

2nd Prize, Topic 2 Open Category

Participatory Runways

Morphosis Architects

Eugene Ong

JURY CITATION:

The jury commended the scheme for its complexity and sophistication, reminding us of Bernard Tschumi's Park de la Villette as a space of free exploration with strategically placed points of reference. The positioning of follies in the form of linear blocks and buildings also creates interesting framings of the vast landscape, creating delightful spatial experiences to address and embrace the vastness of the space. As an urban design strategy, this creates a basis for new landscapes to be inserted, creating contrast and drama.

PARTICIPANT'S WRITE UP:

Participatory Runways

An uninterrupted expanse. Not usually the impression one would associate with the urban fabric of Singapore, but here, at the Paya Lebar Airport, we have it. Artificially engineered for a hyper-functional program, no doubt, but an expanse nonetheless. And what a magnificent one at that - 4km-long and 75m-wide. Such openness is a rarity, where every square metre is highly optimised towards a larger strategic plan for the growth and survival of our country. Furthermore, what we have here stands as a bureaucratic heterotopia; a void in the memories of the populace, where recollections of the place are confined to orchestrated viewing galleries, longing waits for loved ones at arrival halls or marvelling at the wonder of flight along the fenced perimeter. The master plan proposes to unveil this spatial character as a new construct of civic space and loci in Singapore, and the creation of an urbanism that encourages notions of national aspirations and identity in Singapore.

The openness shall be preserved, an element of our country's journey, and its utilitarian division of landscapes transposed from one for the movement of planes to one for the movement of people. Hermetic containers of steel give way to an expansive field for expression and chance encounters. The intimidating length of the runway is segmented to more intimate scales, each of which engages the runway in novel, tactile ways. In a city where landmarks constantly eclipse the last in an endless bid to be the grandest spectacle, the programs of the runway are positively banal; yet in their synthesis with the unique site, achieve spectacularity. The linearity is broken by a staccato of material and topographical interventions, landforms that allow park goers to appropriate uses and claim their spot in the city. Marking their presence on the site, the existing airport buildings are converted into a series of cultural containers - addressing their past use and program through the lens of the country's journey, the air force, our national carrier, and the dreams of our people, centerpiece of which is the new viewing beacon atop the control tower which offers a vantage across the new town.

Surrounding the new heritage park are the core programs of a rich and vibrant town of the future. Typical mixed-use town centers are "de-centered" to promote pedestrian movement and interaction. Guiding the spatial logic are bridges of housing that bring the fabric of the surrounding neighbourhoods to the site. A deviation from conventional HDB typologies in its directionality and the strongest gesture of the master plan, they run across and bring the city at large into the park, while infusing the town with new residents to invigorate the old "void". In their varying volumes of interstitial spaces and a thorough, open void deck across each block, multiple "living rooms" for the city are created, clustered configurations of tenants anchored by retail and community functions, each with their distinct character, atmosphere and programs. The housing rationality is unhindered by the old buffer of industrial spaces that flank the airport boundaries. On the contrary, their points of convergence create a specificity between new and old and allow a more accessible relationship between domesticity and work. To that end, the industrial enclaves are revitalised sustainably across time as existing industries are relocated. Its varying and flexible spatial characters allow the new residents to adapt them, from planes to that for a new age of work and entrepreneurial enterprise that generates a local character of "cottage" commerce throughout the town.

Conceptually, the scheme packages the site into minute parcels based on its functional and adjacent urban fabric and is governed by design and zoning guidelines specific to the town. As Singapore matures as a nation, it is crucial that the built environment evolves to reflect the changing aspirations of the people. A strategy of appropriation is adopted across the entire spectrum of the master plan – from the smallest plot of grassland to the subdivided building plots. The interventions are considered along three lines of thought that reconcile practicality with a thematic focus – the history of Singapore via spectacle, the future of our identity via culture and the changing trajectories of the economy via innovation.

The new course of urbanism promotes a framework wherein agency is encouraged on a local level. Architects and designers are invited in the creation of new architectural and urban languages to address questions of a national identity and representation in our country's coming of age as a global participant. This allowance for a creative means of occupying the built environment is reflected across the public space, where municipal intervention is limited in favour of a more 'randomised' use and participation in the environment, hence encouraging a greater participation and belonging in the civic life of our city, and creating a new mode of living in Singapore beyond.