

Amsterdam Academy of Architecture

architecture - urban design - landscape architecture

The profession

The practice of spatial design is changing rapidly. Assignments are growing more complex as more and more external factors are coming to bear on them. The designer is no longer the protagonist. The design plan is no longer the only document to direct the building process. An increasing number of specialists influence the final shape of the building and the physical appearance of the city or landscape. The position and responsibilities of the architect, the urban designer and the landscape architect are thus growing less clearly defined. And with the end of the big utopias or ideologies, there are no longer any narratives based on a wide consensus that can give a natural direction to the responses to those assignments. This may look like a threat to the design disciplines, but in practice it actually means a tremendous challenge. Designers can no longer rely solely on their own traditions and on their own theoretical framework to come up with solutions for the programmes formulated by society. Designers therefore have to be aware of both the potential and the limitations of their discipline when it comes to solving architectural and spatial problems. Different forms of cooperation call for different styles of work. Different levels of abstraction exist side by side, and not every project requires the same kind of plan. Architects, urban designers and landscape architects will thus not only have to be able to visualise their ideas or to defend their plan convincingly; they will also have to be able to devise a strategy to resolve a complex problem satisfactorily.

The Amsterdam Academy of Architecture

The Amsterdam Academy of Architecture trains students to practise architecture, urban design and landscape architecture as skills situated at the interface of fine art, building and civil engineering, natural and cultural technology, and the spatial sciences. The Master's Degree awarded by the Academy gives graduates direct entry to the Register of Architects.

The Amsterdam Academy of Architecture is the only training institute in the Netherlands to combine the three spatial disciplines of architecture, urban design and landscape architecture within its walls. That unique combination of courses places the Academy in an exceptional position, both nationally and internationally. Study and work are combined in the course: half of the course consists of design education, the other half consists of acquiring work experience in a relevant part-time position.

The Academy offers courses that are open and always up to date with the latest developments in the discipline. Architects, urban designers and landscape architects are trained in a constant interchange between the disciplines by practising designers and researchers. The courses given at the Academy are marked by the essential characteristic of constantly looking beyond the boundaries of one's own discipline in the search for design strategies that can be broadly implemented. The Academy community - students and tutors - is growing increasingly international in its composition.

History, position, location

The Amsterdam Academy of Architecture has a tradition of training for designers by designers that goes back almost a hundred years. The foundation of the course was laid in 1908 with the start of the course in Advanced and Higher Architectural Education organised by the Amsterdam Association of Architects *Architectura et Amicitia*. The Amsterdam Academy of Architecture began life as an association in 1916.

Since 1987 the Amsterdam Academy of Architecture has been the architectural faculty of the Amsterdam School of the Arts (AHK). The AHK offers top-quality art education at a high level of ambition. It offers courses and differentiated graduation possibilities, ranging from preliminary trajectories to courses leading to a Master's Degree, that target performers as well as art teachers and creative artists. The AHK covers a wide range of disciplines: fine art and design, film and television, theatre, dance, music, museology and architecture. The AHK is financed by the Dutch Ministry of Education, Culture and Science.

The Amsterdam Academy of Architecture has its premises in a monumental complex on the Waterlooplein in the heart of Amsterdam. The Academy has its own place in the cultural life of the city. Besides the regular course programme, national and international activities are organised on a regular basis, such as series of public lectures on particular subjects,

workshops on metropolitan themes, exhibitions and other events. The Academy strives in this way to give itself - and thereby its students and tutors - a place of its own in the professional debate between the spatial design disciplines.

Tutorial staff

The course directors consist of the director of the Academy and the three heads of department. There are no permanent tutors at the Academy. The more than two hundred tutors who are involved in teaching each year are invited on a freelance/project basis to supervise projects and to give lectures or practical classes on the basis of their specific skills. Working with nobody but freelancers from the practice of design and research makes it possible to select a fresh body of tutors each year to provide an optimal response to the demands that are made on designers and design courses. The heads of department are appointed for a limited period. This ensures a constant scrutiny of the structure and content of the courses in the light of developments in theory and practice in each of the three disciplines. The course directors meet each week together with the course coordinator and the study advisor to guarantee coherence and continuity in the courses.

