

## Symbolic Power, History and Humanitarian Crisis: Re-Imagining Haiti's National Palace Site:

Palais National (National Palace), Port-au-Prince, Haiti

### Introduction:

The National Palace in Haiti has shaped and been shaped by the course of the geopolitical history of the modern world. After suffering major damage in the 2010 earthquake, the building has lain in ruins in Port-au-Prince. As a poignant reminder of the neo-colonial impact on the Caribbean before the disaster, the building's current state stands as a metaphor for the country's crippled political system and tumultuous history. However, it remains unclear whether the presidential palace will be reconstructed, demolished, or replaced. The complex relationship between its historical influences, the current political climate and presence of international actors will be explored in this research design competition.

### History:

The site has a tumultuous and violent history that begins long before the 2010 disaster. Serving as the Haitian rulers' residence since the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the site has seen several forms of rule, from colonial to imperial, dictatorship, and finally democracy.

Initially the Government Palace, it was visited by Simon Bolivar seeking troops for his South American campaign. In 1850, renamed the Imperial Palace it was destroyed in 1869 by a rebel army bombardment which ignited a store of munitions and gunpowder held by the president. A replacement was built in 1881, which was then destroyed by a bomb blast in 1912, ending the rule of President Cincinnatus Leconte.

The current Beaux-Arts structure was built in 1918 by French-Haitian architect Georges Baussan. The damage it suffered in the 2010 earthquake caused the central dome and portico to collapse, with significant structural damage to the roof structure throughout the building. Demolition of the most hazardous areas of the structure was carried out in mid-2010, but with no available funds the fate of the building still remains unknown.

After the earthquake, a large camp grew in the Place du Champ de Mars directly adjacent to the palace. Over 20,000 displaced and homeless people settled in the ad hoc camp. But by early



2012, the camp had begun to be resettled with 19.9 million US dollars in funding from the government of Canada. It remains unclear, however, what the fate of these people is, and where they are to resettle.

## Design Research Brief:

Provide a conceptual proposal for the National Palace site that serves as the office and residence of the President while also demonstrating a relationship between the site's official functions and the informal settlements in the Place du Champ de Mars. The aim of this competition is to explore how a designer can respond to the cultural, environmental, and political conditions at the centre of the world's biggest disasters so far this millennium. It is unlikely to be built, but it could break creative boundaries critiquing the situation or provide solutions to some of the identified problems on the site, forging a platform for leadership in socially engaged architecture.

Take into account the space as a symbol of the crisis, democracy, and power as well as the necessities for security. Bearing in mind the historic and symbolic nature of the site, take into account the political nature of the various organizations and the external agendas at work in Haiti. Considerations should also be taken for sanitation and health (cf. 2010-2011 Cholera outbreak), distribution of amenities, the tropical climate and susceptibility to hurricanes and earthquakes, as well as the scarcity of resources.

## Deadlines and Requirements:

Requirements: Design proposal with drawings and presentation image(s). A written proposal of around 400 words explaining the relevance and reasoning of the design proposal will also be required. The complete submission should fit on two No. A2 panels submitted in digital format to: [competition@article-25.org](mailto:competition@article-25.org). A shortlist of submissions will be announced shortly after the submission deadline and designers will be invited to present their work to a panel of experts at Article 25's head office in London.

Launch date: Thursday 26<sup>th</sup> January, 2012

Expression of interest due: Friday 10<sup>th</sup> February, 2012

Submission deadline: Monday 19<sup>th</sup> March, 2012

Competition presentation: Thursday 29<sup>th</sup> March, 2012

Submissions will be judged on research potential, innovation, creativity and evidence of understanding of the situation in the design response. Winners will be awarded our selection of the most influential humanitarian architecture books, and have their work featured on the Article 25 website, blog and knowledge community board.

## Information Sources:

Storm map of Haiti, The Weather Channel

[http://www.weather.com/maps/maptype/satelliteworld/caribbeansatellite\\_large.html](http://www.weather.com/maps/maptype/satelliteworld/caribbeansatellite_large.html)

Gordon, Leah. *Kanaval: Vodou, Politics and Revolution on the Streets of Haiti* (2003)

Haiti Libre, Haiti News <http://www.haitilibre.com/en/>

Haiti Reconstruction Fund <http://www.haitireconstructionfund.org/hrf/> National Earthquake Hazard Reconstruction

Program Haitian-Truth.org <http://www.haitian-truth.org/category/earthquake-hits-haiti/> Images and news stories

Interim Commission for the Reconstruction of Haiti (IHRC) <http://en.cirh.ht/>

NEHRP *Recommended Provisions for Seismic Regulations* (2003) [www.nehrp.gov/pdf/fema450provisions.pdf](http://www.nehrp.gov/pdf/fema450provisions.pdf)

Two Years of Haiti News <http://www.article-25.org/news-blogs/this-weeks-news/two-years-of-haiti-news>

Two Years on: Entrenched Dependence? RIBA Knowledge Community Discussion (login required) <http://www.riba-knowledgecommunities.com/node/9021>