

Information

Currently Showing

Jeppé Hein

The Curve

Until 29 Apr/07

Admission Free

Danish artist Jeppé Hein plays on the image of a roller coaster, with a large-scale steel structure that weaves, loops and double dips through the entire 80-metre length of The Curve.

Forthcoming Exhibition

Panic Attack! Art in the Punk Years

Barbican Art Gallery

5 Jun–9 Sep/07

£8/£6

Panic Attack! explores art produced from the mid-70s to mid-80s in Britain and the United States which reflects the rebellious and iconoclastic spirit of the punk years. Focusing on London, New York and Los Angeles, the exhibition includes work by some 30 artists, among them Tony Cragg, Derek Jarman, Barbara Kruger, Robert Mapplethorpe, Raymond Pettibon and Cindy Sherman.

Forthcoming Exhibition

Marjetica Potrč

The Curve

24 May–19 Aug/07

Admission Free

Slovenian architect Marjetica Potrč presents *Forest Rising*, a new model of citizenship and sustainability, based on her research in the Amazonian region of Acre. Part of the series of new commissions for The Curve.

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The Barbican is 25 in 2007 and to help celebrate we have arranged a wide variety of special events and activities.

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Gallery Information

Open 11am–8pm

Tue & Thu 11am–6pm

Barbican Centre

Silk Street

London

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www.barbican.org.uk/artgallery

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barbican
artgallery / **Guide**
Alvar Aalto: Through the
Eyes of Shigeru Ban
22 Feb – 13 May / 07
Free / please take one

Alternative format

A large print version of this brochure
is available at the Ticket Desk



Celebrating
25 years of the
Barbican

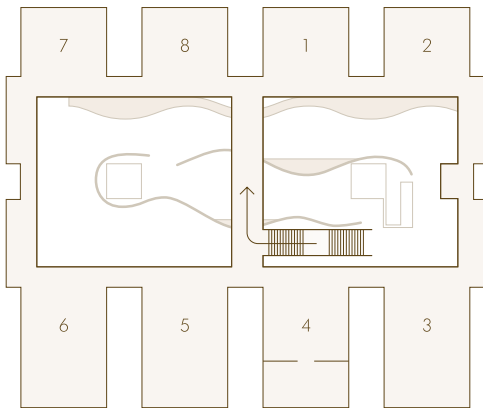
'The ultimate goal of architecture... is to create a paradise. It is the only purpose of building a house... Every house, every product of architecture... should be a fruit of our endeavour to build an earthly paradise for people.' Alvar Aalto, 1957

'I would like to use my (architectural) skills and knowledge for the benefit of society. While exploring new ideas, I would also like to apply subsequent innovations to humanitarian needs.' Shigeru Ban, 1999

Alvar Aalto: Through the Eyes of Shigeru Ban

Finnish architect and designer, Alvar Aalto (1898–1976), is universally acknowledged as one of the most important figures of 20th century architecture. His commitment to humanitarian ideals, inspired by nature, sets his work apart from the purism of Modernist contemporaries, Le Corbusier and Mies van der Rohe.

Aalto's visionary approach is more relevant than ever. In this exhibition the acclaimed Japanese architect, Shigeru Ban (b.1957), sheds new light on Aalto's legacy. Sixteen of Aalto's most significant architectural schemes and a wide range of his design products are complemented by Ban's own work inspired by Aalto, including the undulating ceiling and wall made with paper tubes which together form a key element of his exhibition design.



