

## CAMPUS UTOPIAS

### A visual re-reading

Ayşen Savaş, Esther Gramsbergen, Yağiz Söylev

**ABSTRACT:** "Campus Utopias: A Visual Re-reading" describes a multidisciplinary graduate course conducted collaboratively by TU Delft and METU Ankara's Architecture Departments in 2022. The research course focused on the key urban and architectural features of selected campus projects, examining how the modernist architects engaged in these designs were able to use them as a basis for the experimentation of new educational-residential models for living. This research paper explores the formal aspects of these campuses and their architectural significance. It recognizes the diverse geographies where the modern architectural movement took root and the active role played by political, economic, and cultural agents in shaping these projects. Working with local agents and situating modern architecture within its surrounding infrastructure and landscape helped master architects to integrate local architectural values and new building technologies.

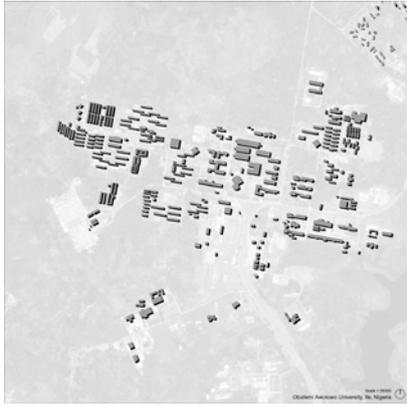
The article presents three case studies: Obafemi Awolowo University in Nigeria, the University of Baghdad in Iraq, and the Central University of Venezuela in Caracas. These campuses were designed and built after World War II, representing the aspirations of newly installed governments. The article highlights the architectural approaches that incorporated environmental considerations and cultural inspirations and the socio-economic considerations in each project. The research methodology involves a comparative analysis of the campuses, focusing on their formal qualities and in-between spaces. The students involved in the graduate research course utilized various media and techniques of representation, including 3D digital drawings, models, collages, and physical reliefs. The work results were presented in the form of an exhibition titled "Campus Utopias" at TU Delft Faculty of Architecture and the Built Environment in April 2022. The student projects in this photo essay show the diversity of scale and make visible the similarities and differences in the overall campus design approaches of the three projects. The major focus is on the in-between spaces and the outcomes of the multidisciplinary work of architects, engineers, landscape architects, and artists.

**KEYWORDS:** Modernist university campuses, cross-cultural influences, campus utopias, creative analysis

**INTRODUCTION:** "Campus Utopias" is a multidisciplinary graduate course conducted as a collaboration by TU Delft and METU Ankara Architecture Departments.<sup>1</sup> Since 2019, this design research course has focused on the key urban and architectural features of selected campus projects. For modernist architects, the campus was a challenging field of experimentation that informed new urban models. Conceived as a community or a small city, it offered the opportunity to reflect on some of the most ambitious visions for a better society. In the search for the ideal living and learning environment, radical spatial experiments were carried out that led to some of the most emblematic buildings in modern architecture. In the

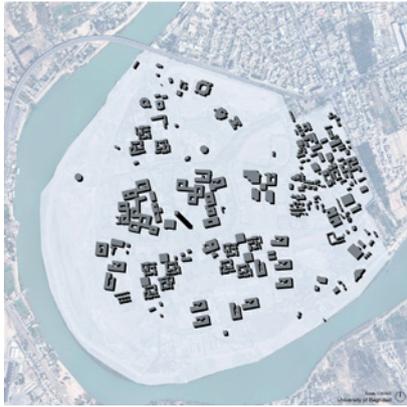
2021-2022 spring semester, the course investigated the formal aspects of a series of university campuses selected from the so-called Global South. The list included Oscar Niemeyer's University of Brasilia, Walter Gropius & The Architects Collaborative's (TAC) University of Baghdad, Louis Kahn's Indian Institute of Management (IIM), Arie Sharon's Ife Campus in Nigeria, Mario Pani and Enrique del Moral's UNAM in Mexico, Carlos Raúl Villanueva's City University of Caracas, S.J. van Embden's National University of Singapore, Maxwell Fry and Jane Drew's National University of Ibadan in Nigeria, and Pierre Jeanneret's Panjab University in Chandigarh, India, designed under the guidance of Le Corbusier. This list

OAU



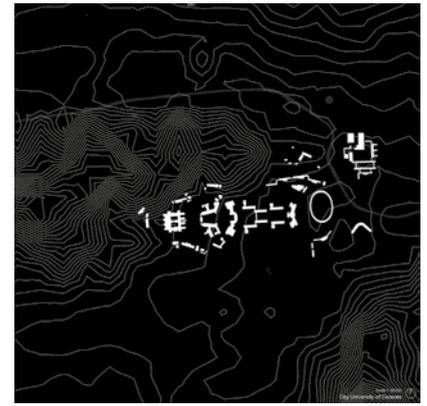
University of Baghdad (OUB), Iraq, designed by Walter Gropius & TAC in collaboration with local architects Mahdloom and Hisham Munir between 1957-1969.

