A telescoping outer shell, capable of covering a public square and multiplying the flexibility degrees of a center for artistic invention, transforms this project into one of the most striking of recent years. What is less noticeable, however, is the residential tower on which The Shed is backed and which, in the end, produces and transfers the necessary economic value for this architectural innovation to exist.
The Shed, New York’s new center for artistic invention is an 18,500 m² building designed by Diller Scofidio + Renfro in collaboration with Rockwell Group. The building’s flexible design will accommodate the broadest range of performance, visual art, and multi-disciplinary work.

Two principal components comprise The Shed: an eight-level ‘fixed’ base building for cultural programming and support spaces, and a telescoping outer shell that deploys over an adjoining plaza to double the building’s footprint on demand. The base building includes two levels of gallery space, a versatile theater, a rehearsal space, a creative lab for artists, and a sky-lit event space. The shell forms a vast hall that accommodates large-scale performances, installations, and events. When deployed, it creates a 1,600 m², light-, sound- and temperature-controlled space that can serve an infinite variety of uses. When the hall is combined with the adjacent gallery, it creates a nearly 2,715 m² contiguous space that can accommodate an audience of 1,250 seated or 2,700 standing. When the shell is nested over the base building, the 1,860 m² plaza will be open public space that also can be used for outdoor programming; the eastern façade can serve as a backdrop for projection with lighting and sound support.
Planta de techo
Roof plan
S. E. / N. S.
Courtesy of Diller Scofidio + Renfro in collaboration with Rockwell Group

Sección transversal - lobby
Cross section - lobby
S. E. / N. S.
Courtesy of Diller Scofidio + Renfro in collaboration with Rockwell Group

Planta emplazamiento / Site plan
S. E. / N. S.
Courtesy of Diller Scofidio + Renfro in collaboration with Rockwell Group
The Shed’s back-of-house spaces, which include offices, mechanical spaces, dressing rooms, and storage, are located on the lower levels of the residential tower to the west. This allows the bulk of The Shed’s base building to be devoted to programmable space for art.

The Shed takes inspiration, architecturally, from the Fun Palace. Like its precursor, The Shed is conceived as open infrastructure that can be permanently flexible for an unknowable future.

**THE SHED**

Arquitectos / Architects: Diller Scofidio + Renfro, Rockwell Group
Ubicación / Location: 545 West 30th Street, New York
Cliente / Client: The Shed
Construcción / Construction: Levien & Company
Ingeniería y diseño estructural / Engineering and structural design: Thornton Tomasetti
Asesoría en prevención de incendios / Fire protection consultant: Jaros, Baum & Bolles

**Materiales / Materials:** Acero estructural, polímero ETFE, vidrio doble, hormigón armado / Structural steel, ETFE polymer, insulated glass, reinforced concrete.

Presupuesto / Budget: US$ 23,500 / m²
Superficie proyectada / Designed surface: 18,500 m²
Año de proyecto / Project year: 2008-2015
Año de construcción / Construction year: 2015-2019
Sección tipo – apertura de plaza pública / Type section – open plaza
S. E. / N. S.
Courtesy of Diller Scofidio + Renfro in collaboration with Rockwell Group

Sección tipo – simultaneidad de espectáculos / Type section – simultaneous events
S. E. / N. S.
Courtesy of Diller Scofidio + Renfro in collaboration with Rockwell Group

Sección tipo – carga y descarga / Type section – loading and unloading
S. E. / N. S.
Courtesy of Diller Scofidio + Renfro in collaboration with Rockwell Group

Sección tipo – espectáculo en plaza cerrada / Type section – event at covered plaza
S. E. / N. S.
Courtesy of Diller Scofidio + Renfro in collaboration with Rockwell Group
Diller Scofidio + Renfro


Rockwell Group

Cross-disciplinary architecture and design firm founded in 1984, that emphasizes invention and thought leadership merging architecture, theater, craftsmanship, and technology. Current projects include the renovation of the Helen Hayes Theater (New York); Nobu Hotel Barcelona and the new headquarters for Warner Music Group (Los Angeles). Has published three books: What If…? The Architecture and Design of David Rockwell, Spectacle by David Rockwell with Bruce Mau, and Pleasure: The Architecture and Design of Rockwell Group. David Rockwell serves as the Chair Emeritus of the Design Industries Foundation Fighting AIDS (DIFFA) and as a board member of the Cooper Hewitt, Smithsonian Design Museum, Citymeals-on-Wheels, and New York Restoration Project.
Exquisite Corpse