Upper level / The exhibition begins on the upper level

Room 1

Early Years and Nordic Classicism

Rooms 2 & 3

Functionalism

Rooms 4 & 5

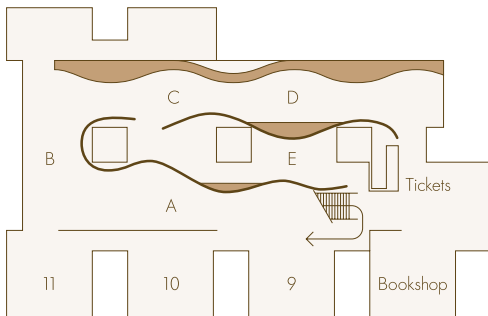
Search for a New Style

Room 6

Red Period

Rooms 7 & 8

White Period and Aalto's Late Phase



Lower level / The exhibition continues on the lower level

Room 9

Forms

Room 10

Materials and Standardization

Room 11

Lighting and Structure

Zones A–B

The Architect and Society / the AA–System Houses

Zones C–D

Aalto Furniture

Zone E

Shigeru Ban and Aalto's Legacy

Room 1

Early Years and Nordic Classicism

Alvar Aalto was born in 1898 in Kuortane, a village in Southern Ostrobothnia. When he was five, his family moved to Jyväskylä, a small town in Central Finland. Surrounded by lakes with winding shores, low ridges and prosperous farms, the town was the administrative and cultural centre of the region. Growing up in this pastoral yet culturally rich environment, Aalto came to regard nature and culture as complementary. He believed that every member of society, regardless of their background, can contribute meaningfully to the well being of the community as a whole.

Having completed his studies at the Helsinki University of Technology, Aalto returned to Jyväskylä, where he established his own architectural practice in 1923. The following year he married fellow architect, Aino Marsio (1894–1949). Aalto's introduction to the art and architecture of northern Italy whilst on honeymoon was to have a profound impact on his work.

At this time, Finnish architecture was under the influence of Neo-Classicism. So called, Nordic Classicism, originated in Denmark and Sweden, it combined *architettura minore*, the delightful classical vernacular of northern Italy with local traditions. Young Aalto quickly responded to this trend and aspired to make his hometown 'the Florence of the North'. Featuring the *Jyväskylä Workers' Club* (1924–25), Aalto's first civic commission, this section explores how Aalto incorporated classical forms into a multi-functional building.

Rooms 2 & 3

Functionalism

In 1927, Aalto moved to Turku, where he became an associate of the more senior architect, Erik Bryggman (1891-1955). Under the influence of Modernist Functionalism, Aalto's works became increasingly simple, losing their historical and ornamental motifs. The Turku 700th Anniversary Exhibition and Trade Fair designed by Bryggman and Aalto in 1929 illustrate this new pared down approach.

The project which marks Aalto's transition to Functionalism is the *Viipuri City Library* (1927–35) at Vyborg in Russia. Here Aalto began to develop his original architectural vocabulary, such as undulating ceilings – invented to improve acoustics – and rows of cylinder shaped top lights designed to minimize the shadows cast under the readers' hands.

Aalto achieved international fame with the *Paimio Tuberculosis Sanatorium* (1929–33). Conceived as 'an instrument of healing', Aalto paid special attention to the psychological requirements of the bedridden patient, incorporating details such as a noiseless wash basin, calming lighting and colour schemes. The bent wood and plywood furniture pieces designed for the library and the sanatorium were equally acclaimed and are still in production today, over 75 years after their conception.

Rooms 4 & 5

Search for a New Style

In 1933, Aalto moved to Helsinki in search of greater opportunities and challenges. Around this same time he became increasingly critical of the narrowly analytical, rationalist approach of his Modernist contemporaries, emphasizing instead the importance of the psychological effect of design.

The stylistic advances that Aalto made whilst working on the *Paimio Tuberculosis Sanatorium* and *Viipuri City Library* were further elaborated in the textual and timber detail of his own private residence and workplace built at Munkkiniemi and in the dramatic undulating volume of the *Finnish Pavilion*, New York World's Fair (1938–39).

Universally acclaimed as one of Aalto's masterpieces, the elegant *Villa Mairea* (1938–39), was designed and built for Harry and Maire Gullichsen. Aalto had met the Gullichsens in the mid-1930s and they became his principle patrons and clients. As Managing Director of the large wood-processing company, Ahlström Corporation, Harry Gullichsen provided Aalto with important commissions. In 1935, Aalto and Aino together with Maire and the design critic Nils Gustav Hahl founded Artek, a company to produce and distribute Aalto's furniture.

In designing the villa, Aalto was allowed to experiment freely, exploring a wide range of conceptual and technical ideas. The house

synthesises imagery taken from rustic Finnish farm constructions, traditional Japanese architecture and garden design as well as continental Modernism. Aalto's innovations include a highly original arrangement of wooden pillars in the living room – an outcome of his experiments with local materials – a variety of types and systems for lighting and furniture, and the air-conditioning system that anticipates today's concept of environmental engineering.