OUB



Central University of Venezuela (UCV), Caracas, designed by Carlos Raúl Villanueva between 1940-1949.

UCV



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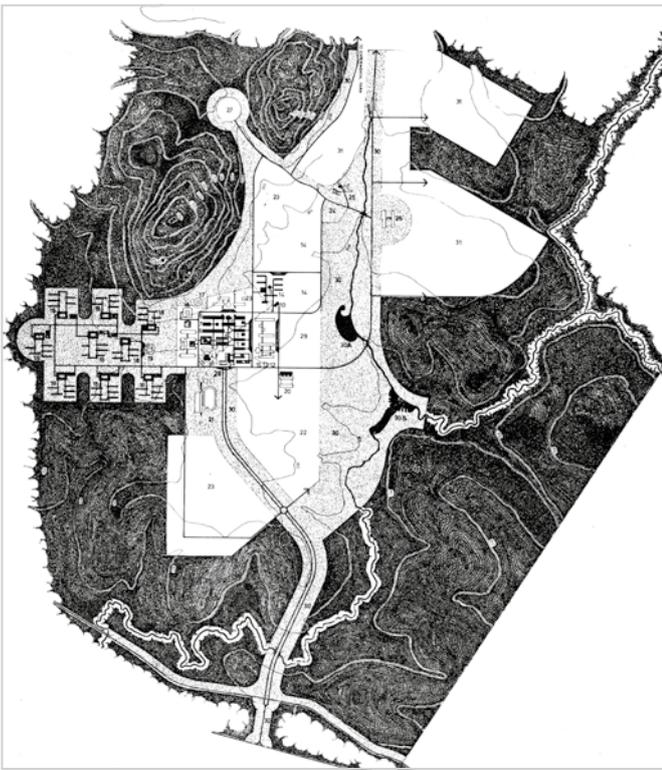
c

01 a) Current condition, map based on OpenStreetMap and Google Maps; b) greenery and water elements on the campus (original plan drawn in current condition); c) figure-ground map of original plan in relation to topography. © Aaliqe Smit, Olivier Bierens, Judith Oosterhoff, Valentin Gies, Christina Sarra, Steven ter Schure, Wendy Wu, Shanshan Xie, Sare Genç, Casper Laan and Harin Naik, 2022.

indicates the diversity of geographies where the influence of the Modern Movement can be identified. Various political, economic, and cultural agents played an active role in this development, and architects responded creatively to these complex and challenging conditions.

From this list, three projects from three continents were selected for this photo essay to illustrate the outcome of the course in which students focused on the architectural significance of university campuses. Obafemi Awolowo University (OAU) in Ifè, Nigeria, the University of Baghdad (UOB) in Iraq, and the Central University of Venezuela (UCV) in Caracas, Venezuela. All were designed and built after World War II and represent the aspirations of newly installed governments. The significance of two of these projects has been recognized by international

and local conservation organizations in different ways. The UCV campus was declared a World Heritage Site by UNESCO in 2000, followed by OAU in 2020, which was included in the Getty Conservation Institute's "Keeping It Modern" initiative (KIM). The DOCOMOMO Iraq chapter was established in 2016, and its founders were members of UOB's Architecture Department, which can be considered a promising sign. Recent publications and exhibitions have already put these experimental projects into a historical context.<sup>2</sup> Socio-political investigations focused on the role of architects as an agent in mobilizing development resources as an alternative to dominating colonial expertise. Architects, responding to local concerns with construction techniques and materials, contributed to discourses on international modernism.



02 1962 Masterplan of the OAU Ifè campus by Arie Shanon. © ariehshanon.org, 2022.

