mobile (GEAM). The pavilion designs helped Hansen also to expand the

concept of 'perceptive background', changing the role of architecture to a framework exposing exhibited objects and passing-by visitors. The flexibility of his projects corresponded very well with contemporary art, leading to the project of the Zacheta gallery extension in Warsaw and the competition entry for the **Museum of Modern Art in Skopje** (1966), neither of which unfortunately was executed.

For the competition organized by People's Poland to help Yugoslavia rebuild the city of Skopje following the earthquake of 1963, Hansen and his team submitted a project of a museum composed of two parts. The first section of the building, dedicated to the permanent exhibition, was a simple structure raised on pilotis or piers. The most characteristic part of the Skopje's design was, however, the part dedicated to temporary shows. Composed of hexagonal elements supported on hydraulically powered, rotatin telescopic poles, the structure allowed for a completely free transformation and adaptation of the building to the needs of any exhibition. Umbrella-shaped mobile elements could be furled and unfurled, or even folded away and hidden underground when not needed. The architecture, conceived as a tool in the hands of its user, could easily adapt to the rapid changes in contemporary art, provoking the birth of new projects.

This section of the exhibition features also Hansen's research in the field of cybernetics, the best manifestation of which is the design of the **Polish Radio Experimental Studio** (PRES, 1962), whose space and colour scheme was adjusted to the sounds of electronic music created there. Being the first facility of this kind in the Eastern Bloc and one of the earliest in Europe, PRES responded to the needs of avant-garde composers, gathering the





state-of-the-art equipment for generating, recording, processing and editing sound. Hansen's objective in designing the studio was to create an innovative environment that would offer a plethora of possibilities for shaping acoustic conditions as well as ensuring operational flexibility and functionality. Again, the architecture was supposed to become a tool, an instrument on which the composers could play.

This medial thread began by the PRES is complemented by reports from Hansen's politically engaged students from the beginning of the 1970s, related to co-operating with television: *Activities in the TV Studio* (1972) by KwieKulik or *Video A* (1974) by Paweł Kwiek. Interested in activities in 'large social scale', they wanted to make the transition of Open Form theory and practice from the field of architecture to mass-media. Their experiments, focused on the relation between the avant-garde ideas and popular culture, were an attempt to make a specific replica of PRES in the context of TV. Through Open Form exercises, Hansen and these artists sought to transform their work into multivalent 'exercises', in the sense of exercising rights, collectivity or even performing physical exertion and mathematical assignments. Open Form is thus understood and characterized as a kind of perpetual (re)training or aesthetic calisthenics, a series of operations and operating exercises.

POLITICS OF SCALE

The interest of Hansen's students in mass media leads to the projects that shifted the idea of Open Form into the macro-scale design. The *Linear Continuous System (LCS)*, an extension of Hansen's theory of Open Form into the scale of the Great Number, proposed replacing centric cities with belts of development

stretching throughout the entirety of Poland. The concept of the LCS, developed since the mid-1960s, was Hansen's response to the prognosis of Poland's rapid demographic development and the increasing problem of urban sprawl. The architect proposed to replace old centric cities with four multifunctional settlement belts stretching from the Tatra Mountains to the Baltic Sea. The belts, combining residential, social, transportation and light industrial zones, were supposed to provide all their inhabitants with a good quality of life with equal access to culture and nature, as well as the possibility of individual expression (e.g. in the **Western Belt project** proposed for the city of Lubin and its surroundings and presented in the exhibition in a form of a model, the inhabitants were encouraged to construct their houses by themselves on the terraces provided by the architects). The LCS, as a project dedicated to a socialist state with its centrally-planned economy, centralized industry and common grounds, was discussed at the meetings of the Poland 2000 committee as a possibility for Poland's spatial development.

Besides the model of the Western Belt, the exhibition features also a series of Hansen's conceptual drawings revealing the organic inspirations for the LCS (**LCS: Impressions**, 1960s). The application of Open Form to designs in the scale of the Great Number is summarized in Hansen's articles published in the Team 10's journal, *Le Carré bleu*.

