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Aviva Studios
Water Street, Manchester M3 4JQ
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ARCHITECTURAL STATEMENT

Aviva Studios, which is programmed and operated by Factory International, embraces Manchester's industrial as well as its creative past. The building's concrete and corrugated metal facades stand against the refurbished brick warehouses and new build flats, offices, and television studios that make up the new St. John's neighbourhood.

The building's main event space, the Warehouse, is conceived as one large industrial space, left bare to be adapted by its users as they see fit. The arches that once supported the historic viaduct known as the Pineapple Line are preserved as part of the foyer. A technical grid on the Warehouse ceiling permits any type of use, from concert to exhibition. A movable full-height acoustic wall, 21 metres tall, can divide the space so that two events can coexist without disturbance. The space can be opened up, but also split and a performance space made larger or smaller.

The Warehouse is complemented by the Hall, a 1,600-seat auditorium with a flexible stage, adaptable to ballet, theatre, music, and cross-art performances. The Warehouse and the Hall can work in tandem: the proscenium opens fully into the warehouse and allows the stage to run deeper into the building.

It is a space that can create multiple opportunities and endless configurations and environments. It is a new type of performance space, a unique crossover between a fixed theatre and flexible warehouse.

At street level, the design has allowed the creation of a significant area of public space along the River Irwell.

Ellen van Loon
OMA Partner and Lead Architect

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BUILDING FACT SHEET

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 is designed by world-leading practice Office for Metropolitan Architecture (OMA), with OMA Partner, Ellen van Loon as lead architect, and is their first 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 operates the cultural centre, as well as delivering the citywide Manchester International Festival every other year.

Location

Located in the centre 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 during MIF23 with a series of preview events including an exhibition of Yayoi Kusama's inflatables, *You, Me and the Balloons*.
- **October 2023:** Official opening production for Aviva Studios, the home of Factory International.

Project Specifications

Site: 1.80 hectares

Gross Internal Area (GIA): 13,350sqm

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

Hall Capacity: Multiple configurations with maximum of 1,603 seated or 2,000 standing, 22-metre-wide proscenium and orchestra pit for 80 musicians

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Materials

Throughout the project's interior and exterior, the focus of material selection reflects 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 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:

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, 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

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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 landscaped outdoor spaces provide visitors with a setting to enjoy the building and surrounding environment, including the River Irwell – an almost unique experience in central Manchester.

Environmental Sustainability

Factory International is on a committed path towards zero-carbon activity. Using operational data from 2024 as the benchmark, Factory International's ambition is to become a zero-carbon emissions organisation by 2038 in line with Manchester's targets.

Particular attention has been paid to the building fabric to create acoustically insulated spaces enveloped in a very high thermal mass which reduces the amount of energy required for heating, and high-performance glazing also reduces the amount of energy required for cooling. The fresh-air ventilation system closely monitors the air quality in the building to match the flow rate with the occupancy to minimise energy consumption and maintain comfort for each size of event. Waste heat is also recovered. The building is targeted to achieve a BREEAM (Building Research Establishment Environmental Assessment Method) assessment rating "Very Good". A BREEAM rating is generated by measuring and grading projects against 103 different sustainability criteria covering the management of the project, materials and delivery.

Construction and Delivery

The development of Aviva Studios has been led by Manchester City Council in partnership with Factory International.

Architect: OMA
Technical Architects: Ryder Architecture
Construction Partners: Laing O'Rourke
Structure and Civil Engineer: Buro Happold
Services Engineer: Buro Happold, BDP
Acoustic Engineer: Level Acoustics
Fire Engineer: WSP
Theatre Consultants: Charcoalblue
Vertical Transportation: Pearson Consult
Landscape Design: Planit.IE
IT: Turner & Townsend
Transport Planning: Vectos

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Design Team

OMA Team: Ellen van Loon, Rem Koolhaas, Gary Owen, Carol Patterson, Jonathan Telkamp, Richard Hollington, Tanner Merkeley, Jacopo Bellina, Paloma Bule, Anita Ernödi, Marc-Achille Filhol, Alain Fouraux, Benedetta Gatti, Aris Gkitzias, Michael Hadjistyllis, Jason Houssein, Lisa Huang, Aleksandar Joksimovic, Hans Larsson, Thijs van der Lely, Emma Lubbers, Dirk van der Meij, 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, Federike Werner, Tom Xia, Yushang Zhang.