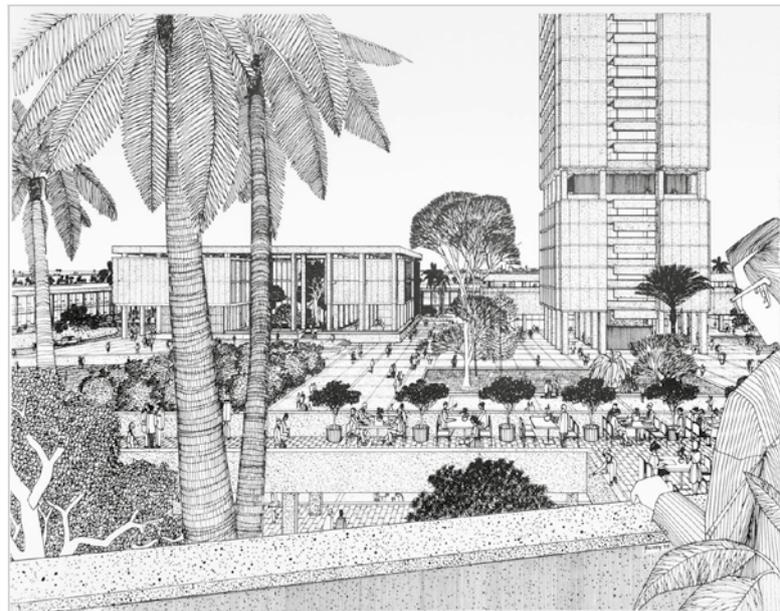
### OBAFEMI AWOLOWO UNIVERSITY (OAU), IFÈ

After Nigeria declared independence in 1960, the University of Ifè (renamed Obafemi Awolowo University in 1987) was designed between 1962 and 1976.<sup>3</sup> Arie Shanon (1900-1984), a Bauhaus-trained Israeli architect, designed the campus together with his son Eldar Shanon (1933-1994) and artist Harold Rubin (1932-2020). Ayala Levin, in her recent book "Architecture and Development", explains the reasons behind choosing a non-European architect as an alternative to the established "settler colonial imagination" and an unorthodox way to plan for the architectural development of Sub-Saharan Africa.<sup>4</sup> The university project was initiated within a decade of when political relations were realigned between Israel, which gained independence from the British mandate in 1948, and Nigeria, decolonized from the British Empire in 1960. As an Israeli architect, Sharon was chosen as an alternative to British or other European architects to represent Nigeria's independence and new democratic national identity. Israel's neutral position during the Cold War and the capacity of Israeli architects, planners, and consultants to provide aid from international organizations such as the US Agency of International Development (USAID) and made it possible to operate at different scales and meditated among international institutions, government agencies, and domestic stakeholders. The layout of the campus is a combination of modernist schemes and local planning and architectural traditions. Inspired by the Yoruba palace design, the main core is designed on a loose grid that fuses between abstract arrangement and freeform. Starting from the selection of the site located in Ifè

(also Ilé-Ifè), considered the cradle of Yoruba culture, aesthetic inspirations combined with international influences made possible diverse readings of the campus architecture. Environmental considerations were a major concern for the campus architects. The pyramidal grading of the building blocks and recessed terraces were intended to cope with the glaring heat and monsoons and to emphasize sculptural horizontality. Murals on concrete facades emphasize the scale and geometry of the buildings and present contemporary interpretations of Yoruba Art.

### THE UNIVERSITY OF BAGHDAD (UOB)

In 1957, Walter Gropius (1883-1969) was commissioned by King Faisal II to build a university with 273 buildings that would become "a small town"<sup>5</sup> on the banks of the Tigris. At the time, Gropius, the founder of Bauhaus, was already in the United States and shared the responsibility of the campus design with the Harvard-based The Architects Collaborative (TAC) and local architects Mahdloom and Hisham Munir. After World War I, Baghdad became the capital of the newly created British mandate, and British influence remained dominant until 1958. During the post-war period, the city underwent a period of political turbulence, with a succession of coups and military regimes, which ended when the Arab Socialist Party came to power and started the policy of socio-economic development. The pursuit of national identity and the claim of modernization were reflected in the art and architectural works of the period. In the 1950s, King Faisal II channeled oil revenues to development projects. He convened a development board that invited modern architects such as Frank Lloyd Wright, Alvar Aalto, and Gio Ponti and sought to instill Western forms while adapting to vernacular



03 Walter Gropius & TAC and Hisham Munir, perspective drawing of the central plaza from the student center, University of Baghdad, 1960 © Canadian Centre for Architecture, Walter Gropius c/o Pictoright Amsterdam.

architecture and using local materials. Meanwhile, local architects who studied in the West incorporated Western ideas in their designs.

