

Studio Other Spaces' artwork *Common Sky* opens at the Buffalo AKG Art Museum

The new work creates an inclusive space that connects visitors with the sky and the surrounding landscape

BUFFALO, NY, 12 June 2023: Studio Other Spaces (SOS) – led by artist Olafur Eliasson and architect Sebastian Behmann – designed *Common Sky*, a canopy of glass and mirrors that envelops the courtyard of the Seymour H. Knox Building. Both a sculpture and an architectural structure, *Common Sky* provides a space that is free and open to the public, and that reflects the museum's vision of a twenty-first-century art institution of inclusion.

Common Sky is a celebration of the sky as common. The glass roof acts as a lens, inviting people to connect with their immediate environment and bringing into focus the ephemeral qualities of the atmosphere: the changing seasons, the dappled light, and the cloud formations. The alternating mirror and transparent glass panels emphasize physical movement as a means to shape space, making visitors visible within the work and prompting them to co-create fragmented inward and outward perspectives. The various angles of the mirrors cast complex, kaleidoscopic reflections that frame unexpected views as people move around the courtyard below.

Olafur Eliasson, artist, SOS co-founder: *'Common Sky is a dynamic, sculptural statement that combines a geometric language and a playful, poetic approach. As an artwork, it sensitizes you to the world outside, to the surrounding environment of Buffalo. It draws your attention to things that are difficult to measure, to things that depend on emotion and on your active involvement. If you don't get involved, nothing will change.'*

Sebastian Behmann, architect, SOS co-founder: *'The structure forms a unique design that takes into account all of the surrounding elements from the Buffalo AKG Art Museum, the park, and neighboring buildings. We created a site-specific artwork that amplifies the existing situation and combines it with the idea of a Modern courtyard. We hope visitors enjoy this new space that is accessible to everyone all year round, in all weather conditions, without a ticket, and where public events can be held.'*

Janne Siren, Peggy Pierce Elfvig Director, Buffalo AKG Art Museum: *'The Seymour H. Knox Building, designed by Gordon Bunshaft and completed in 1962, is a renowned work of modernist architecture. With *Common Sky*, Olafur Eliasson and Sebastian Behmann, along with their team at Studio Other Spaces, have created an artwork that honors and celebrates Bunshaft's architectural vision while activating the Knox Building's Ralph C. Wilson, Jr. Town Square as a dynamic center for learning, creativity, and community engagement. People from all walks of life can see themselves reflected in this stunning kaleidoscopic canopy, which will be a must-see destination for the people of Western New York and visitors from around the world.'*

The geometry of the canopy forms a trajectory across the courtyard, from a triangular pattern at the roof's edges to a hexagonal pattern towards the middle. In cross-section, the roof structure has two levels, which are covered by alternating mirror surfaces. These reflect sunlight and minimise heat gain, which is necessary for environmental reasons. The



distribution of hexagons and triangles thus also serves to balance the opening and closing of the roof. Even though almost half of the surface is closed, the space feels open and airy. The structure curves and reaches down to the ground at a single off-centre point of support, maintaining an asymmetry of space. This funnel-like column marks the spot where a lone hawthorn tree, planted in the 1960s, once stood, evoking a memorial to what came before. The presence of this feature means that the roof structure need not impose a new support system on the building. It also adds movement and, like a hollow tree trunk, draws the outside elements in – whether rain, snow, leaves, or light.

Studio Other Spaces designed *Common Sky* to create a connection between the historic museum and the adjacent Delaware Park. Inspired by the intense weather patterns of the city of Buffalo and the lush park designed by Frederick Law Olmsted, it strives to form space with non-classical architectural elements that are already inherent to the site, while also honouring the original architecture. The strict modernism of the Seymour H. Knox Building, designed by Gordon Bunshaft and completed in 1962, is complemented by *Common Sky's* organic shape, which rhymes with the forms found in the surrounding landscape, such as the trees, winding paths, clouds, and shafts of sunlight.

Each element of the canopy was developed especially for Buffalo AKG Art Museum, in collaboration with the engineer Herwig Bretis from ArtEngineering and the Petersberg-based steel constructor Hahner Technik.

Initiated in 2019, this project is part of the new master plan by Shohei Shigematsu of the architectural firm OMA. It is the most significant campus expansion and development project in the museum's 160-year history.