Although the LCS was never realized in its full shape, Oskar and Zofia Hansen tried to introduce its assumptions in their mass housing projects: the Rakowiec and Przystółek Grochowski Housing Estates in Warsaw (1958; 1969-73) and the **Juliusz Słowacki Housing Estate in Lublin** (1963-66). The surveys held among the inhabitants of the latter reveal Hansen's

conceptual relation to Team 10, expressed in their interest in participation, ecology, the humanization of cities and factories, and the revision of the urban principles of modernism. Carried out before the construction began, the surveys were aimed at introducing the element of individuality into a mass housing project. Driven by the aim of giving expression to the individual within the local community that also inspired Open Form, the Hansens asked the future inhabitants of the estate to fill the given architectural frames with partition walls according to their needs. Unfortunately, later the automatic allocation of the flats – usual for socialist Poland – made this experiment in participation unsuccessful.

The maximum flexibility and users' participation in designing their living spaces was assured also in Hansen's contribution to **PREVI** (PROyecto Experimental de Vivienda, or Experimental Housing Project) in Lima, Peru (1969-72, with Svein Hatløy). Dwellings designed for this experimental housing project were based on thin units from reinforced concrete. Serving as the components that formed both walls and roofs of the future housing, the units were supplemented by lighter elements – like blocks, beams, plates, wickerwork and textiles – which were to be given to inhabitants, allowing them to finish their apartments individually. Six houses from Hansen and Hatløy's housing estate project were realized experimentally and, greatly redesigned by their users, remain in Lima.

TRADITION OF OPEN FORM

Presented at the mezzanine of the Serralves library, the last section of the exhibition translates the pedagogical aspect of Open Form into reality by questioning the significance of Hansen's theory for Polish contemporary art. Raising issues of participation and processuality, the works by, among others, Grzegorz Kowalski, Artur Żmijewski, Paweł Althamer, KwieKulik, Paweł Kwiek, Zbigniew Libera, Wiktor Gutt and Waldemar Raniszewski, denote various approaches to the concept of Open Form and its postulates of reviewing the hierarchy between the artist and the viewer.

At the turn of the 1960s and 1970s, the duo KwieKulik, both students of Hansen, pursued Open Form as the basis for collective, communication-oriented production. Through a process they described as 'working with the camera', they recorded indeterminate actions and ephemeral performances coordinated in relation to the camera's field of view. Where Hansen stressed a type of participatory involvement through the 'energy of the client's initiative', KwieKulik approached collaboration in the form of serial 'provocations' (*Open Form: School, Open Form: Street and Parade Square*, 1971) and 'responses' in which not only authorship would be questioned, but also the status of a singular work (*Open Form: Game on Actress' Face*, 1971). KwieKulik focused on developing 'backgrounds', 'structures' and 'games' through which forms of collective action would emerge. An insistence on the unpredictable unfolding of these processes in formal, social and temporal dimensions was coupled with a stress on objective documentation. While mathematics, cybernetics and communication theory were their terms of reference, the artists also conceived their work as a radical social practice that would experiment with non-authoritarian

systems and offer a form of interference in contemporary politics and propaganda (Paweł Kwiek, *1,2,3... Cinematographer's Exercises*, 1974).

Wiktor Gutt and Waldemar Raniszewski in their *Grand Conversation* (1972-2008) took Open Form practice from its rational and quasi-scientific background and merged it with the almost ritualistic communication characteristic for 'savage' and tribal cultures. A continuation of this strategy can be found in *Minstrel Show* (2009) by Anna Niesterowicz and Łukasz Gutt, where the artists confronted racist phenomena of Minstrel Show with a 'primitive' way of painting the faces alluding to Wiktor Gutt and Waldemar Raniszewski's practice.

Three different examples of art and architecture education affected by Hansen's theory are presented in the middle of the room. The most influential until now is Grzegorz Kowalski's studio with his exercise *Common Space, Individual Space*. In the 1980s Kowalski established his own studio and didactical programme at the Warsaw Academy of Fine Arts. Strongly inspired by Hansen, his studio attached greater importance to the development of the student's individuality, and pursued a partnership-based and compassionate teacher-student relationship rather than an authoritarian and hierarchical one. The task *Common Space, Individual Space* gathers on equal rights the students and the lecturers, who engage jointly in a communicative situation using only non-verbal means – visual forms, signs and gestures. Each participant begins with a specific 'private area', individual space at their disposal, from which they enter the 'common area', the space of interaction. Movement of one participant can elicit a spontaneous response of another, drawing the students' attention to the communicative quality

