

Staging Singapore

OSAKA EXPO 2025



Osaka Expo site: Yume-shima or the Island of dreams. Image source: Kyodo

Synopsis

Expos are mega-events that capture global interest. They provide a stage for participating states to promote carefully constructed national identities through purpose-built pavilions. Designed to draw attention and showcase curated contents, these pavilions come to embody stories which nations wish to tell the world about themselves.

Beyond serving as instruments for national branding, expo pavilions have played an important historical role in advancing architectural design. A pavilion is expected to be extraordinary—able to distinguish itself from a crowded field through its quality. Compared to a conventional building, there are fewer design constraints to resolve. It is usually built on a tabula rasa site, has a singular program and is temporary in nature. These conditions are ideal for experimentation. Consequently, the history of expos is replete with exceptional pavilions that anticipated future buildings and processes by pushing the envelope in terms of avant-garde ideas.

Pavilions are not empty shells, but house exhibits within. The nature of the exhibit has changed significantly since the first World Expo. Initially, there was an emphasis on displaying material goods signifying a nation's technological achievement or staging performances with historical or cultural dimensions. Eventually, film became the dominant medium for transmitting ideas about a nation, with the portrayal of narratives about everyday life becoming more commonplace in recent times. The visitor was no longer viewed as a passive spectator to be informed or entertained, but an agent who can interact with the exhibited contents and be affected emotionally. Design expertise lying outside the traditional domain of architecture was needed to realise exhibits with such an expanded scope.

Staging Singapore addresses the national pavilion in the context of the upcoming 2025 World Expo in Osaka. The studio looks to develop proposals for a Singapore pavilion, which is to be designed from the inside out. Students will tackle the exhibit first and begin by crafting a narrative from a Singapore perspective in response to the expo's main theme—Design of Future Society. Different media and techniques will be experimented with to convey these stories in the most evocative manner. Shortly thereafter, students will shift their attention to the design of a pavilion architecture that organises the spatial relations between visitors and exhibition content and structures their interaction.

The studio will rely heavily on iterative prototyping as a working approach, where students are expected to build physical models and proof-of-concept demos to test and directly experience proposed designs. Workshops will be organised to equip students with requisite knowledge in areas such as fabrication and programming interactive media environments. The studio will also organise exhibition visits and talks with curators/designers, culminating in a study trip to Japan during the recess week. Students are also encouraged to enrol in the 20.301 Material Computation elective course, which will complement the studio in its emphasis on material and tectonic experimentation.

References

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3. Puente, Moises. *100 Exhibition Pavilions*. Barcelona: Editorial Gustavo Gili, 2000.