Room 6 Red Period

The outbreak of World War II shattered the Modernist utopia of pristine, timeless white buildings. Due to a lack of maintenance during the War years, many Functionalist buildings had deteriorated badly. After the War and under the influence of Aalto, Finnish architecture oriented towards the use of local, traditional materials.

Abandoning plastered façades and flat roofs, Aalto began instead to use predominantly red brick and pitched copper roofs. Often described as the 'Red Period', Aalto's buildings from this time reflect a sense of history and cultural roots; each building a perfect complement to the local environment.

Built for a small industrial community on the SÄYÄTSALO Island, *SÄYÄTSALO Town Hall* (1948–52) was conceived as a sculptural, earth-coloured structure integrated in Aalto's man-made landscape. His first major commission outside Finland, *Baker House Senior Dormitory for the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, USA* (1946–49), was innovative in the use of bricks to create undulating volume. Standing on a rocky site on Muuratsalo Island, *Experimental House* (1952–53), a summer house for Aalto and his second wife Elissa, née MÄKINIEMI (1922–94), was conceived as an architectural experiment to test the technical durability and aesthetic effects of various materials such as bricks and tiles. With a façade made of red brick, copper and grey granite, the *National Pensions Institute, Helsinki* (1952–57) is acclaimed as one of the most inspiring examples of 20th century civic architecture. With their skylights and custom-made building materials, furniture, light fittings and textiles, the interior spaces are among Aalto's finest.

Rooms 7 & 8 White Period and Aalto's Late Phase

The mid-1950s was one of Aalto's most intensely creative periods during which he won several important competitions and designed buildings that are generally regarded as masterpieces. Abandoning red brick constructions, he returned to primarily white buildings; this time, however, with increasingly complex plan configurations, sections, and sculptural silhouettes. Certain formal themes, such as the fan and the asymmetrical amphitheatre shapes are repeated in many contexts and variations.

The Church of the Three Crosses, Vuoksenniska (1955–58) exemplifies Aalto's 'White Period', with its sculpturally moulded, immaculately white interior space. It is divided into three parts, separated by partition screens moving on rollers to create a multi-functional space and provide a sense of intimacy, whether the church is full or empty. The exterior and the interior have very different shapes and characters and the space is lit by a variety of light openings (among 103 windows only two are identical) that create dramatic changes of illumination throughout the day.

During his late phase, Aalto designed and planned a number of civic and cultural centres that were intended to be the symbolic hearts of their respective communities. The *Seinäjoki Civic Centre* (1958–87) took nearly 30 years to realise and was completed posthumously. Aalto's scheme for the Centre was a kind of man-made landscape consisting of a series of plazas and courtyards delineated by the church, town hall, library, theatre, and a municipal office building, all enriched by a landscape of terraced earth. Aalto's spatial plan for Seinäjoki is here compared with that of the buildings *La Maison Carré, Bazoches-sur-Guyonne, France* (1956–59) and the *Finlandia Hall, Helsinki* (1962–71).

Lower Gallery

Room 9

Forms

With his characteristic use of undulating forms, Aalto's architecture has often been described as sensuous and intuitive, free from geometric regularity. However, a recent study of Aalto's drawings carried out by the Shigeru Ban Laboratory, Keio University, Japan, throws light on Aalto's application of geometric forms; for instance, for the determination of proportion and for defining the key elements of the building structure. These geometric elements are examined here, as well as Aalto's characteristic compositions with undulating volumes and cuboids. Examples include the *House of Culture*, Helsinki (1952–58), the *Apartment Building Neue Vahr*, Bremen, Germany (1958–62) and the *Seinäjoki Library* (1960–65).

Room 10

Materials and Standardization

Aalto carried out numerous experiments with natural, locally accessible materials such as wood, bricks and tiles to explore new aesthetic effects and their technical potential. Aalto's unique idea of 'flexible standardisation', an efficient system to deliver well-designed products at an affordable price, was one of the most important outcomes. He standardised building materials and parts to cut down production costs and developed a system for combining those standardised units in a variety of ways, to allow maximum flexibility. This section explores Aalto's standardised building materials, and parts developed for the *House of Culture*, the *National Pensions Institute* and *La Maison Carré*.

