

# OMA

## **Factory International (Aviva Studios)**

Ellen van Loon

Since it was launched in 2007, Manchester International Festival has taken place in existing buildings both large and small throughout the city. But spaces with the qualities needed by the art pieces commissioned by the Festival are fewer and fewer, disappearing amid Manchester's fast-paced redevelopment into England's new economic hub. In 2015 Manchester City Council launched an architecture competition for a new kind of art venue for Manchester International Festival (MIF), capable of hosting both art performances and exhibitions, separately or simultaneously.

MIF's new home embraces Manchester's industrial and creative past. Its facades of concrete and corrugated metal stand out amidst the refurbished brick warehouses and newly built glass-facing flats, offices, and television studios, which make up the new St. John's neighborhood. The building hovers over Water Street and the arches of 19th century Pineapple railway line, now part of its foyer, opening up a much-needed swathe of public space towards River Irwell, forgotten between greedy new developments.

The Factory is not one building but two. Its main event space, the Warehouse, is one large, 21-meter tall, flexible container, left bare to be adapted by its users as they see fit. It can be used as a single space or subdivided in two, with full-height moveable partitions that provide acoustic insulation. Productions of different scales can take place inside, from intimate performances to concerts with 5,000 people standing. The ceiling is a technical grid, with lighting, equipment and rigging, that supports concerts and exhibitions alike.

The Warehouse is complemented by the Hall, a 1,603-seat auditorium with a flexible stage, able to accommodate opera, ballet, theater, music, and cross-art performances. The Warehouse and Hall can work in tandem, allowing the stage to extend to a depth of 45 meters.

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## Factory International (Aviva Studios)

### Project Specifications

**Project:** Factory International (Aviva Studios)

**Status:** Completed

**Client:** Manchester City Council, Factory International (Manchester International Festival)

**Location:** Manchester, United Kingdom

**Site:** 1.80 hectares

**Gross Internal Area:** 13,350sqm

**Program:** Mixed Use, Theatre

**Warehouse Capacity:** Up to 5,000 people standing (2,565 sqm)

**Hall Capacity:** Multiple configurations with maximum of 1,600 seated or 2,000 standing, 22m wide proscenium and orchestra pit for 80 musicians

**Design Team:** Ellen van Loon, Rem Koolhaas, Carol Patterson, Gary Owen, Jonathan Telkamp, Tanner Merkeley, Jacopo Bellina, Paloma Bule, Anita Ernódi, Marc-Achille Filhol, Benedetta Gatti, Aris Gkitzias, Michalis Hadjistyllis, Jason Houssein, Lisa Huang, Aleksandr Joksimovic, Hans Larsson, Thijs van der Lely, Emma Lubbers, Dirk van der Meij, Tanner Merkeley, Felix Morczinek, Tom Paling, Maria Aller Rey, Mario Rodriguez, Helena Rong, Won Ryu, Saskia Simon, Lukasz Skalec, Wael Sleiman, Iason Stathatos, Koen Stockbroekx, Shinji Takagi, Nicola Vitale, Frederike Werner, Tom Xia, Yushang Zhang

### Collaborators

**Technical Architects:** Allies and Morrison, Ryder Architecture

**Construction Partners:** Laing O'Rourke

**Structure and Civil Engineers:** Buro Happold, BDP

**Acoustic Engineer:** Level Acoustics

**Fire Engineer:** WSP

**Stage Engineering:** Charcoal Blue

**Vertical Transportation:** Pearson Consult

**Landscape Design:** Planit.IE

**IT:** Strata

**Transport Planning:** Vectos

**Services Engineer:** Buro Happold

**FF&E:** Ben Kelly and Brinkworth

**Graphic Design:** Peter Saville and NORTH Design

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## Project Overview

This landmark new cultural space in the heart of Manchester, UK, is one of the largest and most ambitious developments of its kind in Europe. Aviva Studios, home of Factory International, is designed by OMA, with Partner Ellen van Loon as lead architect, and is it's the firm's major public building in the UK. The development has been led by Manchester City Council, with backing from HM Government and Arts Council England. Factory International will operate the cultural center, as well as delivering the citywide Festival every other year.

