Activating Architecture

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Describe the vision or mission of your work; what are you trying to accomplish through your architecture?

I have always firmly believed that architecture should primarily be driven by *relevance*. Design should ultimately encompass ideas about how spaces, or areas of the city, are relevant to the end user. Architecture should always be an activator: from the social to the sustainable; from issues related to health and well-being to creating a sense of safety and psychological comfort. Design that is truly relevant enables engagement, empowerment and inspiration through urban and architectural conditions. Architects can achieve this by creating choice, chance and a variety of different experiences for the user.

What motivates you to prioritize this vision; why have you chosen to work towards this mission?

At times out of frustration and at times because of a belief and a desire to change things; to move away from an overly formal approach, or from architecture-for-architecture's sake. I of course believe in improving form and continuing to activate architecture on this level. However in the 1990s and early 2000s image-based, iconic architecture became a prevailing design approach within the profession and many clients would simply request that you design a "landmark building." The primary purpose of such buildings was to emphasise the brand value of architecture. However this mono-functional

Burnham Pavilion, Photo by Christian Richters

Arnhem Central Masterplan, Photo by Hufton + Crow

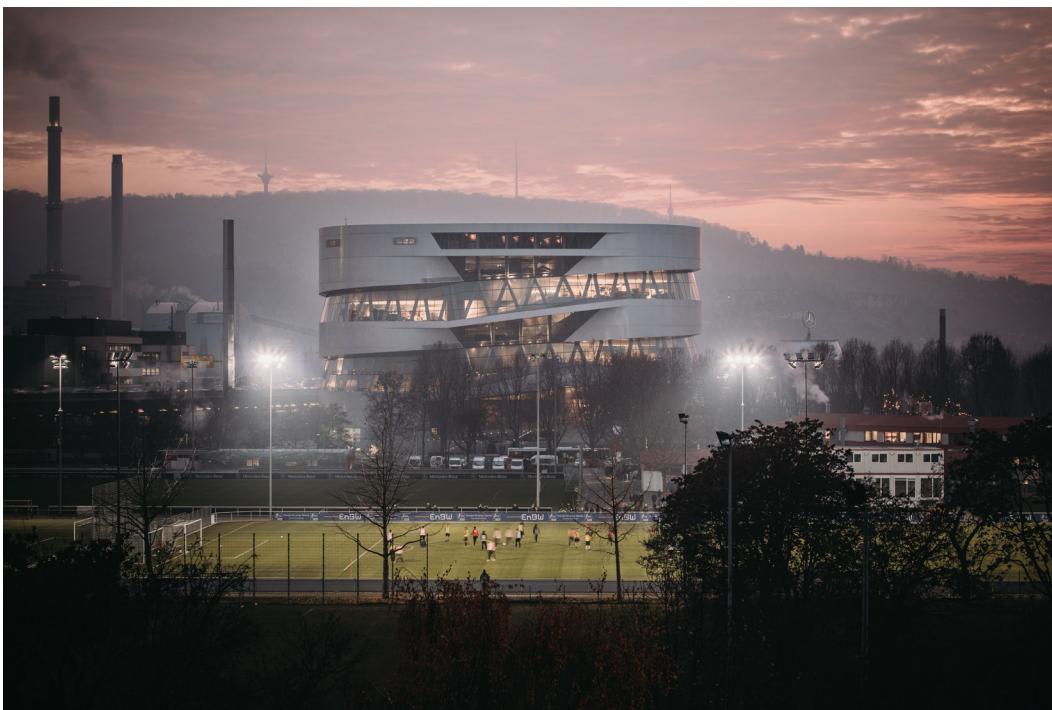*Arnhem Central Masterplan Photo by Hufton + Crow*

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VilLA NM, Photo by Christian Richters

Möbius House, Photo by Christian Richters

Erasmus Bridge, Photo by Christian Richters

Mercedes-Benz Museum, Photo by Evabloem

Raffles City Hangzhou, Photo by Jin Xing

Mercedes-Benz Museum, Photo by Evabloem

approach soon became untenable. In the early 2000s issues of sustainability became an essential and primary concern throughout the building industry and as a result we experienced a significant shift in values in which we started to focus on the *performance* of our buildings and cities. However, this performance cannot only be measured by energy use and environmental effect. As an architect you are always intent on adding value wherever you possibly can, because, in the end, most projects have a social function in one way or another and I have always been aware that how you design these functions will inevitably determine the success of your project. Today's architecture and urban design is about the application of design knowledge across an ever-expanding spectrum of expertises. Thankfully we are now seeing continuous demand for highly performative, sustainable, human-centric, technology-driven, safer and healthier buildings.

How do you go about creating architecture that explores this mission? How do you continuously embody this mission into what you produce?

