

GUGGENHEIM

NEWS RELEASE

Rem Koolhaas and AMO Explore Radical Change in the World's Nonurban Territories in the Guggenheim Exhibition *Countryside, The Future*

Exhibition: *Countryside, The Future*
Venue: Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, 1071 Fifth Avenue, New York
Location: Rotunda
Dates: February 20 through August 14, 2020

(NEW YORK, NY—February 19, 2020)—From February 20 through August 14, 2020, the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum presents the exhibition *Countryside, The Future*, organized in collaboration with architect Rem Koolhaas and Samir Bantal, director of AMO, the think tank of the Office for Metropolitan Architecture. To coincide with the opening of the exhibition, the book *Countryside, A Report* (Guggenheim Museum and Taschen, 2020) has been published.

Countryside, The Future is organized by Troy Conrad Therrien, Curator of Architecture and Digital Initiatives, at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, in collaboration with Rem Koolhaas and Samir Bantal, Anne Schneider, Alexandr Zinoviev, Sebastian Bernardy, Rita Varjabedian, Yotam Ben Hur, Valentin Bansac, with Ashley Mendelsohn, Assistant Curator, Architecture and Digital Initiatives, at the Guggenheim.

In June of 2014, the UN released *World Urbanization Prospects*, a report that announced that half of all humankind now lived in cities, and stated that “managing urban areas has become one of the most important development challenges of the twenty-first century.” This heralded a global focus on sustainable urbanization that ignored the other half of the world’s population living in rural conditions—neglecting not just their challenges but also exciting and innovative solutions to modernity.

This exhibition is an attempt at rectification, and its content is drawn from a large consortium of collaborators representing diverse global geographies and a broad range of expertise. A unique exhibition for the Guggenheim Museum, *Countryside, The Future* contests the assumption that ever-increasing urbanization is inevitable, exploring radical changes in the rural, remote, and wild territories

collectively identified here as “countryside,” or the 98% of the Earth’s surface not occupied by cities.

A central thesis of the exhibition is that our current form of urban life has necessitated the organization, abstraction, and automation of the countryside at an unprecedented scale. Data storage, fulfillment centers, genetic engineering, artificial intelligence, robotic automation, economic innovation, worker migration, and the private purchase of land for ecological preservation are in many cases more actively explored and experimented with in the countryside than the city.

The impact of global warming on specific countryside conditions underlies much of the show. In Siberia, the thawing of permafrost is dramatically transforming the landscape and releasing increasing amounts of methane with potentially catastrophic consequences.

Rem Koolhaas: “In the past decade, I have noticed that while much of our energies and intelligence have been focused on the urban areas of the world, the countryside has changed dramatically under the influence of global warming, the market economy, American tech companies, African and European initiatives, Chinese politics, and other forces. This story is largely untold, and it is particularly meaningful for AMO to present it in one of the world’s great museums in one of the world’s densest cities.”

Richard Armstrong, Director of the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum and Foundation: “*Countryside, The Future* marks a turn in trajectory for Rem Koolhaas following a career-long focus on cities, presenting the curious encounters, stories, phenomena, conditions, fears, and hopes that he and his colleagues discovered on their travels through rural areas around the world. With this bold exhibition, the Guggenheim carries forward its legacy of risk-taking, addressing urgent global concerns with a project that goes beyond cultural matters into political, anthropological, scientific, technological, and philosophical territory.”

Samir Bantal, Director of AMO: “This is a collection of new and old ideas that aims to rediscover the dynamics of the countryside. A place many of us think of as stable and slow-moving is revealed as an incredibly agile and flexible realm, even more than any modern metropolis.”

Troy Conrad Therrien, Curator of Architecture and Digital Initiatives at the Guggenheim Museum and organizer of the exhibition: “*Countryside, The Future* isn’t so much a culmination as a reveal, the wholesale delivery of a decade of insight into the marketplace of ideas and opinion on what’s to come. The exhibition begins the way the accompanying book ends: with a tapestry of questions, almost a thousand in total, that simultaneously declare the thoroughness of the investigation and a still-unsated curiosity for the countryside, or what Rem Koolhaas calls an ‘ignored realm.’ Ignored by whom? Rem, for one. The declaration isn’t hubris, it’s a challenge for us all, countryside inhabitants and experts included, to think anew about what may seem foreign or familiar.”

Overview of *Countryside, The Future*

As the exhibition unfolds, it addresses questions about the development and role of the countryside over time: What was the countryside historically, what did the major political figures of the twentieth century prepare for us, what is the current condition, what needs to be done for the future, and in what ways could this take shape?