## Location

Located in the center of Manchester along the River Irwell, Aviva Studios forms part of the city's major St. John's Quarter redevelopment. The site is part of the Castlefield Conservation Area, which includes the Science and Industry Museum located on a globally significant industrial heritage site including the world's oldest surviving passenger railway and world's first railway goods warehouse. The redevelopment scheme will revive the entire site of the former Granada TV Studios, which is being transformed into a burgeoning city centre hub for culture, creativity and digital innovation.

## Key Milestones

- **November 2015:** OMA selected as winner of the international competition to design The Factory. The project marks OMA's first major public building in the UK.
- **8 July 2017:** Ground-breaking Ceremony with performance by Laurie Anderson for Manchester International Festival.
- **July 2021:** Deborah Warner's installation *Arcadia* takes place within the construction site of the building as part of Manchester International Festival.
- **June 2023:** The venue welcomes its first visitors.
- **October 2023:** Official opening production for Aviva Studios, the home of Factory International.

## Materials

Throughout the project's interior and exterior, the focus of material selection was to reflect the industrial nature and heritage of the site. The combination of exposed steel connections, raw concrete, and façade systems typically used on industrial buildings and factories are brought together to create a new interpretation of the materials, while retaining the industrial aesthetics.

## Features

The design of the building is based around large, open, flexible spaces that will constantly change and reconfigure to meet the needs of the work created and presented in the building. Key elements include:

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**Warehouse:** 33 metres wide, 64 metres long, 21 metres (clear) high, the Warehouse is the ultimate flexible performance space, with a theatre grid spanning the entirety of the area. At 21 metres tall, it is higher than four double decker buses stacked on top of each other and is the length of a Boeing 747 aeroplane. Two 'Multiwall' acoustic partitions enable the Warehouse to be configured as a single space or divided into two warehouse spaces. The partitions move as individual panels that are manually moved around a track.

170 strong points in the Warehouse can each hold one tonne, to allow sets, production rigs or performers to be suspended from the walls, and the standing-height grid has a working load of 200T, evenly distributed across it.

**Truck Lift:** On the West side of the North Warehouse are a pair of unique, purpose-built vehicle lifts that allow for two 50-ton articulated lorries, with trailers up to 40 feet long, to access the Warehouse.

**Hall:** Two foyers with bars, fixed balcony seating for 640, with flexible stalls for multiple seated formats (for max 963), with a total seat count of 1603 and further options for standing configurations. Plus, a flexible orchestra pit with a capacity of 80 musicians.

The Warehouse and Hall can connect together to make a flat floor space or to create a large stage for the Hall (35 by 32 metre), with an 11-metre-high proscenium arch opening. The Proscenium steel shutters give sound separation between the two spaces so simultaneous events can take place in the Hall and Warehouse.

When the Hall is a separate space the seating/standing capacity and depth/width/height of the stage can both vary to suit the event.

**Back of House Towers:** Support including offices, a green room and dressing rooms (nine in total which can accommodate 95 people).

**Social:** This is a primary foyer facing Water Street serving both the Hall and the Warehouse. It is framed by eight Grade II listed railway arches at the south. There are three entrances into the space, City Square to the North, River Square to the West, and a direct link into the Science and Industry Museum (SIM) lower courtyard through a Grade II listed arch. When SIM is open people can seamlessly move between the spaces.

A 33-metre-long bar is split in two by the 'mega pig' which is a key part of the building's structural engineering, holding up the proscenium arch above.

Additional multi-use foyers are on Level 2 and Level 3 of the building.

**Outdoor spaces:** New outdoor spaces will provide visitors with a setting to enjoy the building and surrounding environment, including the River Irwell – an almost unique experience in central Manchester. A number of trees will also be planted.

**Construction and Delivery:** The development of Aviva Studios has been led by Manchester City Council in partnership with Factory International.