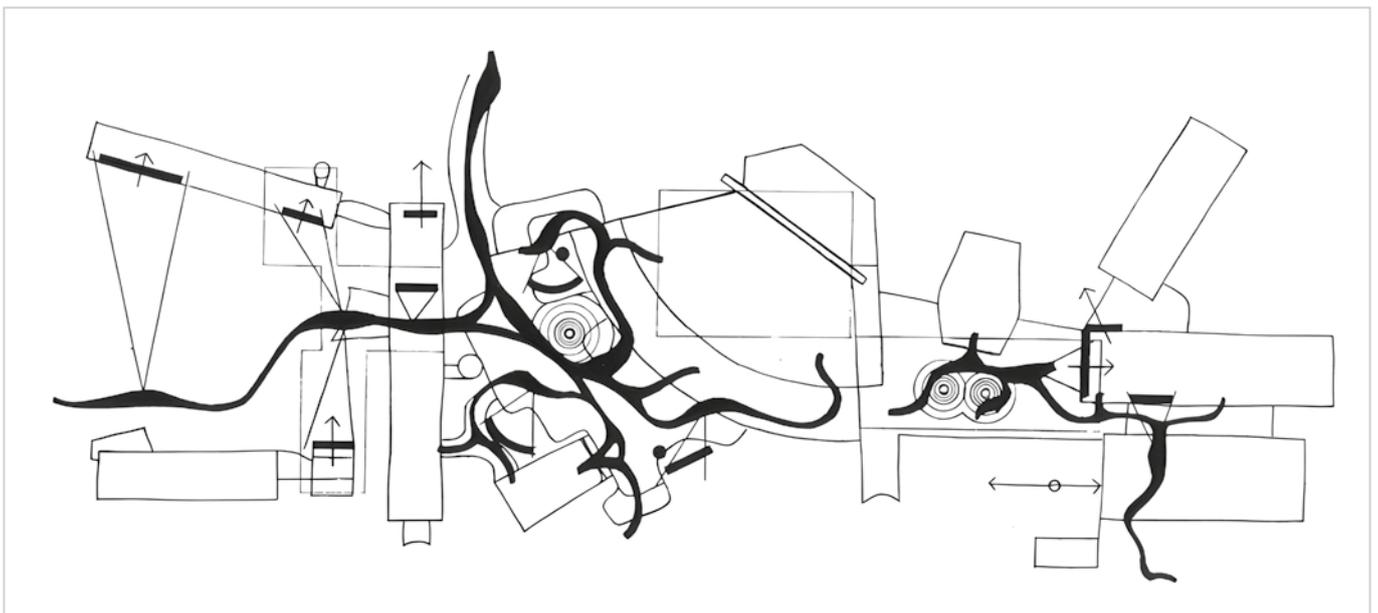
The members of TAC envisaged a low-rise, dense development, like those of a traditional Arabian settlement: "The basic concept has been the idea of the balance of unity and diversity, integration and differentiation."<sup>6</sup> All buildings were designed around patios and connected with continuous walkways. The central campus, enclosed by a ring road, was surrounded by clusters of student dormitories and public functions. "The interrelationship of the individual buildings and the landscaped open spaces with their water fountains between them, as well as the shadow effects from the strong sunlight obtained by cantilevers and undercuts, will cause a significant rhythm."<sup>7</sup> Gropius explained. Due to political upheavals in Iraq in the following years, execution was delayed, and only part of the design was ever realized.

### CENTRAL UNIVERSITY OF VENEZUELA (UCV), CARACAS

The Central University of Venezuela in Caracas was designed between 1940-1949 by a local architect trained in Europe, Carlos Raúl Villanueva (1900-75). He was born in Venezuela and completed his architectural education in France. In his publications on the design of the campus, architectural historian Enrique Larranaga underlines the significance of Villanueva's friendship with August Perret in Paris and follows the traces of modernist architecture illustrated in both architects' interpretation of Beaux-Arts training.<sup>8</sup> Venezuela was separated from Colombia in 1830, followed by a dictatorship that built a new infrastructure network with funds from the oil industry.

The waves of immigration that followed World War II contributed to the diverse culture in Venezuela and led to an orientation towards modern architecture. The plan of the old city, divided into identical squared blocks, was used as a model for the expansion of Caracas.