OMA

OMA is an international practice operating within the traditional boundaries of architecture and urbanism. OMA is led by eight partners – Rem Koolhaas, Reinier de Graaf, Ellen van Loon, Shohei Shigematsu, Iyad Alsaka, Chris van Duijn, Jason Long, and Managing Partner-Architect David Gianotten – and maintains offices in Rotterdam, New York, Hong Kong, Doha, and Australia.

OMA-designed buildings currently under construction are the renovation of Kaufhaus des Westens (KaDeWe) in Berlin, Hangzhou Prism, Green Point Landing in New York and Mangalem 21 in Tirana. OMA's completed projects include Taipei Performing Arts Centre (2022), Norra Tornen in Stockholm (2020), Axel Springer Campus in Berlin (2020), MEETT Toulouse Exhibition and Convention Centre (2020), Galleria in Gwanggyo (2020), nhow RAI Hotel in Amsterdam (2020), a new building for Brighton College (2020), Potato Head Studios (2020). Earlier buildings include Fondazione Prada (2018), Garage Museum of Contemporary Art in Moscow (2015), De Rotterdam (2013), CCTV Headquarters in Beijing (2012), Casa da Música in Porto (2005), Seattle Central Library (2004), and The Netherlands Embassy in Berlin (2003).

Ellen van Loon

Ellen van Loon is Partner at OMA. She joined the office in 1998 and has led award-winning building projects that combine sophisticated design with precise execution.

Her recently completed projects include Jacquemus' shops in London and Paris (2022), Tiffany & Co's temporary showroom in Doha (2023) and temporary store on Avenue Montaigne (2022) in Paris, the BVLGARI Fine Jewelry Show in Milan (2021), Brighton College in Brighton (2020), BLOX / DAC in Copenhagen (2018), Rijnstraat 8 in The Hague (2017), and Lab City CentraleSupélec (2017). Other projects in her portfolio include Fondation Galeries Lafayette (2018) in Paris; Qatar National Library (2017); Amsterdam's G-Star Raw Headquarters (2014); De Rotterdam, the largest building in the Netherlands (2013); CCTV Headquarters in Beijing (2012); New Court Rothschild Bank in London (2011); Maggie's Centre in Glasgow (2011); Casa da Musica in Porto (2005) – winner of the 2007 RIBA Award; and the Dutch Embassy in Berlin (2003) – winner of the European Union Mies van der Rohe Award in 2005.

Ellen van Loon is currently working on the transformation of Kaufhaus des Westens (KaDeWe) Berlin – Europe's biggest department store; Lamarr, a new store for the KaDeWe Group in Vienna; and the Palais de Justice de Lille.

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Interior Design

Ben Kelly and Brinkworth have collaborated to design the interiors for the public spaces within Aviva Studios, building upon a long-standing creative relationship. Ben Kelly and Kevin Brennan, CEO of Brinkworth have previously designed many public and entertainment spaces together, including Béton House, Park Hill Student Accommodation Sheffield, (Dis)order Nightclub L.A, BIMM Fulham, and The Basement at The Science Museum, London. Ben Kelly is also known for his work in connection with Factory Records, including Fac 51 The Hacienda, Dry 201 and The Factory HQ in Manchester.

Ben Kelly and Brinkworth have created truly adaptable, multifunctional welcome areas with a palette that references 1980's industrial Manchester. A key design feature is a two-storey structure, which stands in the middle of the ground floor foyer, designed to be used for a range of usages from a welcome desk to a DJ booth. The structure is wrapped in perforated bright orange and blue metal which references the *Orchestral Manoeuvres in the Dark (OMD)* album cover designed by Ben Kelly and Peter Saville. In addition, the retail solution is fully modular and can be reconfigured and adapted, or removed entirely if needed, making the space flexible for the many diverse events it will host.