Room 11

Lighting and Structure

While Aalto designed a variety of light fittings as an integral part of his architecture, he also incorporated into the structure of the building an efficient system to allow the penetration of natural light, developing a wide range of skylights. Furthermore, Aalto applied the same design principles to both the light fittings and the building structure itself. This section features

models analysing the structure of Aalto's skylights and light fittings as well as a variety of pendant lights designed by Aalto.

Zones A–B

The Architect and Society/ AA–System Houses

The AA–System Houses were a prefabricated housing system Aalto developed during the Second World War, as a way of addressing the housing needs of the vast number of people displaced by the War. Aalto was initially commissioned by Ahlström in 1940 to produce prefabricated wooden houses in response to this severe housing shortage. Unhappy with the idea of mass-produced houses, Aalto applied his idea of flexible standardisation to this programme. Named AA–System Houses ('AA' for 'Aalto' and 'Ahlström'), these dwellings were designed to provide maximum flexibility and variation through standardised building parts.

Aalto's ultimate goal was to provide comfort and happiness for the 'Little Man', i.e. ordinary people. While Aalto carried out a variety of experiments through ambitious projects for privileged clients and civil authorities, his innovations were not just a reflection of his own artistic expression but were an attempt to provide better housing and living conditions to the greater part of society.

Zones C–D

Aalto Furniture

Aalto's first known furniture design dates back to 1919. His early commissions, such as the *Jyväskylä Workers' Club* (1924–25), included his own lighting and furniture designs, which incorporated Classicist stylistic ideas. During the late 1920s, Aalto became more interested in Modernist design, and purchased Marcel Breuer's Wassily Chairs and Poul Henningsen's light fittings for his own home. Around this time, he began to combine steel and wood with plywood in his furniture.

Aalto's breakthrough as a furniture designer resulted from his work on the *Paimio Tuberculosis Sanatorium* (1929–33) for which he designed hospital furniture with tubular steel, as well as bent wood and plywood. The *Paimio Chair* (1931) and related designs became the foundation for Aalto's mature

furniture work and brought him international recognition. In 1933 Aalto had his first solo exhibition at the Fortnum & Mason department store in London. The warm reception he was given in Britain was a catalyst for the establishment of the Artek Company in 1935.

In conjunction with the development of his furniture, Aalto carried out a number of experiments with bent wood, some of which remain as sculptural objects, as featured in the display here. Through these experiments, Aalto with the help of Otto Korhonen, devised his first, single bent furniture leg (the L-leg or the Z-leg) in 1933. This was followed by the double bent leg (the Y-leg) in 1947 and the three-dimensional fan-shaped leg (X-leg) in 1954. Aalto called his furniture legs 'the little sister of the architectural column'; they formed the basis of a number of his furniture styles.

Zone E

Shigeru Ban and Aalto's Legacy

Born in Tokyo in 1957 and trained in the United States under the tutelage of John Hejduk, at that time an influential 'hard-line' modernist, Ban never met Aalto in person; his early architectural language was founded on high Modernism. However, encounters with Aalto's work had a profound influence on Ban's subsequent career as an architect. The first was on Ban's visit to Aalto's native Finland in 1984, and then through an Aalto exhibition in Tokyo that Ban designed in 1986. The latter became a catalyst for Ban's signature use of paper tubes in architecture.

Stylistically, the works of the two architects seem to differ immensely. Nevertheless, Ban acknowledges that his work and career are hugely indebted to Aalto's architecture; not so much in the aesthetic or technical sense, but in terms of architectural vision and design philosophy. In Ban's view, Aalto was essentially an experimental architect, who created a distinctive architectural language, combining traditional and natural materials with modern technology, in order to improve the conditions of human life.

Enveloped within the paper tube structure, an echo of Aalto's undulating forms, this section shows the way in which Ban continues Aalto's legacy. The exhibits include his early paper tube structure, *Paper House*, Lake Yamanaka (1995); *Kirinda House*, Sri Lanka for

tsunami victims (2005–2007); *Centre Pompidou*, Metz, with a roof structure inspired by traditional bamboo hats from China, and which is scheduled to open in 2008.