The city plan proposed by Maurice Rotival in 1938 was based on ideas of modern city planning with a grand central avenue that cuts through the existing gridded urban fabric. During Simon Bolivar's colonial era, Villanueva proposed a central axis plan for the Central University of Caracas, formally based on the Beaux-Arts traditions with volumes arranged on either side, including a botanical garden.<sup>9</sup> Later transformed by modern explorations, the final design of the campus lost its initial east-west axial symmetry with the introduction of a series of public buildings with opposite orientations. It was the organization of the pedestrian circulation that broke the rigid order of this rigid axiality. Art played an important role in the overall design of the campus. Artists such as Alexander Calder, Alejandro Otero, Mateo Manauera, Fernand Léger, and Jean Arp installed murals and sculptures to enhance the spatial organization on the site. Based on the American university campus typology, the project revealed modern trends without compromising the values of traditional architecture with its climate-appropriate streets, squares, courtyards, and patios. The free plan drew attention with its volumetric transparency, perforated walls, in-between public areas, brise soleil, and covered walkways. Despite the prolific use of concrete, the campus, with a daily population of 150,000 people, impresses with its ability to cope with the wild tropical nature and harsh climate.



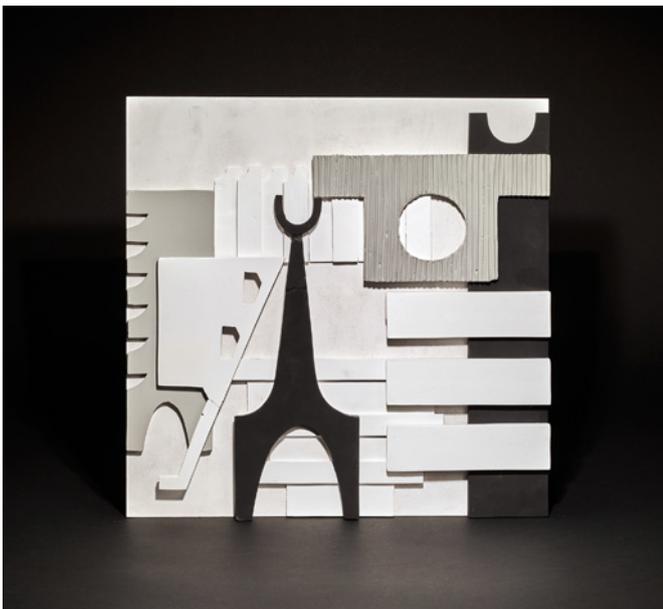
04 Carlos Raúl Villanueva, sketch indicating the movement through the campus in relation to buildings and artworks. © Moholy-Nagy, S. (1964). Carlos Raúl Villanueva und die Architektur Venezuelas, Gerd Hatje, p.97.



05 Layers of cross-cultural inspiration at the OAU campus, four reliefs by Valentin Gies: 'stairs and structure', 'the wall as a canvas', 'the Island in the forest', 'social utopias'. © Max Hart Nibbrig, 2022.



06 Collage showing the relationship between inside and outside, between buildings and landscape at the OAU campus. © Aaltje Smit, 2022.



07 Relief by Olivier Bierens, interpretation of formal languages that define the character of the OAU campus. © Max Hart Nibbrig, 2022.