Histories and transformations of the countryside are illustrated along the six levels of the rotunda's ramp, each level with its own theme. Designed by AMO/Koolhaas and graphic designer Irma Boom in collaboration with the Guggenheim's exhibition and graphic design staff, this mix of imagery, films, archival materials, wallpaper graphics, a printed curtain, objects, text, and reproduced artworks, and robotic sculptures presents an unfolding narrative of case studies contextualized by a broad array of voices.

Exterior: Outside the museum entrance on Fifth Avenue, a hermetically sealed industrial grow container cultivates tomatoes under pink LED lights and a finely tuned microclimate. Also positioned at the entrance to the museum is a high-tech, state-of-the-art Deutz-Fahr tractor used in industrial farming.

Rotunda: On the publicly accessible street-level floor of the museum are cut-outs, objects, and extracts in the style of an ancient Roman unswept floor. Suspended above the fountain in the rotunda is a small imaging satellite, an industrial-size bale of hay, and a COTSbot—a predatory starfish-killing underwater drone—is paired with a reproduction Roman sculpture of a fisherman.

Level 1 and High Gallery: Introduction

Koolhaas's essay, titled "?," composed of questions related to the countryside, is featured on the wall of the High Gallery alongside an animated map that identifies the geographic scope of the project. Also introduced on Level 1 is the "Semiotics Column," created by journalist Niklas Maak with students at the Harvard Graduate School of Design, in which one of the few vertical elements of the Guggenheim Museum building is plastered with a matrix of images from advertisements, fashion campaigns, toys, and country music to illustrate fantasies and stereotypes of rural life.

Level 2: Leisure and Escapism

A 180-foot-long, full-height, fully saturated curtain takes over this section to tell a punctuated story of leisure in the countryside. Using visual and textual collage, the curtain begins with early Roman and Chinese cultures and cuts forward in time through episodes in Europe and America, from Marie Antoinette to hippie counterculture, to the current global wellness industry that profits from a natural world conditioned for corporate retreats and curated adventure.

As Koolhaas notes in the exhibition text: "Before Christ was born there existed a moment of global consensus on the countryside; the Romans and the Chinese, thousands of miles apart, developed intricate and coherent treatises on the countryside as a space of creative and idealized existence. Today's 'Wellness,' a 4.5-trillion-dollar industry, has abandoned such cultural and creative dimensions. An 'elevated' form of consumption has transformed whole sections of the countryside. In Italy, abandoned villages are converted in their entirety into luxury spas; in Andermatt, Switzerland, a huge new hotel is an extruded 'stretch-chalet'; and in China, authentic villages are remodeled into wellness resorts."

Level 3: Political Redesign

Through a series of eight case studies focused on the twentieth century, this section provides representative examples of "political redesign," the application of political will and vision to the transformation of the countryside at territorial scale. Such acts, proposed and effected by various

political regimes, are profiled, from dictatorship to democracy. Case studies include a prototype of a nineteenth-century commune, efforts to recondition the landscape of the Soviet Union in the twentieth century, and a food security program put into effect in Qatar in 2017.

As Koolhaas notes in the exhibition text: “Driven by need, ambition, ideology, and new political structures all through the twentieth century, a number of massive proposals for radical redesigns transformed large sections of the globe. Authoritarian and democratic states alike took colossal risks attempting to increase productivity and food security, and remake society. Success or failure, famine, or overproduction... We live in a world still deeply marked by these Promethean efforts.”

Level 4: (Re-)Population

This section considers the countryside as a frontier for experimentation. A carousel of photographic evidence, paired with firsthand texts and stories by and from locals, it presents a panoramic view of new social structures from China, Africa, Europe, and the US. Among the examples featured are European villages revitalized by welcoming refugees; Chinese villages focused on a form of twenty-first-century rural life; and innovation and development in Southern Kenya.

As Koolhaas notes in the exhibition text: “As soon as we leave the urban condition behind us, we confront newness and the profoundly unfamiliar. What we collect here is evidence of new thinking—in China, in Kenya, in Germany, France, and Italy, in the US: new ways of planning, new ways of exploring, new ways of acting with media, new ways of owning, paying, renting, new ways of welcoming, new ways in which the countryside is inhabited today.”

Level 5: Nature/Preservation

Featured on ramp 5 are complex case studies that counter accepted notions of nature through the lens of its preservation: in Uganda, the unintended consequences of conservation success with the mountain gorilla; in Siberia, the global and local impact of thawing permafrost; in Patagonia, large-scale land acquisitions by wealthy individuals and private conservation organizations.

