

# Organic Architecture Exhibition

Pioneers, development and perspectives



Staircase Gasunie, Groningen,  
Alberts & Van Huut, 1994

## Content and objectives

The exhibition gives an overview of the origins, development and current significance of organic architecture. It aims at a wide audience including those interested in architecture, designers, students and potential clients.

Apart from merely giving a historical survey of the movement, this exhibition aims to encourage enthusiasm for an architectural approach in which the human being holds a central position and that seeks to establish a careful relationship between the human being and the natural, social and cultural environment.

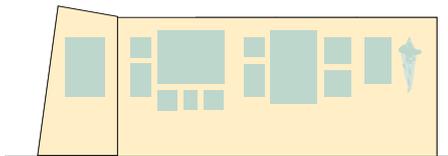
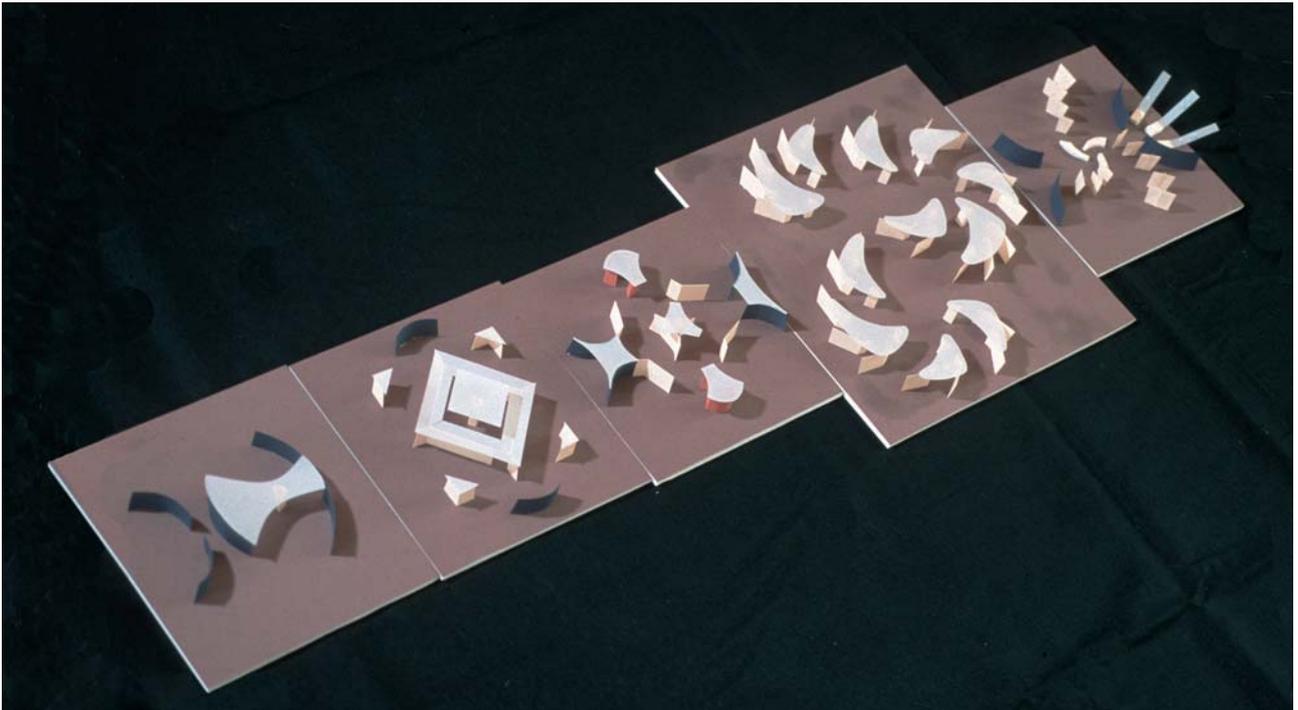
## What is organic architecture?