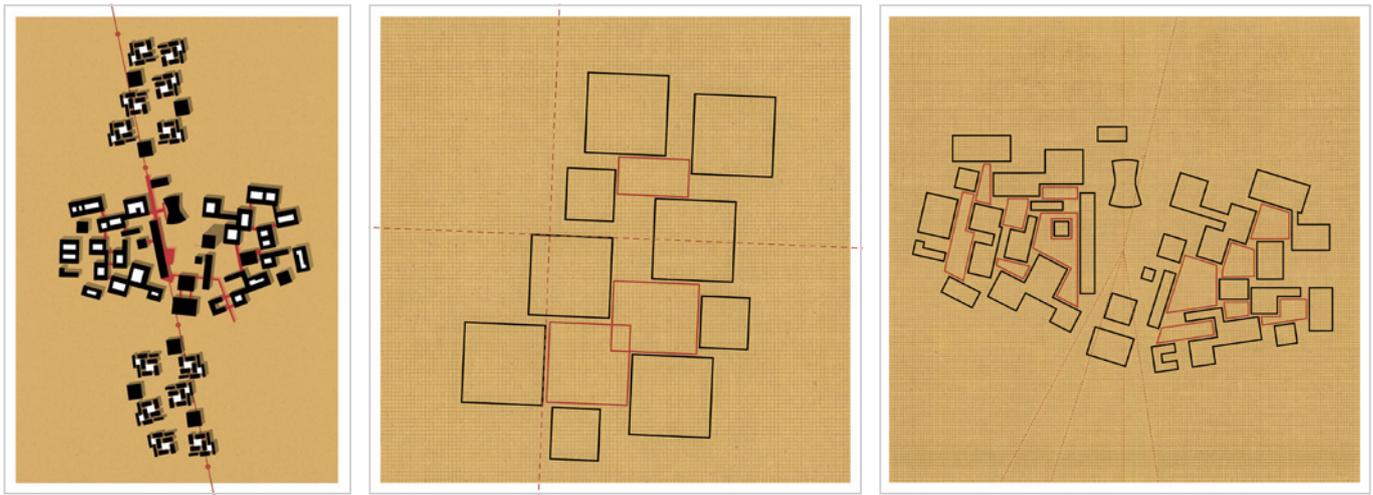


08 Relief by Judith Oosterhoff, the main structure of the OAU campus represented as a carved-out tree branching into the forest landscape. © Max Hart Nibbrig, 2022.

## GENERAL CHARACTERISTICS

In all these experimental projects, the new governments presented the establishment of new universities as an important means of development towards a modern country. Universities understood themselves as a showcase of the contemporary lifestyle and facilitators to raising a new generation that adapts to new living conditions. Dormitories, staff houses, cafeterias, central buildings, and sports facilities were included in the architectural program besides educational buildings, and the open spaces between the buildings were meticulously designed and became a tool for organizing social life. These campuses also served as models for infrastructure projects, which are tools of new modern-focused forms of urbanization.

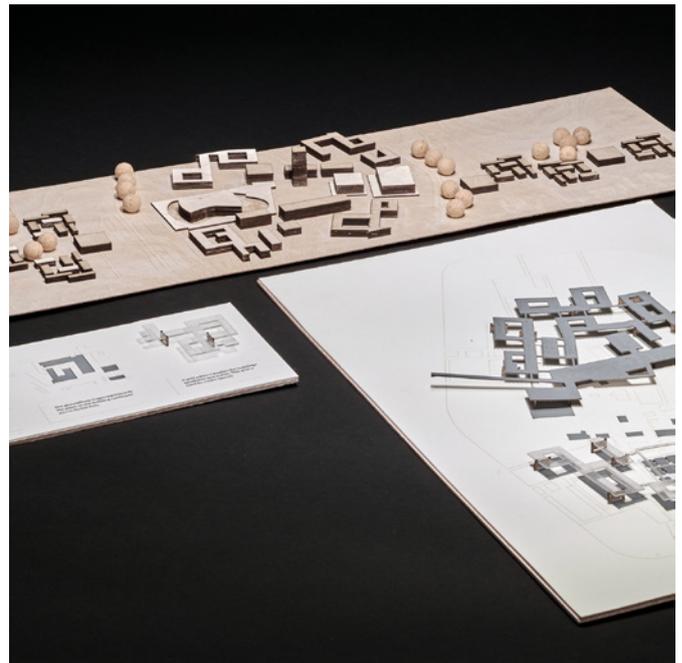
The separation of pedestrian and vehicle traffic, the landscape-producing space together with architecture, and the fact that works of art are one of the significant inputs of campus design were the sources of the success of these interdisciplinary design exercises. Instead of separating the local from the international, working with and putting modern architecture within its surrounding infrastructure and landscape helped master architects to integrate local architectural values and new building technologies. While the main pedestrian circulation axes, arcades, and urban platforms suggested new, informal social spaces, works of art diversified the architecture as alternative meeting points and landmarks.



09 Analysis of compositional elements of the UOB campus, compositional pattern of the dormitories and courtyards, compositional pattern of the central zone. © Shanshan Xie and Wendy Wu, 2022.



10 Model of the central zone at the UOB campus by Steven ter Schure, emphasizing the connection between the courtyards and the continuous circulation on the first floor. © Max Hart Nibbrig, 2022.



11 Series of models by Christina Sarra, Steven ter Schure, Wendy Wu, and Shanshan Xie, showing the coherent design approach in different scales at the UOB campus. © Max Hart Nibbrig, 2022.