Project details

Client: Buffalo AKG Art Museum

Location: Buffalo, NY, USA

Date: 2019–23

Studio Other Spaces

Studio Other Spaces (SOS), founded by artist Olafur Eliasson and architect Sebastian Behmann in Berlin in 2014, connects architecture and art through interdisciplinary and experimental building projects and artworks for public space. Their shared interest in spatial experimentation led them to the holistic approach that defines Studio Other Spaces. In their work, they continuously move between overall perspectives and a highly detail-oriented level, exploring all aspects of a project through each stage of development – from inception to its life and reuse. SOS projects foreground the atmospheric and intangible qualities of their specific locations, approach materiality through research and experimentation, and emphasise physical movement as a means to shape space. Recent projects include *Common Sky* (2019–2023), a canopy of glass and mirrors for the courtyard of the Buffalo AKG Art Museum, New York; the wine-tasting pavilion *Vertical Panorama Pavilion* (2020–22) for the Donum Estate in Sonoma, California; *The Seeing City* (2015–22), a site-specific, permanent artistic installation designed for the top two floors of the Morland Mixité Capitale building in Paris, France; the design of *Lyst Restaurant* (2019) in Vejle's Fjordenhus; and the *Meles Zenawi Memorial Park* (2013–) in Addis Ababa, a campus comprising five buildings, several pavilions, and a park, conceived and built with Ethiopian partners and in collaboration with Vogt



Landscape Architects. The studio's first solo exhibition, titled *The Design of Collaboration*, was on display at Kunst Meran Merano Arte in South Tyrol, Italy, from September 2020 through January 2021. As part of curator Hashim Sarkis's exhibition in the Central Pavilion for Biennale Architettura 2021, SOS collaborated with six co-designers to present *Future Assembly*, a more-than-human gathering inspired by the United Nations.

www.studiootherspaces.net

Olafur Eliasson

Artist Olafur Eliasson (Iceland/Denmark), born in 1967, works in a wide range of media, including installation, painting, sculpture, photography, and film. Since 1997, his solo shows have appeared in major museums around the world. In 2003, his artwork *The weather project* – an enormous artificial sun installed in the Turbine Hall of Tate Modern, London – was seen by more than two million people. As part of his practice, he engages with arts education, policy-making, and issues of sustainability and climate change. Eliasson's architectural projects include the Serpentine Gallery Pavilion 2007, designed together with Kjetil Thorsen; *Your rainbow panorama*, a 150-metre circular, coloured-glass walkway situated on top of ARoS Aarhus Art Museum, Denmark (2006–2011); the Facades of Harpa Reykjavik Concert Hall and Conference Centre (2005–2011), created in collaboration with Henning Larsen Architects, which won the Mies van der Rohe Award in 2013; and, most recently, *Shadows travelling on the sea of the day*, 2022, a cluster of mirrored pavilions in the desert of Qatar.

www.olafureliasson.net

Sebastian Behmann

Sebastian Behmann is co-founder of the architectural firm Studio Other Spaces and heads the department of design at Studio Olafur Eliasson. Born in Germany in 1969 and educated in architecture at TU Dresden, Behmann began collaborating with Eliasson in 2001. Together the two have designed numerous architectural works. These include pavilions, installations, international exhibitions, and *Fjordenhus* in Vejle, Denmark (2009–2018), the first major building designed entirely by the architectural team at Studio Olafur Eliasson. Behmann was the head architect for the facade design of the Harpa Reykjavik Concert Hall and Conference Centre (recipient of the 2013 Mies van der Rohe Award), whose shimmering glass facades were developed by Studio Olafur Eliasson in collaboration with Henning Larsen Architects. Other architectural projects have included *Cirkelbroen* (The circle bridge) in Copenhagen (2015); *Your rainbow panorama* for ARoS Aarhus Kunstmuseum (2011), *Serpentine Gallery Pavilion 2007* in London (with Kjetil Thorsen), and *The blind pavilion*, shown as part of the Danish Pavilion at the 50th Venice Biennale (2003). As co-founder of Studio Other Spaces, Behmann has led the development of projects including *Common Sky* (2019–23); *The Seeing City* (2015–22); *Vertical Panorama Pavilion* (2020–22); the design of *Lyst Restaurant* (2019) in Vejle's *Fjordenhus*; and the *Meles Zenawi Memorial Park* (2013–) in Addis Ababa.

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