

JURY REPORT

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Chair

“Imagine a city that is not addicted to fossil fuels. How would that change the way we live, work, and move around the city?” With this question we launched the Post-Fossil City Contest in January this year. We had no idea what this would all set free, in terms of discussions, interventions and, indeed, imaginations.

The post-fossil city is an enigma. When we talk about climate change everyone seems to agree quite quickly that a two degree, or even 1.5 degree target should be our common goal. We also accept that this requires swift action, and we scorn those that seem to be unwilling to go all the way. Yet, when it comes to thinking about the consequences of this quest, when we have to think what sort of future we are heading for, we nearly all fall silent. We are, in that sense, literally moving towards a post-era: post-fossil. We still have no idea what this new era will look like, what it will give us, what new opportunities, but also what new threats it may hold.

The Post-Fossil City Contest was launched to address this void. Our ‘call to arts’ was meant to generate new imaginaries of our urban futures, be it in a world without coal, oil and gas. Imaginaries able to unlock new energy, to help the transition, make it something that we want to achieve quickly, not need to realize quickly.

The initial call resulted in 250 proposals, from all over the world. On March 14th we selected ten finalists. Each of the finalists got €1,000 to develop their concepts. On June 14th, the final entries were revealed, here in the atrium of the Stadskantoor, the hall of the citizens of the city of Utrecht.

The last week the jury had the difficult task of having to judge the quality of the nine remaining entries.¹ This was by no means an easy task. The entries were very diverse, the entries were multi-layered (on site, in presentation on the web, with primary and sometimes secondary material), and, last but not least, the overall quality of the entries was very high across the board. Indeed, the jury was generally very impressed by the quality of the works and would like to salute you all for that.

To come to a decision in a fair and orderly way, the jury used the following criteria:

1. *Power of Imagination*: what is the potential of the idea as game changer for urban life in a post-fossil city? Does it open a new domain of possibility?
2. *Appeal*: does the proposal have the potential to strike a cord of key audiences like policy makers or citizens?
3. *Future Value*: does the entry have the potential to act as a catalyst if developed after the exhibition?

It was obvious from the outset that we could not confine our judgement to the actual objects in the exhibit. We purposefully left the form of the entry free, with as crucial restriction the design of the exhibition itself. That design, in which we could easily recognize the shapes of the fossil world we are trying to escape from, was made by Studio KNOL who should be praised for the fantastic design. While the individual exhibits show possible futures, the whole entourage shows the world from which this new world, a world beyond oil, has to emerge. In light of our criteria we decided to judge the entries as 'interventions in space', both physically and mentally.

The jury is of the opinion that the ten entries present an important tableau of artistic and creative approximations of the post-fossil city. As such we think it constitutes a valuable exhibition that deserves to be seen and studied by many audiences, policy makers and ordinary citizens alike. We express the hope that we can indeed make this exhibition travel in order to allow many people to be inspired by the thoughts and creations of the ten contestants.

¹ Exhibit number 09, *Sensorial Time Travel*, by Jamillah Sungkar, was handed in too late to be considered for the competition. However, it comprises a full tenth part of the final exhibition.

The jury, however, had the primary assignment of choosing a winner. It first discussed all individual entries one by one and then compared the ten entries. Based on this discussion we drew up a shortlist of three. To do justice to the efforts and quality of the seven others, I will first say a few words about the seven contestants that did not make the top three.

- First of all, Jamillah Sungkar's *Sensorial Time Travel*. She pointed us at a perceptual system that is often overlooked: smell. Walk through her installation and realize that we are not necessarily bound to inhale fossil exhaust.
- The teams of *People of Petrotopia* challenged our initial idea that we should have positive imaginations and developed a very powerful dystopic image of the city of the future. Their idea really speaks to a wider audience than the self-selected group that usually talks about climate change.
- Michel Erler's *Platform Cities* made an aesthetically beautiful and subtle movie about the role of platforms in the city of the future, a very actual and important topic.
- *Het Devies 2039*, made by a team of architects, designers and urbanists, really showed the power of a collective effort. A true achievement employing the technique of 'looking back' at the absurdity of our current system through a museum of the fossil era and a newspaper from 2039.
- *African Alternatives* by Blake Robinson and Karl Schulschenk defined the African city at the crossroads. They urged us all to look at the African city, and particularly its 'evolutionary potential of the present'. In two complex images they sketched two widely different futures for the African city.
- The team of *Photovoltaic Pergolas* showed that the functional need for renewable energy is not necessarily in contradiction with visual appeal and a liveable city. Why not take a pergola to a BBQ to keep your beer cold and your BBQ hot?

- Finally, the team of Cow & Co probably got the most attention in the early phases of the contest. People were puzzled, should we take this seriously? Our perspective: yes we should, because the current way in which food production and urban life is organized is not sustainable in the long run.