Facilities

The Academy has a library with a specialised collection in the field of architecture, urban design and landscape architecture, a large map collection, and a selection of video tapes that is unique in the Netherlands. There is a CAAD laboratory with eight state-of-the-art worksites, specifically aimed at design information science, three-dimensional images and animations. The Academy network ensures that the wide range of software is available throughout the building. Students can also make use of a model construction workshop and a simple photographic studio. The Grand Hall and the Corridor are used for public lectures and exhibitions as well as for teaching purposes. The canteen is situated at the heart of the Academy.

Publications

The graduation projects of the students are presented each year in the Academy Yearbook. On the basis of project presentations, essays and interviews, this yearbook also reflects on the courses and practical developments during the year. Important results to emerge from the courses are recorded in separate publications on an incidental basis.

The Bulletin and the Academy website www.academyofarchitecture.nl provide students and tutors with information about the courses and developments within the Academy.

The courses

Architecture

Designing buildings is situated in the exciting field of tension between specific limiting conditions and the architect's own artistic interpretation of the assignment. An architect is thus both an engineer and a conceptual thinker, and it is precisely the symbiosis of these two worlds that makes architectural design so interesting. An architect can draw on a great spatial insight to devise buildings that are not only smoothly functioning and intelligent in engineering terms, but which also appeal to the imagination through their spatial composition. An architect is thus a spatial artist who is able to raise the assignment above the level of the pragmatic limiting conditions in order to create buildings that can be appreciated and experienced in a meaningful way.

Architects are expected to be able to anticipate changes in the use and function of buildings. Social and technological changes lead to changes in the functioning of buildings and thus in their organisation and physical appearance. It is the extent to which architects are able to respond to this, and thus to create contemporary buildings, that determines the value of the architecture. The position of the architect within the building process has changed radically during the last hundred years. Whereas in the past the architect was the real master builder who influenced the entire building process, nowadays the architect's role has become more that of the designer within larger processes. Nevertheless, it is still the task of the architect to provide meaningful architectural answers to all the limiting conditions, demands and ambitions. As a result, the architect still occupies the key position in the design process.

The curriculum of the architecture course is completely orientated towards this future role. Besides the creation of a personal architectural style, a lot of attention is paid to knowledge of oeuvres and the determination of one's own position. Thanks to the presence of many professionals within the course, to working in small groups, and to the emphasis on being able to work on one's own initiative, students are given every opportunity to determine their own position during the course. Technical knowledge is assumed to have been acquired in the preliminary training. The curriculum of the Amsterdam Academy of Architecture is therefore concentrated entirely on architectural thinking and design.

Urban design

As a 'generalist' discipline, urban design has developed from civil engineering and architecture to become a discipline with several different roles in the wider field of spatial planning. The discipline has a strong public orientation. The 'generalist' character of the discipline implies that it has many points of contact with other disciplines, such as economics, social sciences, traffic science, environmental science and the other design disciplines. Urban design also has a juridical component when spatial plans are legally laid down in the form of a structural plan or zoning plan. The implementation of urban design takes place at different levels of scale - from street to region - and has two components. On the one hand, it is aimed at implementation: the creation of the spatial conditions for specific building assignments by means of urban plans, or for plans to (re)arrange the public domain. On the other hand, it is orientated towards spatial exploration, with the objective of formulating the spatial assignment within a broad planning process and visualising the ambitions of the various parties. The latter aspect brings the urban designer within the field of operations of urban development planning. The work has a strong strategic component. The course concentrates on how to arrive at an urban design. The syllabus therefore concentrates on introducing students to the wide range of design assignments and assisting them to develop a design attitude and design resources and to learn how to adopt their own point of view in the professional debate. A basic knowledge of the more sectoral disciplines, such as civil engineering, traffic science or geomorphology, as well as planning and the planning-related legal aspects of the profession, is assumed to have been acquired in the preliminary training.

Landscape architecture

The landscape architect designs to solve spatial problems and visualises new topographical situations. He or she may do so at various levels of scale and abstraction (from garden to province) and, depending on the nature of the assignment, as a solitary expert or as a member of an interdisciplinary planning team. In this sense landscape architecture as a discipline is closely related to architecture, urban design, cultural technology and civil engineering. As far as the properties of his or her design material are concerned, the landscape architect is dependent on such disciplines as soil science, ecology, hydrology and geography. Moreover, the anchoring of the profession in society calls for insight into such fields as environmental psychology, sociology and economics. It is thus a discipline with a wide orientation, aimed at sustainable change in the everyday world in which we live. That is one of the reasons why the importance of landscape architects has grown in the process of urban development planning during the last few years. The design of a new topography on the basis of a knowledge of natural elements and processes is specific for landscape architecture. Landscape architects are explicitly aware of the temporal aspect of the environment. They know how to create the right basic conditions to challenge time - as expressed in growth, development, use and decay - to bring about a quality outdoor space. This is the background against which the work of the landscape architect is regarded in the Netherlands as an attempt to reconcile new artifacts with the carrying capacity of the natural and historical surroundings.