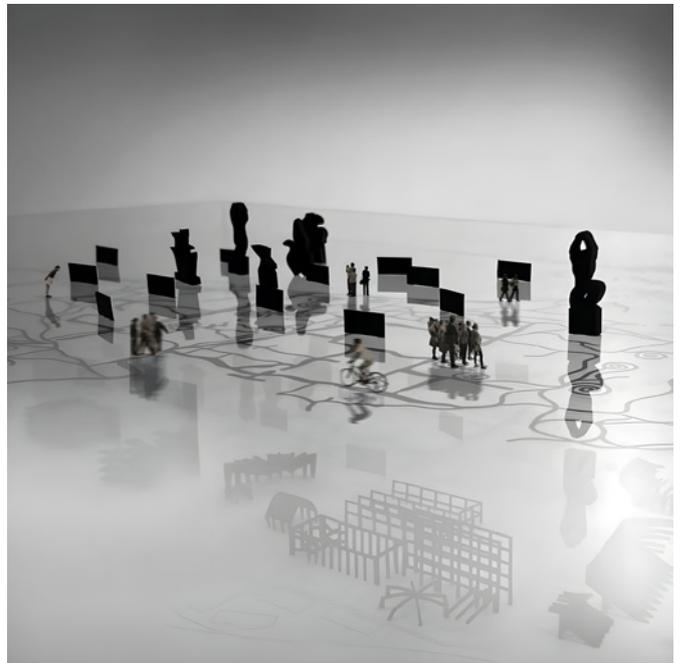
## CREATIVE RE-READINGS: AN ARCHITECTURAL EXHIBITION

The “Campus Utopias” course explored a large spectrum of archival material and specifically focused on the visual and textual documents related to the formations of campus architecture. Rather than in-depth explorations of contextual studies, the formal qualities of these environments were the main themes of students’ work. “Comparative Maps” is the first group of drawings illustrating the formal characteristics of the campuses. These studies, abstracted from the master plans drawn at the same scale (1:25,000) and showing the architect’s first idea, the final state of the campus, alternative figure-ground relations, and the landscape, enabled the campus projects to be read and interpreted by morphological comparison. These maps provide a common ground for comparative re-readings by representing the initial ideas behind the site selection decisions, interpreting topographic slopes, riverbeds and valleys, landscape interventions, and infrastructure layout.

design processes of these complex projects. The course is conducted with the conviction that the methods architects develop to visualize ideas are also operational in understanding these precedents. Based on major published sources and original drawings, students create 3D digital drawings and models to understand their urbanistic, architectural, structural, and infrastructural characteristics. The final works are presented in 3D collages, conceptual physical models, clay and wood reliefs, site sections, and plans. Students have the opportunity to explore the potential of different media to represent their ideas. In addition to the booklets they prepared, they experienced the creative environment of the exhibition space and visual collaboration software such as Miro. The course proposed a method of critical re-reading, paying attention to five different scale levels and their inter-scalar relations: from the territory to the campus, the building, the interior, and finally, the materials. The object of study, the modern



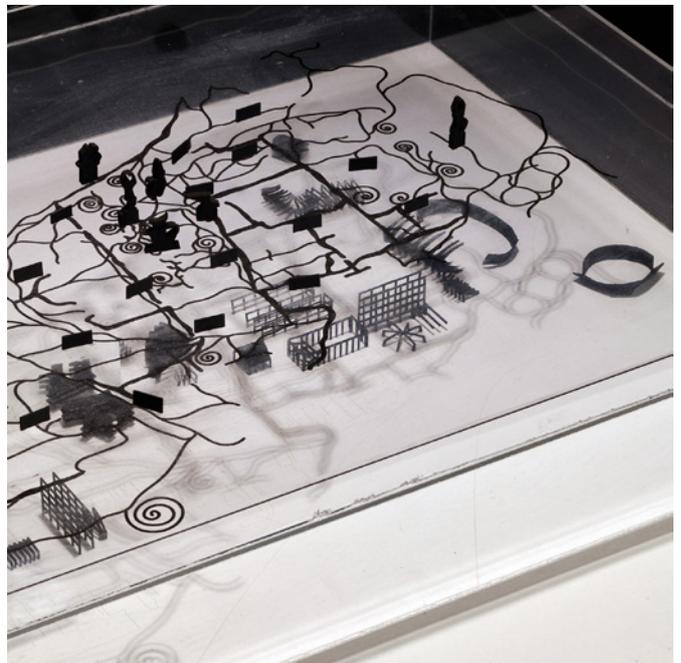
12 Collage showing the relation between the covered walkways and artworks at the UCV campus. © Sare Genç, Casper Laan, and Harin Naik, 2022.