Recently, the Arts section of *The New York Times* published “Have You Seen This?,” a series of eight brief articles on “eight little things – a scene, a joke, a building, a pizza, a dance, a painting, a lyric, a sound – worth your time.” The showcased building-thing was in fact not yet a building per se, but “a feat of architectural engineering” on its way to become the newest addition to the series of developments that have sprung following the miraculous green path of the High Line. Michael Kimmelman – the newspaper’s architecture critic – delivers an entertaining snippet of what has come to be known as “The Shed,” Diller Scofidio + Renfro’s (ds+r, in collaboration with Rockwell Group) cultural centerpiece proposal for the massive real-estate development that is Hudson Yards; scheduled to open in 2019. More image than text, Kimmelman’s narrative – systematically peppered with numerous gifs and a couple of photos – explains the architectural features of this “faintly quaint, eloquently designed contraption” located at the west-bound turn of the High Line onto West 30th Street, between 10th and 11th avenues. As it stands today, an “enormous steel exoskeleton” weighing 8 million pounds, the Shed’s most outstanding feature – and the only one so far – is, as Kimmelman writes: a “five-minute ballet on six-foot wheels” powered by six 15-horsepower motors, “in effect, a Toyota Prius engine moving a behemoth as finely-tuned as a Formula One car.”

Far from finished, this “feat of architectural engineering” has captivated media attention since before its construction phase began in 2015. The Shed – previously called “The Culture Shed” – began to be outlined in 2008 as an essential component to the Hudson Yards development plan, and by 2014, had already been transformed into a non-profit organization, complete with Board of Directors and Artistic Director/ceo, recently announcing its first visual arts commission by conceptual artist Lawrence Weiner. While media has indeed focused on the ultimate magic trick that is the gliding steel frame, this element proves only a partial component to the design. The Shed’s “telescoping outer shell” performs the now-famous back and forth movement, only to continuously cover and uncover an “eight-level fixed base building for cultural programming and support spaces,” thus extending onto an adjoining plaza and “doubling the building’s footprint on demand.” In turn, part of this nondescript fixed building is appended or ingrained into 15 Hudson Yards, a 70-story skyscraper also designed by ds+r and Rockwell, and one of many that comprise Hudson Yard’s main development area, currently under construction. The tower’s first floors “contains the building’s [the eight-level fixed building] back-of-house needs,
enabling the entirety of The Shed to be devoted to programming.²⁰ Openly referencing Cedric Price’s Fun Palace, ds+r has achieved a new desirable trait for cultural venues worldwide: the ability to move.

An outer “shell” that nests, two buildings that spoon, an appendix to a 1.5-mile long elevated park. Strangely evocative of the possible hangars or freight-train depot structures that might have once populated the area in the early 1930s when the High Line started functioning, the Shed is not the only architectural curiosity of Hudson Yards. The polemic real estate development, the largest private development in Manhattan since the construction of Rockefeller Center – as advertised¹³ – is currently on the process of adding millions of square feet of novel retail, commercial, residential and mixed used space to the city of New York.¹⁴ The colloquial separation of the Shed from its significant high-rise half, and by extension, from the entirety of the complex constellation that is Hudson Yards, has been markedly pointed out by the ecstatic reverberation of video loops, animated 3D renders and gifs of a building-on-wheels, in the noticeable scarcity of published architectural drawings.¹⁵ This distance, perhaps inadvertently emphasized by anticipated media coverage, does however find some traction within ds+r’s discourse. Dismembered from 15 Hudson Yards, the Shed is presented by ds+r – on their website, in multiple media outlets – as a project in itself, independent from the tower and vice versa. The images that accompany both are mutually excluding: the tower is commonly portrayed from a standpoint where you can’t really see the Shed in full, because it hides in the back; the Shed’s videos and animations avoid a complete view of the tower, always fragmented and partial. Digital renderings portray the ghost-like tower as any other of the other towers in the complex, as if attempting to disappear, while focusing on the Shed. The residential tower has been evidently less advertised and discussed than the Shed, however, they’re inherently dependent: they are, in fact, a single architectural project. Thus, the discursive dissection of both proves interesting: if the architectural operation that enables – financially, physically – the Shed is the 70-story residential tower, why then portray them as two distinct bodies? In other words, if the real estate value of a cutting-edge cultural center designed by world-famous architects at the core of a development like Hudson Yards is self-evident, how then do we value the Shed as a contemporary piece of architecture?

