

Past, Present, Possible?

An interview with Winy Maas Hon FRIAS





Valley, Amsterdam
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 Image: Vero Visuals, Rotterdam, The Netherlands

MVRDV

You established MVRDV together with Jacob van Rijs and Nathalie de Vries in 1993 and have become world-renowned for innovative design and practice. The world, and architectural practice, has changed significantly in that 25 year period.

Q *How would you characterise the changes to architecture and practice over the past 25 years?*

A When Jacob van Rijs, Nathalie de Vries and I started MVRDV in 1993 we were already heavily influenced by the warning issued by the Club of Rome and we saw amazing opportunities to actually find solutions to the global climate crisis.

Nowadays it has finally become mainstream to work on these global issues. We saw our tools change from paper to incredible sophisticated three-dimensional (digital and analogue) solutions, yet at the same time the construction industry still heavily relies on century-old materials such as brick and mortar. There we need more innovation.

Q *How have MVRDV adapted to, and led, that change?*

A The digital revolution started during our studies and so, as an office, we were born digital. We have made renders, animations and 3D tests ever since we started. I still love this simple yet abstract visual quality of the early work.

Today we educate our staff in technology and sustainability, and also here we are early adopters - recently our in-house BIM whizz-kid was asked to help the government of Luxembourg to implement BIM.

Another fantastic innovation is scripting. For our Valley project in Amsterdam we've been able to test the façade for each tower, creating 80 variants that respect daylight, view and sustainable elements.

Q *What do you think are the principal opportunities and challenges for architecture (and architects) in the next 25 years?*

A We have to participate in the global issues, as experts and as a discipline. We should think big with a vision to give direction and work hard on it; we should look ahead to the future and always remain curious to find and apply innovations.

Q *What's next for you and MVRDV? Forthcoming projects? Future ambitions?*

A In 2019 we will complete a large museum project in Rotterdam, the totally democratic and fully accessible art depot for Museum Boijmans van Beuningen. Then in 2022 we will open the first smart city in the Netherlands, the Floriade Almere. Our ambitions are broad - we want to do everything at all scales. From cabins to regional planning and research, we want to create remarkable and wonderful places.

The Why Factory

You founded The Why Factory, a research institute for the future city, in 2008 at TU Delft.

Q *What is the scope and ambition of The Why Factory?*

A The Why Factory (T?F) is a global think-tank and research institute which we run at Delft University of Technology and other universities. We

explore possibilities for the development of our cities by focusing on the production of models and visualisations for cities of the future. We combine education and research into a research lab and platform that aims to analyse, theorise, and construct future cities. But to be more practical and give an example: we ask the question “how would a city look that we would share with as many animals as possible?” and then we design and research this.



Could you outline the interplay between your research and practice? How one informs (and is informed by) the other?



It's complicated... (laughs). Interplay happens in all different ways - we mostly do totally independent research and explore directions the practice could not go down, that commercially cannot be paid, like a future vision to replace all building material with nano-technology and create totally flexible architecture. Sometimes we collaborate closely and come to communal results, such as The Vertical Village. Sometimes we work and research parallel issues such as the Green Dream, a study into sustainability that is very valid for the practice, or the Porouscity, a study for skyscrapers with a human scale quality that we also explore in practice during competitions. So we inspire each other and collaborate and at the same time there is great freedom to be independent. As it should be.



The recent The Why Factory publication, Copy Paste “is an invitation to copy with finesse and skill (that) understands the past as a vast archive on which we can and must build.” In the wake of the devastating fire at Mackintosh’s Glasgow School of Art there has been much debate about what to do next. What approach would you advocate?



As the building is so loved and admired, I would rebuild it and update it in a sustainable way and



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make it a great educational project for the architecture school and local artisans. Look at the centre of Warsaw that was rebuilt after the war whilst Rotterdam was completely modernised. I think it's definitely the choice of Glasgow. But perhaps, if the annihilation of the building is complete, one could think about rebuilding it on the same site but on top of a new building, to densify the area. This would elevate the new old Mack to become a beacon above the roofs of Glasgow.



What are your future areas of research and investigation?

Mobility is an important issue for the future that will be explored in upcoming studios. We are looking into bio-engineering and buildings that are flexible and adaptable for all kinds of users.

