

Press Information Belgian Spirit – Twin Design Research Studios

[Belgian Spirit](#) is an initiative of the three Belgian Regions of Brussels, Flanders & Wallonia. It was set up in 2011. Belgian Spirit promotes Belgian architecture, design and fashion in Asia through [Business of Design Week](#) (BoDW) in Hong Kong and other events. The goal is to create and develop long-term collaborations between Belgian designers and their Asian counterparts and clients.

As partner country of BoDW 2013 Belgian Spirit will organize a series of events and activities in December 2013.

As part of Belgian Spirit's architectural track, Belgian architect Kristof Crolla has curated an educational project composed of an inter-university workshop and an exhibition in the Inspiration Hall under the House of the Belgian Spirit resulting from collaboration between Belgian and Hong Kong-based institutions.

9394.06km – Twin Design Research Studios



The 21st century city is no longer the neatly designed, geo-specific, singular entity the term once suggested, rigidly following a predictable set of rules in response to carefully designed regulations. Maybe this ideal never existed. And if it ever has, it does not seem to have influenced the large-scale urban experiments of Hong Kong, Shenzhen, and, in their wake, of many of the contemporary Chinese New Cities. Here planning methods, carefully fine-tuned over hundreds of years, are effortlessly and fundamentally altered to create radical urbanisation machines that allow for swift response to global pressures of development. With Hong Kong as an example, an unprecedented urban model for highest density has materialised in the form of thousands of jam-packed skyscrapers on a few hilly rocks in the South China Sea. Shaped on the one hand by the cities' unique topography, but primarily driven by the capital of capitalism's ideal framework for speculative development, a fascinating amalgamate of human activity has emerged from a colonial trading port. Is this the 21st century's ideal city?



As fresh space runs out, housing prices skyrocket and interlocking mobility networks are grinding to a halt, the urge for compactness is put under pressure. Meanwhile, across the border, global forces are pushing for a shift in urban programming of what once was the “Factory of the World”: vast singularly planned areas are forced to convert and adapt to new and ever changing needs. Economic zones of labour, where urbanity and ecological concerns meet with great political and sociological influence, are demanding for new forms of collectivity, both for housing as well as for other programs. Although practical, economical, and ecological considerations demand for high densities and hybrid programming, do these models apply everywhere and, within them, how do we safeguard living conditions while avoiding ending up in a constant Sisyphean failure?

It is the task of the Architect to step to this challenge. He has to provide pragmatic and intelligent solutions to the developments of land features in order to obtain a beneficial impact for the end users. The exponential, diversified urban growth has led to a generic heterogeneity, but it is this heterogeneity, often seen as the cause of the chaotic appearance of the city, that will become the catalyst for architectural design. Architecture, infrastructure or urban development, can no longer be considered as autonomous and detached sectors. Their autonomy has been imposed by the growth of their complexity and specialization, but those fields are intensely interrelated and interdependent in our urban fabric. It is the role of the Architect to understand the relationships and interdependences between those different sectors and create projects in response. The Architect is the one who has the power and responsibility to change its reality and meaning.

Project “9394.06km – Twin Design Research Studios” covers an architectural academic collaboration between six Belgian and Hong Kong Architecture Schools & Universities. Faced with the caricature of these anarchic cities, the young architects-to-be will seek to understand the manufacturing of our living environments in order to detect their malfunctions, and learn to reconfigure them with rigour, method, delightfulness and creativity. Starting from their own unique cultural backgrounds, students from both Belgium and Hong Kong will be challenged to invent new strategies for architectural implementation into Hong Kong, Shenzhen and the PRD, the exhibition of which will lead to a constructive dialogue between the two countries.

Both geographical entities, Belgium and Hong Kong, are separated by more than just 9394.06km. They differ radically in culture, history, socio-political context, built environment, etc. By exhibiting the design outcome of these joint studios in one location, the goal is to publically trigger a constructive dialogue between the two: through open debate the project aims to promote alternative visions for the challenges faced in the Asia-Pacific region and widen the field of design possibilities.



Project Curator:

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Collaborating Institutes and Studio Tutors:

The University of Hong Kong (Tao Zhu)

i.c.w. Hasselt University (Nick Ceulemans, Peter Bongaerts and Oswald Devisch)

The Hong Kong Design Institute: (Luis Costa and Kalo Leung)

i.c.w. The University of Mons: (Stephane Meyrant, Li Mei Tsien and Emmanuelle Coniglio)

The Chinese University of Hong Kong (Kristof Crolla)

i.c.w. The Université Libre de Bruxelles (Alain Simon & Eve Deprez)



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