All three remaining entries the jury regarded as potential winners.

- *The Ark of the Newest Covenant — Ten Sustainable Commandments* by BreukersGodrie.

“The upcoming forty years, *The Ark* will travel from city to city. In each city, inhabitants will interpret the *Ten Sustainable Commandments*. By doing so, they will add their local knowledge and wisdom to the *Commandments* and conceive new sustainable concepts. In this way, the *Ten Sustainable Commandments* will cause a chain reaction of cities, together in the same Journey, creating a web of locally founded, sustainable cultures.”

The Ark is a combination of an object, a philosophy, and a performance. Presented in the performance is the idea that the ark should work as a ‘boundary object’ travelling from city to city, thus allowing those cities to learn from each other and, over time, to constitute themselves as a network of sustainable cities.

Philosophically profound in message, and poetic in its visualisation, the Ark intrigues and helps us reflect what a post-fossil city should be about and on how to get there.

- *Letters from 2050* by Onur Can Tepe and Esther Estévez.

“*Letters from 2050* is a collection of narratives that aims to imagine post-fossil futures around the globe, seen as the result from current and future developments. The stories discuss topics such as water scarcity, immigration, poverty and automation in relation to climate change, as seen through the eyes of the future inhabitants of our globe. By reading the letters and hearing about life in 2050, the reader will be better able to imagine the post-fossil city, in its social, economic and political context.”

Letters from 2050 is beautifully crafted, with much attention to typographical quality and lay out. It revitalizes the cultural form of the 'letter' to unlock reflection on a new era, that of the post-fossil city. At the same time the project contains deeply profound possible futures, as expressed in the biographical accounts of a very varied group of people, in many different geographical contexts.

- *City of Sounds and Silence (C.O.S.A.S.)* by Sun City (Jeek ten Velden, Frank van Kasteren & Ivo Schot).

"City of Sounds and Silence (C.O.S.A.S.) is an interactive Dolby Surround radio play with the length of a pop song. C.O.S.A.S. takes you on a walk through the city. You will not hear anything about flying cars or office buildings made entirely out of glass. Instead, the installation leaves the details to the imagination of the visitor. C.O.S.A.S. strives towards an emotional experience of the post-fossil city, where sound plays an important role in really involving the visitor in the post-fossil city. Through stimulation of other senses, different parts of the city are highlighted and the installation can be 're-lived' time and time again."

City of Sounds and Silence is technically sophisticated and makes a very consequent choice to approach the future by singling out one sense: that of hearing. Yet at the same time the staging of the City of Sounds adds a powerful theatrical element to it, as the person immersed in listening, becomes herself an object showing the immersion and conveying a deep wish to undergo this experience yourself. The world of the post-fossil city is portrayed as one of technological advance, good life but in combination with harsh social inequalities at the same time.

There are many ways in which to value and weigh the relative contribution of the three final contestants. We herald the incredible care for detail, whether it was in the soundscape, the beauty of the letter writing or the care for the ark in its intriguing form.

We noted that all top three submissions actually used historical forms to help us regain a handle on the future, the letter writing, the radio play and the biblical reference to ark and commandments. We noted that the makers all showed a deep interdisciplinary capability in their final entries, extending well beyond the domain of the arts proper. Understandings of political economy, ethics, learning and geography gave the entries the power of imagination and allowed them to keep intriguing, over days on end.

Whether it is best to take in the future in a solitary confinement as in *City of Sounds and Silence*, in the form of an exchange as in the *Letters from 2050*, or in the form of a journey as in *The Ark*, remains an open question. The solitary confinement allowed for the true approximation of a different world, but perhaps sometimes the question was how the post-fossil aspects were taken up in *City of Sounds and Silence*. The *Letters from 2050* were very direct and well thought out in their explicit expression of scenes from our future worlds. And *The Ark* perhaps did not actually spell out the future but was very profound in thinking about the theory of change towards the post-fossil city.

In the end the jury had no difficulty in reaching its decision.

We chose for the entry that had most power of imagination, that we thought had the potential to even become a ‘multiplier’ if applied in a public process. We chose the entry that we in the end thought most aesthetically fascinating, intriguing and repellent at the same time. The entry that was presented in a way that suggested full potential for development after the exhibition here in the Utrecht Stads Kantoor is complete.

You will have understood that the winner of the Post-Fossil City Contest of the Urban Futures Studio is... *The Ark of the Newest Covenant — Ten Sustainable Commandments* by Walter Breukers en Jaap Godrie.

Jury Members

- Jurgen Bey (Sandberg Institute)
- Anita van den Ende & Sander Oosterloo (Dutch Ministry for Environment & Infrastructure)
- Maarten Hajer (Urban Futures Studio, *Chair*)
- Lot van Hooijdonk & Peter Steijn (City of Utrecht)
- Winy Maas (MVRDV)
- Willem Schinkel (Erasmus University)