The term organic architecture embraces a colourful variety of architectural approaches and expressions which developed in different places at the beginning of the 20th century. Pioneers such as Frank Lloyd Wright, Antoni Gaudí and Rudolf Steiner drew, each in their own way, inspiration from the principles of living nature. This often led to free and expressive forms. These were not meant as an imitation of nature, but to support people as living and creative beings.

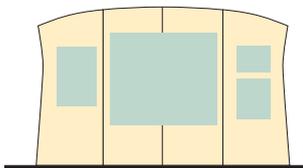
Within the organic movement, architecture is not only seen as an expression of culture and society, but also as something that influences the inner and outer lives of people. In this sense, the human being is seen as a physical, psychological and spiritual entity, connected to its surroundings at all these levels.

At a time in which architecture is largely dominated by economics, technical possibilities and regulations, organic architecture strives for an integral approach that also comprises ecological aspects, cultural meaning and spirituality.

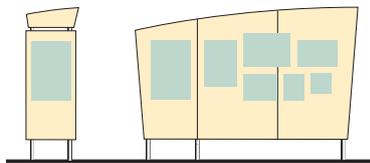
## Composition



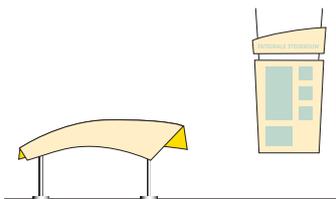
In accordance with its subject, the exhibition itself is conceived as an organism, following the historical development of the organic architecture. The first part shows the origin of organic architecture at the beginning of the 20th century. Its fundamental principles are explained in a clear manner on the basis of designs and quotations by the pioneers.



The second part shows the revival of organic architecture in the fifties and sixties. During these years architects such as Le Corbusier, Eero Saarinen and Alvar Aalto transformed Modernism in a more organic direction.

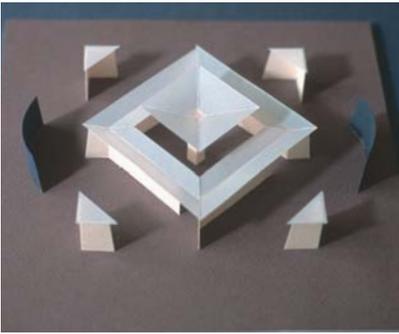


The central part of the exhibition is the most extensive section. About thirty projects from all over the world demonstrate the diversity and richness which evolved during the last two decades of the 20th century. The final part explores what organic architecture can contribute to contemporary issues such as sustainable and healthy building, user participation and the cultural dimension of architecture. Visitors are invited to express their own vision on the environment by means of text, drawing, clay and model-making material.

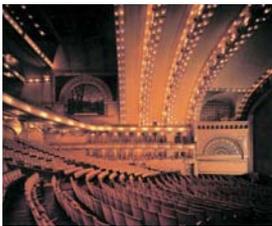


Each of these parts has its own specific character and design. Differences in the spatial grouping of the panels, their form and colour, support the experience of the transformation of the organic architecture throughout the twentieth century. In this way the exhibition illustrates its own subject.

## Origin and backgrounds of organic architecture



The first part serves as an introduction and illustrates the origin and background of organic architecture as it emerged in different countries at the beginning of the 20th century. The externalization of form in the neo-styles and the rise of new building techniques fired many architects of that period to create a new style in line with their times. Amid Art Nouveau, Functionalism, and Constructivism the concept of organic architecture was born. The pioneers of this direction drew inspiration from principles derived from living nature. Each of them stressed different aspects, but seen in relation to one another their individual approaches constitute a coherent totality.



### **Louis Sullivan** (1856-1924)

was one of the first to introduce the concept of 'organic architecture'. After closely studying nature, he concluded that form always follows function and made this principle the guideline for his architectural designs. Moreover, he brought his geometrical building masses to life by means of a rich, organic ornamentation.



### **Frank Lloyd Wright** (1869-1959)

broadened both the content and the language of organic architecture in many directions. He expanded the concept 'organic' to denote the relation between the building and its environment, the continuity of internal and external space and the use of building materials in accordance with their own nature.