In the introduction to Flesh: architectural probes (1994), Georges Teyssot reconstructs the broader cultural apparatus – from art to fashion, from literature to medical devices – that enabled the early trajectory
of Diller+Scofidio's work (D+S, Renfro became partner in 2004). Crossing the threshold of well-established recognition after fifteen years of practice, Teyssot’s text returns to the common-place criticism placed on the partnership of a less-than-architectural practice (in the sense of building) by affirming that what can be found at the core of D+S’s architectural projects – and that they were to be understood as architectural projects in all respects – is the aim “to examine current architectural practice in order to question accepted values.” (Teyssot, 1994:8). From Rotary Notary and His Hot Plate (1987), to Para-site (1989), Tourisms (1991), and Soft Sell (1993), Teyssot’s argument finds traction in the particular aesthetics, professional behavior, and discursive incursions of D+S, in which the architects affirm that their multiple architectures are meant to interrogate cultural conventions, rather than enter into a complicitous role by sustaining them: “Given the technological and political re-configurations of the contemporary body, spatial conventions may be called into questions by architecture. Architecture can be used as a kind of surgical instrument to operate on itself (in small increments).” (Teyssot, 1994:9). From architecture as an apparatus that deploys and affects a response in the human body, to shifting, interchangeable parts and pieces in architectural bodies, and the obsession with the movement of the body in space, D+S’s historical record might prove an interesting site from where to test the Shed. If architecture can indeed be used to operate on itself, what does the operation performed by the Shed entail? Following this line of thought, Teyssot argued:

The first task architecture ought to assume, therefore, is that of defining and imagining an environment not just for “natural” bodies but for bodies projected outside themselves, absent and ecstatic, by means of their technologically extended senses. (...) The incorporation of technology is not effected by “imagining” a new environment, but by reconfiguring the body itself, pushing outward to where its artificial extremities encounter “the world.” (Teyssot, 1994:16)

If the impossibility of knowing what a cultural center would require from space in 20, 30, or 100 years time rendered the sliding movement its architecture’s main goal, how would we describe the potential bodies that will inhabit it? I would say, rather static and holding smart phones in their hands, capturing the finely tuned ballet from a safe distance. This “architecture of infrastructure” – as if infrastructure could be void of agency, interests and value – becomes the mechanism through which conventional values are not only embodied but accepted, and once again delivered to the public, through an attractive GIF. Movement here is nothing but instrumental. Unlike its imagined idol, the Fun Palace, the Shed will be controlled only by top-down programmatic decisions and have no expiration date (except for the end of the renewable 99-year lease on the air rights upon which the development is built;
but that's science fiction). By interrogating the spatial needs of culture in the near-and-far future – assuming that 'culture,' 'needs,' and ‘space' remain conceptually unaltered – ds+r's architecture fixates on the value of a technologically sophisticated, yet architecturally ambiguous, surgical probe that will surely allow ample cultural running-room for the city of New York over the next decades, lending itself to the production of exquisite images, as motionless as the discipline itself. ARQ

Bibliografía / Bibliography


Notas / Notes

2 Ibid.
3 Ibid.
4 Ibid.
5 Ibid.
6 Ibid.
10 Ibid.
11 Ibid.
12 Ibid.
14 Ibid.
15 Neither Diller Scofidio + Renfro’s or Rockwell Group’s webpages have published architectural drawings, and the great majority of media outlets that have reported on the project have only used photographs, renders and 3d animated videos. Only some general sections (only of the Shed, not of the complete 15 Hudson Yards tower) and drawings of the 6-foot wheels have been found online to this date.
16 "The opportunity to design a ground-up building for the arts forced the question, ‘what will art look like in the next 10 years? 20 years, and beyond?’, said Liz Diller at the press briefing in New York. 'The answer was that we simply could not know. All that we could be certain of was that there would always be a need for conditioned space of different heights and sizes, a need for structural loading capacity, and a need for electrical power. The solution was, an architecture of infrastructure." Stevens, Philip, "The Shed" cultural venue by ds+r and Rockwell Group moves towards completion in New York," designboom.com, May 25, 2017, https://www.designboom.com/architecture/diller-scofidio-renfro-the-shed-new-york-arts-center-construction-rockwell-group-05-25-2017/
17 Ibid.
The Shed en construcción / under construction
© Iwan Baan
Courtesy of Diller Scofidio + Renfro in collaboration with Rockwell Group
Axonometría detalle de rueda
Wheel detail axonometric
Courtesy of Diller Scofidio + Renfro in collaboration with Rockwell Group

Detalle de rueda en posición
Detail wheel in place
© Timothy Schenck
Courtesy of Diller Scofidio + Renfro in collaboration with Rockwell Group

The Shed en construcción visto desde la nueva extensión del Highline. Detrás se ve la torre residencial, también parte del proyecto. © Timothy Schenck
Courtesy of Diller Scofidio + Renfro in collaboration with Rockwell Group
The Shed under construction. View from the south, showing the fit between the center for artistic innovation (with its telescoping outer shell) and the residential tower. © Timothy Schenck. Courtesy of Diller Scofidio + Renfro in collaboration with Rockwell Group

The Shed under construction. View from north. This is one of the few images in which the fact that The Shed and the residential tower are actually the same building can be appreciated. © Timothy Schenck. Courtesy of Diller Scofidio + Renfro in collaboration with Rockwell Group