

MADe's Method: Starting Over, Failing Better

MADe's process is not so different from that of many art practices. While the context of our work, situated within architectural competitions, may seem incongruous with art practice, aspects of our methodology resonate with many artists. Each competition directs and informs our approach to the next. And so the context-specific, non-linear approach that each project demands remains marked by a certain coherence and continuity — an underlying order to the progression.

Our deliberate participation in public competitions allows us to explore ideas and concepts across geographical contexts. The process is initiated by a team of just two. The programme is dissected, its limitations are identified, and its functionality is ensured. At this stage, the project's functionality takes precedence over any discussion of aesthetic expression. We are in constant dialogue, outlining ideas and intent without committing to any particular solution. A catalogue of possibilities begins to emerge. We weigh the pros and cons of each option, considering feasibility, innovation and aesthetics. This evaluation of each option's potential to meet the project's requirements and our conceptual ideas determines which iterations are retained and which are not.

The team then expands to four or five members, depending on the number of viable iterations. Exploring each possibility reveals new opportunities, and the team expands further as we begin to grasp the broader picture emerging. The possibilities undergo a deliberate weeding process based on analysis and evaluation, repeated as many times as necessary until we arrive at a single option we are certain of. Up to this point, few images or designs have been produced; we have made a conscious decision not to work on them until we have a concept that can lead us to the final image.

For instance, the entire process for a university building we are currently designing will take approximately three months — two months for the steps outlined above, two weeks to develop the solution, and possibly no more than two weeks to produce the final drawings and images.

Our approach to competition is shaped by our ability to limit our output. We focus on only one competition at a time and, even then, restrict what we

produce — for example, by setting a minimum number of drawings for any competition. This strict regulation stems from recognising the paradox of communicating a proposal and its vision lucidly while reserving aspects for development over time. In practice, this means identifying the key ideas and determining twenty to thirty per cent of the project, with clarity on what that proportion must comprise. We have to be extremely prudent in identifying where to invest our time: certain things are absolutely fundamental, while some systems of proportion, for example, are more open-ended than they first appear. It is about appreciating the difference — about radically simplifying and focusing in a manner that facilitates resolution. Ultimately, this also makes the most economic sense when working with limited resources.

Continuity and collaboration are the cornerstones of our practice. We have worked with essentially the same set of collaborators over the last decade, which has given us the opportunity to get to know one another and develop the work together. This has had unforeseen advantages: it has allowed us to develop a consistent approach to the formulation and representation of our work. We have learnt never to underestimate the efficacy of teamwork. To be completely honest, none of us would be able to work alone — ever doubtful and uncertain, never quite knowing what to do. There would be ideas, but are they good? Do they make sense? Are they beautiful? Alone, one might never truly discern. Working as a team is an entirely different story; it circumvents these doubts altogether. There are, of course, moments of agreement and contention — an inevitability, owing to the diverse perspectives individuals bring. There is beauty in this. Its value lies in the fluidity of our positions, never dogmatic. Each of us can easily inhabit the others' perspectives, and they ours, without ever feeling defeated. Our interests in the same project are entirely different, and it has often happened that, during a conversation, one of us says something that genuinely surprises the others — really?

This prolonged collaboration has allowed us to know one another well. We owe our accomplishments to the innate understanding and patience our members bring to the table. We have competed in many competitions, won some and lost many. Our learning is not restricted to the competitions we have won. There is much to learn from the competitions we

have lost and from those we came close to winning — we might call them unrealised projects.

The studio's approaches and working methods are contextualised by each project's conception, development and realisation. We remain loyal to certain thematic ideas that underpin their conception. These themes recur across projects, shaped by the specific situations we encounter. The emphasis on ideas such as 'building around emptiness' demonstrates continuity in our processes. This concept, which we often apply in our designs, involves creating spaces filled not with physical structure but with potential for use and interpretation — leaving room for the unexpected and the evolving. It is a principle that guides our approach to design. Other themes centre on notions such as minimal definition, impermanence and collective appropriation. Our approach is always in transition — a process, always unfinished, regardless of whether competitions are won or lost.

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