Performance Spaces

Theatre Consultants Charcoalblue have collaborated with OMA on the design of the Warehouse and Hall using virtual reality to visualise the spaces and assist with the sightline analysis, ensuring the highest levels of audience experience.

Charcoalblue have also led on the design of the performance technical systems that have been devised to be ultra-flexible, allowing users to create work with as few technical restrictions as possible. The Warehouse rigging comprises 156 travelling beams and 80 floor mounted grid stands, which can support up to 200 tons of scenery and equipment. The technical infrastructure is based around a system of fibre networks to maximise flexibility and data transfer rates whilst coping with the significant size of the venue. An innovative moveable seating system made up of a series of retractable seating units has also been developed, which can transform from flat floor to seating rake in place and be moved to other parts of the venue to augment seating according to the requirements of a particular production. Charcoalblue has additionally provided guidance on the many detailed building service requirements unique to performance spaces.

Charcoalblue

Charcoalblue was established in the heart of the UK theatre industry in 2004. Since then, they have carved out a reputation as the world's leading integrated Theatre, Acoustic and Experience Consultancy service and now operate across six international studios in the UK, USA and Australia. Their portfolio ranges from landmark cultural venues such as the Royal Shakespeare Company in Stratford-upon-Avon and the National Theatre London, to community-focused arts hubs including Storyhouse in Chester and Peckham Theatre, London. Charcoalblue embrace projects with radically different needs and requirements such as the Royal Opera House, London, the Roundhouse in Camden, Steppenwolf Theatre Company and Toronto's pop-up Luminato Festival. They also have experience working with multinational tech organisations such as Google, large-scale arenas, and sports and e-sports venues. This autumn, three major Charcoalblue projects will come to completion;

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Aviva Studios in Manchester, the Perelman Performing Arts Center in New York City, PAC@NYC, and the Geelong Arts Center in Australia.

Charcoalblue project team

Gavin Green, Steve Roberts, Jenni Harris, Kate Nolan, Emma Savage, Paul Halter, James Nowell and Dicky Burgess.

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Quotes

Ellen van Loon, OMA Partner and Lead Architect

"This will be a new type of performance space – a unique crossover between a fixed theatre and flexible warehouse. Super-sized moveable walls enable endless configurations within a large space, allowing audiences unexpected vistas of performers. I hope that whenever people come to visit they always experience something different, as if with each visit they encounter a different building."

Ben Kelly, Interior Designer

*"It has been a great pleasure working with Brinkworth and the team at Factory International, and with Ellen and OMA. I regard this project as the missing bookend to my relationship with Factory Records and the city of Manchester. We have included design references to the *Orchestral Manoeuvres in the Dark* (OMD) album cover, which Peter Saville and I collaborated on in 1979, and as a homage to both *The Hacienda* and the *DRY* bar. I think that Tony Wilson would have been very happy with these references within this hybrid building which allows endless possibilities for the city of Manchester and beyond."*

Kevin Brennan, CEO, Brinkworth

"Working with Ben Kelly again on such an important project was an honour. The deployment of subtle references to Factory Records pays homage to the city's spectacular music history, while also blatantly referencing back to Manchester's industrial past. Designing a simple brick wall to front the vast bar is a direct reference to the reclaimed brick arches that are included in OMA's design, anchoring it directly to the site with the expression of industrial steel - again a nod to the city's rich industrial heritage. Working alongside the Factory International team, we developed the 'spirit of a festival' concept to provide a space for everyone, across day and nighttime activity. A pop-up mentality provided the flexibility the team needed to cater for all, open to all."

Gavin Green, Founding & Senior Partner, Charcoalblue

"As theatre consultants, Charcoalblue were challenged with creating a venue where Factory International were given the technical and artistic freedom to explore and expand how to present their work in either the warehouse spaces or the theatre. The joy for us as designers was in figuring out how to marry these spaces with this ambition, and the result is an auditorium that is a delicate balance between epic and intimate, creating a palpable, positive connectivity between audience and performer."

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