As Koolhaas notes in the exhibition text: “Since Rachel Carson’s *Silent Spring* (1962), 15% of the Earth’s surface has been preserved, but much more will be needed to compensate for the adventure of modernity. Currently, scientists are developing models in, broadly, two versions. The first, ‘Half Earth,’ is based on E. O. Wilson’s 2016 manifesto. It implies a drastic separation between an almost pristine nature on the one hand and human habitation and cultivation on the other. The second, ‘Shared Planet,’ proposes a more intensive mixing of all our territories. Both approaches imply radical changes in food production, ideology, and agricultural techniques. They will also require the intense collaboration of all spheres, and all political factions that are barely on speaking terms today—and the collective mobilization of tools and technologies that have been spoiled by their unquestioned dominance.”

Level 6: Cartesianism

The street grid, an imposition of mathematical abstraction on varied terrains and unruly human affairs, has been seen as the hallmark of urban rationalism. In this section, at the top of the museum’s spiral, the exhibition explores such Cartesian rationalism in the countryside. Large hanging panels featuring images and projections are paired with contemporary agricultural equipment from the field and lab. Throughout, robotic sculptures roam the ramp, turning the fixed objects into a backdrop for surprising

juxtapositions. Among the case studies are a look at high-tech indoor farming in the Netherlands; large-scale precision farming in the US; a machine designed to measure photosynthesis; and fish farming on land.

As Koolhaas notes in the exhibition text: “Can we prove that René Descartes could only have invented his mathematical methodology because he was living in the hyper-orthogonal landscapes of the Netherlands—dedicated to produce vegetal and artistic abundance in increasingly artificial ways? Can we treat the ocean like a new countryside? Can we prove that Japan is the site where demographics of aging will mobilize robots to sustain ‘life’ in the countryside; that certain corporations now operate revolutionary structures that accidentally invent a ‘new architecture,’ focused on machines not on humans; that plants no longer need daylight or earth (and a lot less water) to grow, that they can influence and take care of each other better than our current monocultures allow them to, showered with pesticides; that nuclear energy is not a finished chapter, but that fusion is around the corner; that all these phenomena create new dreamlike images, promises, and conditions...”

Exhibition Team

Countryside, The Future is organized by Troy Conrad Therrien, Curator of Architecture and Digital Initiatives, at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, in collaboration with Rem Koolhaas and Samir Bantal, Anne Schneider, Alexandr Zinoviev, Sebastian Bernardy, Rita Varjabedian, Yotam Ben Hur, Valentin Bansac, with Ashley Mendelsohn, Assistant Curator, Architecture and Digital Initiatives, at the Guggenheim.

Key collaborators include Niklas Maak, Irma Boom, Federico Martelli/Cookies, Janna Bystrykh, Stephan Petermann, Clemens Driessen, Lenora Ditzler, Kayoko Ota, Linda Nkatha, Etta Mideva Madete, Keigo Kobayashi, Ingo Niermann, James Westcott, Jiang Jun, Alexandra Kharitonova, Sebastien Marot, Fatma al Sahlawi, Vivian Song, and additional faculty and students at the Harvard Graduate School of Design; the Central Academy of Fine Arts, Beijing; Wageningen University and Research, Netherlands; Design Academy Eindhoven, Netherlands; and the University of Nairobi.

Book

Countryside, A Report, a 350-page pocketbook accompanies *Countryside, The Future*, presenting personal accounts and interpretations of the exhibition topics, with an extended preface and epilogue by Rem Koolhaas, a foreword by Richard Armstrong, and a curator’s introduction by Troy Conrad Therrien. Contributing authors are Samir Bantal, Janna Bystrykh, Lenora Ditzler, Clemens Driessen, Louise Fresco, Linda Nkatha Gichuyia, Alexandra Kharitonova, Keigo Kobayashi, Niklas Maak, Etta Mideva Madete, Federico Martelli, Ingo Niermann, Stephan Petermann, Johannes Refisch, and Anne M. Schneider. Designed and set in an original typeface by Irma Boom and edited by James Westcott, the volume is copublished by the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum and Taschen.

Public Programs

Details for various programs offered in conjunction with the exhibition are available at guggenheim.org/calendar. Additional programs will be added.

Conversations

Countryside, The Present [working title]

Friday, March 13, 7 pm

Join architect Rem Koolhaas; Samir Bantal, Director of AMO; Guggenheim curator Troy Conrad Therrien; and other exhibition contributors and guests for a durational program exploring the implications of the research presented in the exhibition.

\$25, \$20 members, \$18 students. Tickets are available and include access to the exhibition *Countryside: The Future* during the event, as well as a reception in the Guggenheim's iconic rotunda.

Support for this program was provided in part by a grant from Carnegie Corporation of New York.