Recently it has become very apparent to me that social effect, technology and material change need to go hand-in-hand if we are to create truly relevant architecture. To date this has not been the case. Until now, technology has only really been used as a design tool within the profession. While the digital revolution is driving change in every part of our lives and we live in the age of the iPhone, the architecture and design sector is still stuck in the Walkman phase. Because I believe it is now time for the built environment to catch up with technology—so that buildings and cities can adapt to truly support the needs of the user—I recently decided I needed to find a way to fully integrate innovative technology into the built environment. In traditional architectural practice
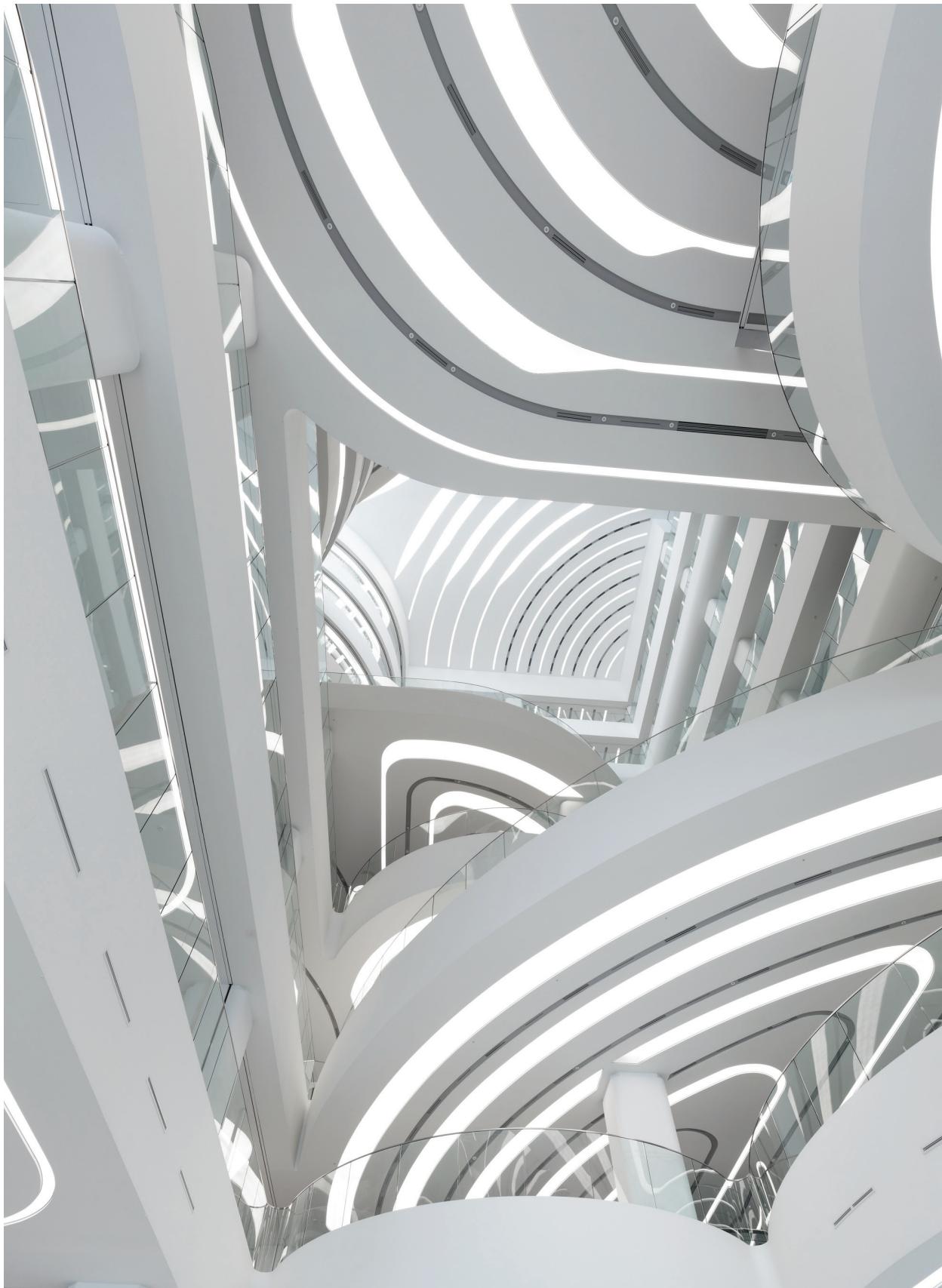
Future Farms Rendering, Image by UNStudio

Lelylaan, Image by UNStudio

however, there are no resources to develop these new technologies; there is little room for prototyping and testing and most importantly, a different skill set is needed to develop such applications. Because of this, I have recently set up an independent tech startup and innovation platform called "UNSense," that is solely dedicated to the research and development of new technologies for the built environment. I am of the firm belief that, in the future, all architecture practices will become arch-tech firms, but for now we have to pave the way to make this expansion of our knowledge and expertise possible. That said, although image making is no longer the priority, it is not the case that architecture is becoming purely utilitarian. I believe a new formal language will emerge and that powerful images will still be generated as a result. More distinguished and intelligent—perhaps even at times ungraspable—images will be generated.