Scotland

Whilst practising internationally you're a regular visitor to Scotland. MVRDV, with my practice Austin-Smith:Lord, have led the (Y)our City Centre project in Glasgow and

you've gained an insight into how Scotland's cities, architecture and landscapes compare internationally.

Q *To meet future challenges what enhancements should Scotland make to ensure it can thrive?*

A Scotland is one of the most beautiful and unspoilt places in Europe and the world even. With the relatively empty countryside and densely populated Central Belt, you have a perfect spatial recipe to become Europe's first CO2 neutral nation. And to develop the spatial dichotomy: keep the Highlands empty and make the belt green and dense. I hope that this and the next Scottish governments can realise their green and social goals and I hope that the independence question will be settled – one way or the other – so that the country can focus on these goals.

Q *What are your ambitions for Glasgow to ensure it can be a leading European city? And how best to deliver these changes?*

A On a more philosophical level, it is fair to say that it is a great time for urban transformation and renewal.

The European city is in high demand and attracts more and more people. Glasgow has an amazing historical inner city and fantastic open spaces that can be transformed into vibrant, unique neighbourhoods. Glasgow has a strong and somehow rough character and that should be used, preserved and strengthened through new developments.

I think in terms of urban planning, Scotland would be wise to reform and focus on what is good for the public rather than having urban planning mostly focused on making room for investments. If the city is great because urban planning is actively

working to make the people the first priority, the investments will follow. Steering investments in the public interest instead of offering opportunities would be a meaningful change.

Q *You've recently received an Honorary Fellowship from the RIAS. What role should our professional institutions play in the future?*

A Set the tone, create a vision for the future, and together with your members ask yourself what architects can do to make Scotland a better place. And never stop.

Graham Ross FRIAS

At the RIAS Convention in Aberdeen in May, the then RIAS President, Stewart Henderson, surprised Winy by presenting him with the Incorporation's Honorary Fellowship. The following citation was read out.

Winy Maas Prof. Ir. Ing. FRIBA HAIA is an architect, urban planner and landscape architect. In 1993 Winy, Jacob van Rijs and Nathalie de Vries founded MVRDV.

MVRDV are regularly cited as one of the leading architecture and design practices in the world today – with countless international awards and accolades. Operating from their principal studio in Rotterdam Winy is world renowned for projects such as the ground-breaking Hannover Expo 2000, the vision for greater Paris, Grand Paris Plus Petit, and more recently the Markthal in Rotterdam, Seoello Skygarden and Tianjin Library.

He is professor and director of The Why Factory, a research institute for the future city which he founded in 2008 at TU Delft. He is currently Visiting Professor at GSAPP Columbia, New York and IIT Chicago and has been Visiting Professor at the University of Hong Kong, Catholic University of Louvain

in Belgium, ETH Zurich, the Berlage Institute, MIT, Ohio State and Yale University.

With both MVRDV and The Why Factory he has published numerous research projects and books on the future of cities. In addition, he designs stage sets, curates exhibitions, gives lectures throughout the world and regularly takes part in international design juries.

In 2013 Winy joined the Economic Development Board of Rotterdam. In 2012 he was appointed urban supervisor for the city of Almere, where MVRDV are curating world horticultural expo Floriade 2022, and since 2003 he has been supervising the Bjørnvika urban development in Oslo, Norway.

Winy has received the Order of the Dutch Lion from the Netherlands Government and has been made a Chevalier de la Legion D'honneur by the French Government for his contributions to the fields of architecture and urbanism.

Since 2016 Winy and MVRDV have been collaborating with Austin-Smith:Lord, on the ambitious and ongoing (Y)our City Centre project for Glasgow City Council developing District Regeneration Frameworks for the Broomielaw, St. Enoch, Central and Blythswood areas of the city. MVRDV and Austin-Smith:Lord were shortlisted for the Perth City Hall design competition in 2016.

Winy is a regular visitor to Scotland, with a love and appreciation of its cities, architecture and landscapes. He has made a significant international contribution to architecture, landscape architecture, urbanism, design education, research and contemporary cultural life over more than two decades, and is helping to shape the future of the centre of Scotland's largest city; Glasgow.