Project for a New Decade: From City to Countryside

Friday, April 24, 6:30 pm

Join architect Rem Koolhaas; Samir Bantal, Director of AMO; and Sarah Whiting, Dean and Josep Lluís Sert Professor of Architecture, Graduate School of Design, Harvard University, for a panel discussion on topics related to the *Countryside, The Future*. The conversation will be moderated by Troy Conrad Therrien, Curator, Architecture and Digital Initiatives, Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum.

\$15, \$10 members, free for students with RSVP. Ticket includes same-day museum admission. Same-day admission tickets may also be presented at the door for free entry to the event as space allows. Schedule subject to change. For more information and for tickets, visit guggenheim.org.

The program is co-organized with the Harvard Graduate School of Design.

Exhibition Support

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About Rem Koolhaas

Rem Koolhaas (b. 1944, Rotterdam) founded the Office for Metropolitan Architecture (OMA) in 1975 together with Elia and Zoe Zenghelis and Madelon Vriesendorp. He graduated from the Architectural Association in London and in 1978 published *Delirious New York: A Retroactive Manifesto for*

Manhattan. His 1995 book, *S,M,L,XL*, summarizes the work of OMA in “a novel about architecture.” In 2001 Koolhaas published with his students two volumes of the Harvard Project on the City, *The Harvard Design School Guide to Shopping* and *Great Leap Forward*. In 2011 he wrote, with Hans Ulrich Olbrist, *Project Japan: Metabolism Talks* on the Metabolism movement in 1960s Japan. His built work includes the Axel Springer HQ (2020), the Qatar National Library (2017), Garage Museum of Contemporary Art in Moscow (2015), Fondazione Prada in Milan (2015), the headquarters for China Central Television (CCTV) in Beijing (2012), Casa da Música in Porto, Portugal (2005), Seattle Central Library (2004), and the Embassy of the Netherlands in Berlin (2003). Koolhaas also designed the Guggenheim Hermitage Museum in Las Vegas, open from 2001 to 2008. In 1978 the work of the Office for Metropolitan Architecture was featured in *The Sparkling Metropolis*, an exhibition on the top ramp of the rotunda of the Guggenheim in New York. Current projects include the Taipei Performing Arts Center and the Factory in Manchester. Koolhaas is a professor at Harvard University and in 2014 was the director of the 14th Venice Architecture Biennale, entitled *Fundamentals*.

About AMO

Cofounded by Rem Koolhaas in 1999 and now directed by Samir Bantal, AMO is the think tank of the Office for Metropolitan Architecture (OMA). AMO applies architectural thinking to domains beyond building, often working in parallel with OMA’s architectural projects to fertilize building with intelligence from an array of disciplines. AMO has worked with Prada, the European Union, Universal Studios, Amsterdam’s Schiphol airport, Condé Nast, Harvard University, the Hermitage, and Virgil Abloh’s Off-White. It has produced exhibitions including *Expansion and Neglect* (2005), *The Gulf* (2006), *CronoCaos* (2010), *Public Works* (2012), and *Elements of Architecture* (2014) at the Venice Architecture Biennale; *When Attitudes Become Form: Bern 1969/Venice 2013* (2013), *Serial Classics*, and *Portable Classics* (both 2015) at Fondazione Prada, Milan and Venice; *Virgil Abloh: “Figures of Speech”* (2019); and *Making Doha* (2019). AMO published *The Harvard Design School Guide to Shopping* (2001) and *Great Leap Forward* (2001) with the Harvard Graduate School of Design, and *Content* (2004), *Al Manakh* (2007), *Al Manakh: Gulf Continued* (2007), *Project Japan: Metabolism Talks* (2011), and *Elements of Architecture* (2014 and 2018).

About the Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation

The Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation was established in 1937 and is dedicated to promoting the understanding and appreciation of modern and contemporary art through exhibitions, education programs, research initiatives, and publications. The international constellation of museums includes the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York; the Peggy Guggenheim Collection, Venice; the Guggenheim Museum Bilbao; and the future Guggenheim Abu Dhabi. An architectural icon and “temple of spirit” where radical art and architecture meet, the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum is now among a group of eight Frank Lloyd Wright structures in the United States recently designated as a UNESCO World Heritage site. To learn more about the museum and the Guggenheim’s activities around the world, visit guggenheim.org.

Visitor Information

Admission: Adults \$25, students/seniors (65+) \$18, members and children under 12 free. Open daily from 10 am to 5:30 pm; Tuesdays and Saturdays until 8 pm. Admission is pay-what-you-wish on Saturdays from 5 to 8 pm. Visitors may learn more about the exhibition using the museum’s free Digital Guide app, Bloomberg Connects, available on-site or from the Apple App Store or Google Play.

For publicity images, visit guggenheim.org/pressimages
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#CountrysideTheFuture

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