

# Instituting Worlds Roundtable

## Architecture and Islands

**Catharina Gabrielsonn**

**Campbell Drake**

**Jennifer Ferng**

**Adam Grydehøj**

**Marko Jobst**

Proceedings of the Society of Architectural  
Historians, Australia and New Zealand (SAHANZ)  
Volume 40

Confence hosted by the University of Queensland  
and the Queensland University of Technology,  
Brisbane 2-4 December 2024

Edited by Ashley Paine and Kirsty Volz

Published in Brisbane by SAHANZ, 2025

ISBN: 978-1-7638772-0-7

Copyright of this volume belongs to SAHANZ;  
authors retain the copyright of the content of their  
individual papers. All efforts have been undertaken  
to ensure authors have secured appropriate  
permissions to reproduce the images illustrating  
individual contributions. Interested parties may  
contact the editors.

DOI: 10.55939/a5443pw90d

Citation:

Gabrielsonn, Catharina, Campbell Drake, Jennifer Ferng,  
Adam Grydehøj, and Marko Jobst. "Instituting Worlds  
Roundtable: Architecture and Islands." In *Proceedings of the  
Society of Architectural Historians, Australia and New Zealand:  
40, Islands*, edited by Ashley Paine and Kirsty Volz, 109-10.  
Brisbane, Australia: SAHANZ, 2025.

Accepted for publication on 9<sup>th</sup> June, 2024



**SAHANZ** Society of Architectural  
Historians Australia  
& New Zealand



December 2-4 2024

Brisbane, Australia

# Instituting Worlds Roundtable

Architecture and Islands

DOI: 10.55939/a5443pw90d

**Catharina Gabrielsson.** KTH Royal Institute of Technology, Stockholm, Sweden

**Campbell Drake.** University of Technology Sydney, Sydney, Australia

**Jennifer Ferng.** University of Sydney, Sydney, Australia

**Adam Grydehøj.** South China University of Technology, Guangzhou, China

**Marko Jobst.** Leeds Beckett University, Leeds, England

Islands are commonly assessed based on their natural spatial characteristics – that is, as framed by geography. The specificity of islands in terms of constructed space, however, comes across as relatively unexamined. Gathering around a forthcoming book, *Instituting Worlds: Architecture and Islands*, this roundtable session will reflect on the contributions that architecture may make to the interdisciplinary field of island studies, and, conversely, what architecture may learn from a field that arguably sits at the frontline of the humanities and social sciences. Indeed, with its sustained discourses on decolonialisation, the rights of Indigenous populations, and the catastrophic impact of climate change, island studies would seem to pose a challenge to the legitimacy of a discipline forged through its alignment with modernity and capitalism.

Jamaica Kincaid's essay *A Small Place*, published in 1988, is a vivid example of this sore relationship. Raging over the exploitation and degradation of Antigua, the island where she was born, she employs architecture as a figure for the island's oppression. Airports, luxury hotels, manor estates, and banks – as well as dilapidated schools, closed-down libraries and hospitals – give evidence for the island's state of exploitation, corruption and deprivation. Literature is a rich source for understanding how islands, as defined by physical limitation and separation, have a tendency to enhance the significance of their relations and bring about an accumulation, compression, and distillation of their elements. Oscillating between scarcity and abundance, dependence and autonomy, islands seem to crystallise the basic traits of human inhabitation, and thereby forward the significance of their architectural manifestations.

In the first instance, architecture therefore comes forth as a measure of island specificity, its degree of autonomy, or the extent of its domination, simply as based on the abundance or absence of buildings, their uses and materials. Understood as spaces defined by physical limitation and separation, islands moreover carry a conceptual resemblance to

architecture that, as a discipline, is set on building distinctions, defining spatial limits, and creating material enclosures. What can we make of this conceptual affiliation? Does an engagement with such spaces merely confirm conventional truths regarding what architecture is and does – or, conversely, does it carry the potential for activating, mobilising and challenging the architectural discipline?

One of the editorial premises for *Instituting Worlds* is that, in providing a delimited field for the measuring of phenomena and their intensity, islands confront us with the identity and legitimacy of architecture – but also allow us to consider the potentiality of the discipline. Placing the emphasis on the conjuncture of building and islands, we have adopted the notion of “instituting worlds” as the title for our book, signalling the tensions intrinsic to this theme. Central to the approach taken by the authors of this book is to address architecture in a widened sense; to use it as a conceptual lens in analysing the makings of material space and unfolding its complex consequences. We know (with Gilles Deleuze) that even desert islands are a product of the imagination and that they, as such, are replete with potential for both critical and clinical ruminations. Drawing on insights from individual chapters, the panel will discuss how the engagement with islands has generated a diversity of methods, employed a broad scope of sources, and multiplied the agency of architecture, far beyond the boundaries of the physical building.