### **Antoni Gaudí** (1852-1926)

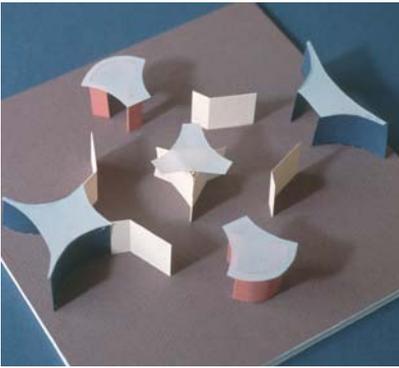
was one of the first architects to express himself in sculptural form. These forms were often based on the forces at play in the construction. During the last phase of his life he developed a natural geometry of double curved surfaces that he applied in the church of the Sagrada Familia.



### **Rudolf Steiner** (1861-1925)

introduced in architecture the principle of 'metamorphosis' that he derived from Goethe. This enabled him to express development processes that are inherent to nature, culture and the human consciousness. By contemplating these forms an awareness for interrelations and the ability to think in processes can be developed.

## The transformation of modernism



Organic architecture seemed to have expired at the end of the twenties. Several of its leading pioneers such as Sullivan, Steiner and Gaudí died and in Europe the economic recession plus the impending Second World War caused a general decline in building.

In the fifties and sixties however, organic architecture underwent a surprising revival. It is remarkably that this revival was brought about by pioneers of the modern movement. They transformed its initially rigid geometrical character into a more lively, organic direction. In some instances, such as with Le Corbusier, this was a surprising turn, in others, such as with Alvar Aalto and Hans Scharoun, a more gradual development occurred.



### **Notre-Dame-du-Haut**

Le Corbusier

Ronchamp, France, 1950-1955



### **TWA Terminal, John F. Kennedy Airport**

Eero Saarinen

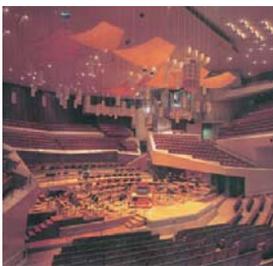
New York, USA, 1956-1962



### **Sydney Opera House**

Jørn Utzon

Sydney, Australia, 1957-1973



### **Philharmonie**

Hans Scharoun

Berlin, Germany, 1956-1963



### **Finlandiahall**

Alvar Aalto

Helsinki, Finland, 1962-1975

## Organic architecture worldwide



During the last decades of the twentieth century organic architecture experienced a vigorous revival. A new generation of architects was inspired by the work of pioneers such as Wright and Steiner, but wed their ideas with local building traditions, new techniques and their own creative impulses. In this way, a new diversity of approaches and forms of expression have originated worldwide.

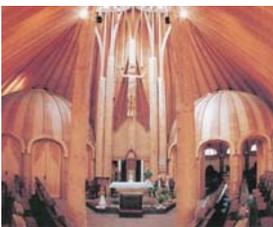
These projects constitute the central part of the exhibition. Depending on the availability of exhibition space, a selection can be made from about 35 projects. They are presented in the form of colour photographs, design sketches, plans, models and a concise project description, when possible by the architects themselves.



**Rudolf Steinerseminariet**  
Asmussens Arkitektkontor  
Järna, Sweden,  
1968-1992



**ING Bank**  
Alberts & Van Huut  
Amsterdam, the Netherlands,  
1979-1987



**Roman Catholic Church Paks**  
Imre Makovecz  
Paks, Hungary,  
1986-1991



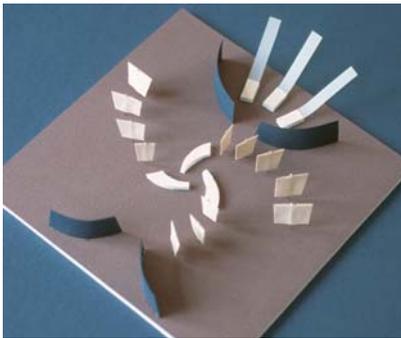
**Whiting Residence**  
Bart Prince  
Sun Valley, Idaho, USA,  
1989-1991



**Uluru-Kata Tjuta Cultural Centre**  
Gregory Burgess  
Northern Territory, Australia,  
1990-1995



**Sekem Kindergarten**  
Portus-Bau  
Egypt, 1986



## Current significance of organic architecture

The last part of the exhibition follows a thematic path. It focuses on the significance of organic architecture for the near and distant future. Topical themes such as sustainable and healthy building, user participation and cultural identity are brought into a dialogue with the premises of organic architecture. Elements such as building materials, form, light, colour and water offer visitors the opportunity to make their own experiences.



