The bus stop remembers: from 1919–2010, the only public university providing higher education in arts in Estonia stood here. Photo: Andra Aaloe.

Winning entry for EKA’s new building on Tartu road: Art Plaza by SEA+EFEKT (2008). Image: SEA+EFEKT.

Former building of Estonian Academy of Arts on Tartu road 1 (2009). Photo: Jarmo Kauge.


Winning entry for EKA’s new new building on Kotzebue Street 1/Põhja Boulevard 7: Linea by KUU Architects (2014). Image: KUU.
WHERE IS THE ESTONIAN ACADEMY OF ARTS?

ANDRA AALOE, KEITI KLJAVIN, editors of U

A decade of real estate deals by the Estonian Academy of Arts have led the school to a situation where its departments are scattered across the city, the historical plot where the academy was situated from 1917 to 2010 has been sold, and the state has yet to decide definitively whether it will support the construction of a new building.

For about ten years now, the Estonian Academy of Arts (EKA) – the only public university offering higher education in architecture, design, art and art culture – has been searching for an answer to their perpetual problem – a lack of space. In 2006, the suggested potential locations (including the Patarsaare sea fortress and the Suva hosiery factory) were discarded and a decision was made to build a completely new building on the academy’s historic plot at Tartu Road 1. An international architecture competition was announced and the winning entry, Art Plaza, with its open plan and spiral atrium, was supposed to provide the school with the latest designs in learning environments and to ‘ethereally tower above the old building’.

EKA was so ready for its new future that it moved its departments out of the building in 2010 and dispersed them across the city, demolishing the old building. However, construction on the new building did not begin; obstacles that at first seemed small led to a situation where brakes were being put on the process on a state – and political – level, which, in turn, led to a loss of major funding schemes. In 2012, the new ‘plaza’ in the city centre was covered with gravel and the Europark banners were erected. Another parking lot in the middle of the city had been born.

In terms of space, everything is the same today – the departments of the academy are located at six different addresses across the city and the plot at Tartu Road 1 is full of parked cars. However, the legal processes are actually underway: in the autumn of 2015, the Estonian Academy of Arts sold its historical plot in the city centre and the buildings at Nunne Street, and bought the premises of the Suva hosiery factory in Kalamaja, at Kotzebue Street 1/ Põhja Boulevard 7. An architectural design for the former industrial building has been found via a competition and the decision was made to build a completely new building on the academy’s historic plot at Tartu Road 1. An international architecture competition was announced and the winning entry, Art Plaza, with its open plan and spiral atrium, was supposed to provide the school with the latest designs in learning environments and to ‘ethereally tower above the old building’.

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Great! But. Actually, we are again brandishing, and hopefully for the last time, our EKA-O ‘newspaper’, which marks the beginning of the transitional period of the school that is still underway and reminds us of the circumstances that were strange, yet utterly characteristic of our (still) transitional society, which led to the disappearance of the historical EKA building and why no imposing art plaza was erected in the city centre. (For instance, one can also recall in the paper how former Prime Minister Ansip wholeheartedly supported the completion of Art Plaza, but eventually it was not included in the strategy of the Ministry of Education).

The Academy of Arts is in the air – towering ‘ethereally’ somewhere between the old and the new building. Having been legally unbound from the Tartu Road plot in the city centre, it is now bound to the pink hosiery factory building in Kalamaja district. In reality, the Academy of Arts is renting a building on Estonia Boulevard, and agreements allow it to stay in the buildings at Nunne Street until 2017. After 6 years the Faculty of Fine Arts was made to move from the Estonian Knighthood House in Toompea Hill for the beginning of this year and is now operating on Lembriti street in Kesklinn. Apparently, EKA finding its true place in the world again is above all up to luck. Good luck, Academy!


3. An excerpt from the Riigikogu sitting of 15 December 2015, where Prime Minister Taavi Rõivas outlined the state of research and development activities and the government’s policy in the field.
EKA-0 or EKA-Zero was a project where we outlined from the media frenzy the entire journey of EKA's new building, how it moved from a grand vision of the future to zero, an empty demolished field. The outlet of EKA-0 was a 'newspaper' that consisted of newspaper headlines and article excerpts from the press about EKA's new building in the six years before 2012. Selected from media archives and chronologically aligned, it becomes quite clear why the school went from a building of its own to an empty lot back then. At first we distributed the newspaper during the coffee break of the Tallinn conference of the international urban activists and researchers network INURA in 2012, when we hijacked the parking lot. However, it seems the issue is still relevant today, so it is time to give this curated media archive a digital dimension by posting it on the U website.