The syllabus

Concurrent training

The course is composed of two parts: a 'classroom' programme and an 'extra-mural' programme. This combination has been a characteristic of the Amsterdam Academy of Architecture right from the start. So work and study complement one another to form a full-time course (concurrent training). Half of the credits are earned by following a syllabus of projects, exercises and lectures for two evenings and one Friday a week. The other half of the

credits are allocated on the basis of the knowledge and experience acquired at a place of work that is relevant to the courses and through the recording and assessment of the professional progress that the student makes.

Characteristics of the syllabus

The Academy courses last four years. Each academic year consists of two semesters. The semesters are the building blocks of the course. Where possible, they are organised around a unifying characteristic or theme that links projects and exercises, supported or supplemented by lectures.

The course can be broken down into three blocks:

- 1 the first year (semesters 1 and 2) - confrontation with the disciplines
- 2 the second and third years (semesters 3 to 6) - widening and broadening of the knowledge of the discipline
- 3 the fourth year (semesters 7 and 8) – graduation year: masterpiece

Each block is concluded with an examination. A special assessment is made at the end of the second year.

Course components

Three types of course components are offered in parallel during the six (regular) semesters preceding graduation: *projects*, *exercises* and *lectures*. The course is centred on the design projects. Form study is also given in addition to the more technical exercises during the first and second years. Workshops, study excursions in the Netherlands and abroad and other activities are organised in January (after the first semester) and in May/June (after the second semester). These are also the preferred times for international exchange projects. Foreign students are regularly invited as participants and famous designers from the Netherlands and elsewhere are brought in as tutors for the workshops (short-term intensive projects). The language during the first two years is Dutch. English is offered in theory in the third year.

Practical component

The practical component is a legally prescribed part of the course and must satisfy certain criteria drawn up by the examination committee. The principle is that work in professional practice takes place concurrently with the study. That means working for at least 20 hours a week for 42 weeks a year. The place of work is expected to be one where designs are made and carried out and which has a sufficient level of infrastructure (availability of specialised literature, documentation on regulations and materials, opportunities to discuss the profession with colleagues). The student must come into contact with every stage of the process, from design to completion, in the course of time, as well as gaining insight into the connection between the different parts of the trajectory. Students are required to produce a portfolio each year recording the main projects from the practical situation. Work progress is assessed at the end of every academic year.

Exchange / guest students

The third year of the full-time master's programme is offered in English, thus making one or two semesters of the third year available to guest and exchange students. Unlike students taking the full-time programme, these guest students are not obliged to work in an office during their stay at the Academy, but they are strongly recommended to do so.

Selection

Admission to the courses is restricted to those who have previously obtained a relevant bachelor's degree in architecture, building engineering, urban planning and design or landscape design and engineering. Degrees obtained at a foreign institute of higher education or university are compared with the admission requirements for each discipline by the NUFFIC, the Netherlands Organisation for International Co-operation for Higher Education.

Foreign students applying for the 4-year diploma course must have a thorough command of the Dutch language. A language test may form part of the selection procedure.

Admission to (a part of) each course in the third year is possible for students who have submitted a portfolio of recent work and a written statement in which they announce and motivate their wish to attend the course. In addition, exchange students will need a letter of recommendation from their home institution. If necessary this will be followed by an admission interview. A test of English as a foreign language may form part of the selection procedure.

Admission and registration

An application form can be obtained, preferably by e-mail, from the secretariat of the Academy.

The school fee for 4-year diploma students is determined annually by the Board of the Amsterdam School of the Arts and is announced on the web site of the Academy.

Exchange and guest students pay the special contract fee, which can be found on the Academy's website.

The Amsterdam Academy of Architecture has bilateral contracts with some European educational institutes within the Erasmus/Socrates programme.

More information

The Academy organises an information evening every year at the beginning of March. Those interested will find information there about the courses, admission and registration, as well as being able to meet the course directors and staff and to view the Academy premises. For more information please write, phone, mail or surf:

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