Alvar Aalto: Through the Eyes of Shigeru Ban is curated by Shigeru Ban, with Juhani Pallasmaa and Tomoko Sato.

The exhibition is organised by Barbican Art Gallery, in collaboration with the Alvar Aalto Museum, Jyväskylä, Finland.

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Win a Trip to Finland

Journey to Finland, the birthplace of Alvar Aalto and experience his architecture first hand, courtesy of the Finnish Tourist Board. The runners' up prize includes a pair of tickets to the Big Chill music festival, courtesy of Finlandia Vodka. To enter the competition visit www.barbican.org.uk/finlandcomp

Win a Classic Aalto Stool

For your chance to win one of Aalto's most iconic furniture design pieces, visit the console by the entrance to the Gallery and answer a simple question about Aalto.

Publication

An accompanying book, priced £29.95, is available from the Gallery bookshop or online www.barbican.org.uk/eticketing/shop.asp

Gifts

Iconic designs by Alvar Aalto are on sale in the Gallery Bookshop including a selection of his classic furniture pieces, lamps and glassware.

Events

All events take place in the Gallery and are FREE to same day exhibition ticket holders unless otherwise stated.

Wed 28 Feb/6.30pm

Introduction to the Exhibition

Alona Pardo, assistant curator, leads a tour of the exhibition.

Wed 7 Mar/6.30pm

A Sustainable Life

Justin Rowlett, Newsnight's 'Ethical Man' and **Ian Taylor**, partner at RIBA sustainability award-winning practice Feilden Clegg Bradley, discuss how to translate the designs and concepts of architects such as Aalto and Ban into everyday life.

Wed 21 Mar/6.30pm

I Want to be an Architect

Writer and performer **Julian Fox** presents a short response to the exhibition.

Wed 28 Mar/6.30pm

Design for Development

Megan Yates, engineer and trustee of Architecture for Humanity, and **Jane Cocking**, deputy humanitarian director, Oxfam, discuss how architects and engineers can contribute to disaster relief and longer-term building projects in the developing world.

Sat 31 Mar/1pm

Talk by Tom Dixon

Cinema 2, Level 4

£7.50/£6

Tom Dixon, creative director, Artek, and non-executive director, Habitat, talks about Alvar Aalto and his creative vision.

Wed 18 Apr/6.30pm

Managing Complexities Part One

Architects and engineers, **Daniel Bosia** and **Charles Walker**, Ove Arup, will be joined by **David Lewis**, director of buildings, Ove Arup, to discuss projects they are developing in partnership with Shigeru Ban. Part one of a two-part discussion.

Wed 25 Apr/6.30pm

Alvar Aalto and Japan

Tomoko Sato, co-curator of the exhibition, discusses the influence of Japanese architecture on Alvar Aalto.

Sat 28 Apr/11am–4pm

Study Day: Alvar Aalto and the UK

£15/£12

Juhani Pallasmaa, chairman of Alvar Aalto Academy, Finland, leads this special day with commentators and design practitioners from Finland and the UK.

See www.barbican.co.uk/education for details.

This event has been programmed in collaboration with the Alvar Aalto Foundation, Finland.

Wed 2 May/6.30pm

Managing Complexities Part Two

Architects and engineers, **Daniel Bosia** and **Charles Walker**, Ove Arup, will be joined by **David Lewis**, director of buildings, Ove Arup, to discuss projects they are developing in partnership with Shigeru Ban. Part two of this two-part presentation.

Families

Sat 3 & Sun 4 Mar/2–4pm

Ready, Steady, Build: Architecture Workshops for Families

£6 per person. Children must be accompanied by an adult. Full details at www.barbican.co.uk/education
Part of *Do Something Different Weekend*

Schools

Wed 14 Mar/5.30–7.30pm

Teachers' Evening

£5 per person, includes entry to the exhibition and a complimentary drink. An informal evening for teachers which includes a tour of the exhibition and ideas for integrating the exhibition into classroom teaching. Suitable for art & design, design & technology teachers, KS3, KS4 and above.

Teachers' Resources

A free resource pack for teachers accompanies the exhibition and is available to download online. Find out more at www.barbican.co.uk/education

Guided Tours

Free artist led tours of the exhibition are available for school groups. To book call 020 7382 7211 or email tickets@barbican.org.uk