### Ecological building

In the years to come the entire building practice will face the task to achieve an ecologically sound and sustainable way of building. Organic architecture can add to this a form language that expresses consciousness for the surroundings, for ecological cohesion and life processes.



### Creating a healthy environment

Sustainable architecture does not automatically create a healthy environment. By conceiving a building as an 'organism' rather than a 'machine', it can support the life processes of the people who use it.



### Sensory impressions and perceptual values

The built environment offers a constant flow of impressions. These impressions have a formative effect on our constitution, they nourish our inner life and reflect cultural values. Various installations offer the possibility to make the relationship between ourselves and the built environment more tangible.



### Identity

Due to the increase in scale and specialization, the architectural process has largely become detached from the users. However, the growing individualisation arouses in many people a desire to exert influence on their own living environment and to recognise themselves in its design.



### Community building

The growing individualisation and related anonymity engender the need for new ways of community building. Community building projects and an increased awareness for the public space surrounding buildings, can stimulate the development of new communities.



### Cultural content

Modern architecture is both in function and appearance strongly determined by economic circumstances. Organic architecture can, by its integrated approach to building, provide an additional cultural dimension, which nourishes the soul and enlivens the spirit.

# Beurs van Berlage, Amsterdam

April 5 – September 14, 2003



## Practical information

Regarding the loan terms,  
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E-mail: [iona@iona.nl](mailto:iona@iona.nl)  
[www.expo.organische-architectuur.org](http://www.expo.organische-architectuur.org)

- The exhibition is set up as a travelling exhibition. Its range and composition can, within limits, be adjusted to the available exhibition space and local wishes. A set core guarantees the necessary thematic background and cohesion.
- In its complete form, the exhibition needs a floor area of around 1000 square meter.
- The exhibition material consists of about 335 colour photographs, 45 transparencies, 50 drawings and sketches, 40 models and objects, 7 chairs and 75 text panels. Each project is illustrated with 3 to 7 colour photographs, if available design sketches, a ground plan and a concise project description.
- Models are available for around 30 projects. These are both (casts of) study models and presentation models. Because of the duration of the exhibition and the fragility of the material, we have had to largely forgo original sketches and presentation drawings.
- Furniture and other implements by those architects who have been active in this field, such as Alvar Aalto and Erik Asmussen, can also be exhibited. All furniture can be actually tried out by the visitors.
- Each part of the exhibition, theme or project is introduced by a concise text outlining the background information necessary to the section in question. An effort will be made to translate these texts in the language of the host country.
- The exhibition does not have its own lighting.
- The exhibition is accompanied by a full-colour catalogue comprising 248 pages. A German and Dutch edition are already available. An English and French edition will be available autumn 2004. Beside this a selection of other books, magazines and postcards can be offered for sale.
- There is a Dutch internet site ([www.expo.organische-architectuur.org](http://www.expo.organische-architectuur.org)) for the exhibition which gives an impression of its content. This site can be made available in other languages with a corresponding domain name.
- The exhibition is composed in collaboration with the Alvar Aalto Archives, the Càtedra Gaudí, the Frank Lloyd Wright Foundation, the Rudolf Steiner Nachlassverwaltung and numerous still practising architectural offices.
- Initiative:  
Dolf van Aalderen, director of the Iona Stichting  
Pieter van der Ree, curator and project manager  
Marty Bax, art historian and advisor
- Design:  
Pieter van der Ree and Buro Kloeg, Bunnik