13 Photo montage showing the construction of the buildings, walking routes, and artworks in juxtaposition at the UCV campus. © Sare Genç, Casper Laan, and Harin Naik, 2022.



14 Impression of the circulation in-between buildings at the UCV campus. © Sare Genç, Casper Laan, and Harin Naik, 2022.



15 Model of the UCV campus, by Sare Genç, Casper Laan, and Harin Naik, consisting of transparent layers, synthesizing the built elements and artworks through the effects of light and shadows. © Max Hart Nibbrig, 2022.

campus, is conceived as “a total work” of architecture, displaying design ideas in various scales starting from the urban design decisions to material details; and sub-themes emerge from its multidisciplinary aspects: urban design, art, landscape, infrastructure, and engineering. Beginning with rather formal analyses, and as a next step, exploration of different representation techniques was encouraged.

The final product of the course was an exhibition in which students compiled their re-readings in a display at the Faculty of Architecture and the Built Environment of TU Delft from April 12 to May 6, 2022. Exhibition preparation was handled as a continuation of the creative

thinking process. The exhibition installation process brought students and educators together in an educational environment where representing, curating, or exhibiting architecture became an architectural production in itself.<sup>10</sup> The preparation of content and spatial design offered an opportunity to reinforce the relationship between thinking and making within and for architecture. This process is conceived as a tool for students to face the challenges associated with implementing a design project in the physical environment.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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**Ayşen Savaş** (1962) graduated in architecture from Middle East Technical University (METU) and The Bartlett School of Architecture (UCL). She completed her PhD at Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), and has conducted courses on various modes of architectural representation. She has been involved in academic research, exhibition design, and museum projects, collaborating with institutions worldwide. For her work, Savaş has received numerous national and international awards and fellowships, including the AIA Architectural Award and the Getty 'Keeping it Modern' Grant for the Faculty of Architecture Building of METU. Her innovative display theme for the Turkish Pavilion at the 2010 World EXPO in Shanghai earned her the Silver Medal.

**Esther Gramsbergen** (1964) graduated in architecture from Delft University of Technology in 1989. She has worked for various architectural firms, including Karelse van der Meer Architecten and ArchitectenCie. Since 1999 she has been employed as an assistant professor in architectural design at Delft University of Technology's Faculty of Architecture and the Built Environment, and since 2009 as an editor of the journal *OverHolland*. In 2014, she obtained her PhD at Delft for a dissertation entitled *Kwartiermakers in Amsterdam: ruimtelijke transformatie onder invloed van stedelijke instellingen, 1580-1880*. Her current research focuses on the role of institutions, such as universities, in urban transformation processes.

**Yağız Söylev** (1991) graduated in architecture from Delft University of Technology in 2018. He works at the Department of Architecture at TU Delft and is involved in various research projects including the *OverHolland Journal*. His research interests involve global knowledge transfer networks in the post-war period from the decolonial perspective. Söylev was the associate curator of the Pavilion of Turkey, at the 16th Venice Architecture Biennale in 2018. His work has been displayed in international exhibitions like *Istanbul Design Biennial*, *Dutch Design Week*, and *Shenzhen UABB*. He has practiced as an architect at *KAAN Architecten* and *kpm architecture studio*.

## ENDNOTES

- 1 The work is embedded in a larger research program initiated with the Getty Conservation Institute "Keeping It Modern" Project. Both the Aula Building at TU Delft and the Faculty of Architecture Building at METU Ankara received the Getty KIM grant in 2017.
- 2 For a thorough investigation of the political, economic, and social contexts in which these campus projects emerged and related bibliography, please see: Levin, 2022; Wright, 2008; Larranaga, 2005; Stanek, 2020.
- 3 Levin, 2017; Livsey, 2017.
- 4 Levin, 2017.
- 5 Gropius & Harkness, 1966.
- 6 Gropius, 1959, 292.
- 7 Ibid.
- 8 Larranaga, 2005.
- 9 Carranza & Lara, 2014, 166-169.
- 10 Arrhenius et al., 2014.