of art. Another less known pedagogical practice inspired by Open Form is Zbigniew Libera's Open Form Studio, run at the Academy of Fine Arts in Prague between 2008 and 2009. *Activities with the Head* (2008) and *Game at Grobovka Park* (2009) were re-enactments of the activities undertaken by Hansen's students in 1970s, referring to *Game on Morel's Hill* and *Open Form – Game on Actress' Face* by KwieKulik, among others. The third presented pedagogical path focuses on the architectural dimensions of Open Form. The programme of the *Bergen School of Architecture*, founded in 1986 by Hansen's student and assistant Svein Hatløy, has been until now strongly inspired by Hansen's theory and continues most of his teaching methods in its curriculum.

The last works featured in the exhibition are films by Paweł Althamer and Artur Żmijewski, who as students of Grzegorz Kowalski represent a second generation of artists confronting themselves with Open Form. *Them* (2007) by Artur Żmijewski documents a social experiment performed by the artist. Żmijewski invited four groups representing divergent ideological mindsets for a joint workshop where, as in the exercise *Common Space, Individual Space*, the participants were given the task to negotiate the shape of their common space without words. The project *Bródno 2000* (2000) is an example of what Paweł Althamer calls 'directing reality'. In February 2000, the artist talked his neighbours from the block of flats in Warsaw into turning the lights on and off in specific rooms. Althamer's commitment to animate community life, visible in this realization, stems from his belief in the determining force of the immediate environment and in the activating role of the artist, 'who can use a simple gesture to make us think outside the box'. The last film – *A Dream*

of Warsaw (2005), by Artur Żmijewski – documents the preparations to the last exhibition of Oskar Hansen’s works held in the Foksal Gallery Foundation in Warsaw in February. In this exhibition Hansen proposed a solution to the problem of visual domination of the Palace of Culture and Science, an imposing complex of Soviet design, over Warsaw’s cityscape. The footage of the preparation of the exhibition is a tribute to the architect, who passed away soon after.

Text by Aleksandra Kędziołek and Łukasz Ronduda

Translated from the English by Sofia Gomes and Maria Ramos

Oskar Hansen: Open Form’ is curated by Aleksandra Kędziołek and Łukasz Ronduda and organized by the Museum of Modern Art in Warsaw and the Museum of Contemporary Art in Barcelona (MACBA), in association with the Serralves Museum of Contemporary Art, Porto.

Exhibition coordination: Filipa Loureiro and Ricardo Nicolau

Exhibition design: CENTRALA

Registrar: Inês Venade

Installation: Ana Amorim, Nuno Aragão, João Brites, Filipe Duarte, Manuel Martins, Carla Pinto, Lázaro Silva

GUIDED TOURS AND TALKS

Guided tour by Aleksandra Kędziorek, co-curator of the exhibition

31 JAN (Sat), 16h00

Museum Galleries

Guided tour for Members by Ricardo Nicolau, deputy to the Director of the Serralves Museum

07 FEB (Sat), 15h30

Museum Galleries

Guided tour by Joaquim Moreno, architect and professor at the Graduate School of Architecture, Planning and Preservation of Columbia University (New York), the Department of Architecture of the Universidade do Minho (Braga, Portugal), and the Department of Architecture of the Universidade Autónoma (Lisbon).

26 MAR (Thu), 18h30

Museum Galleries

Guided tours by Museum Education staff

By Inês Caetano

08 MAR (Sun), 12h00-13h00

12 APR (Sun), 12h00-13h00

Museum Galleries

Guided tours to all the exhibitions

Saturdays: 16h00-17h00 (in English)

Saturdays: 17h00-18h00 (in Portuguese)

Sundays: 12h00-13h00 (in Portuguese)

FAMILY WORKSHOP

DESIGNING THE UNPREDICTABLE

Workshop by Inês Caetano

09 MAY (Sat), 16h30-18h30

Education Room

More information at www.serralves.pt

Education: Líliliana Coutinho (coord.);
Diana Cruz, Cristina Lapa (production)

Institutional support



Exclusive Sponsor of the Museum



Official Insurance Provider: Fidelidade – Companhia de Seguros, S.A.

Fundação de Serralves / Rua D. João de Castro, 210, 4150-417 Porto / www.serralves.pt / serralves@serralves.pt / Information line: 808 200 543

PARKING Entrance by Largo D. João III (next to the École Française)