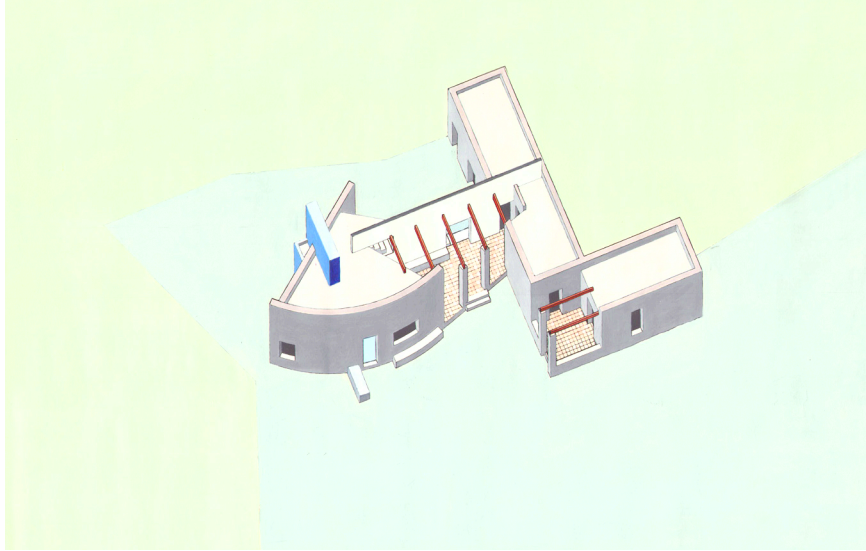


From Metropolis to Arcadia

OMA and the Idea of ‘Confetti’

Hamed Khosravi



Zoe Zenghelis, *Siotis Villa*, 1982. Acrylic on paper, 27 x 33 cm.
Courtesy Zoe Zenghelis

Having not yet built anything, we lack the experience to judge our projects. Perhaps we are optimistic, but without this optimism we couldn't do anything!⁰¹

The year 1978 marked the conclusion of the first period of work by then renowned Office for Metropolitan Architecture (OMA); a transition from a series of polemical, artistic, and critical reflections on the architecture of the city—or, more specifically, an obsession with the metropolitan condition—to developing a rather conventional architectural practice that could not only turn such ideas into ‘real’ projects,⁰² but could also sustain financially the growing families of the young couples. While, for almost a decade, OMA's activities were subsidized by Elia Zenghelis and Rem Koolhaas's teachings at different schools of architecture in London and the United States,⁰³ and by the sale of the paintings of Zoe Zenghelis and Madelon Vriesendorp, a new period had to begin. In fact, a series of carefully curated events inaugurated the end of the first phase and the start of a new beginning: Elia and Zoe Zenghelis designed their own family house in Kratigos, Lesbos; Koolhaas ran OMA's workshop and exhibition at the Städelshule, Frankfurt am Main in June that same year; *Delirious New York: A Retroactive Manifesto* was published by Oxford University Press on November 16, a day before the opening of OMA's first extensive exhibition at the Guggenheim Museum in New York, *OMA: The Sparkling Metropolis*. The opening deliberately coincided with Koolhaas's 34th birthday on November 17. The year 1978 was in fact the time when OMA had its short-lived partnership with Zaha Hadid, who joined the team af-

01 Elia Zenghelis, “Ou le début de la fin du réel,” interview by Patrice Goulet, *L'Architecture d'Aujourd'hui* 238 (April 1985): 14.

02 In an interview with Mimi Poser, the public correspondent for the Guggenheim Museum, Rem Koolhaas reflected on the perception of early OMA works as visionary or as surrealist artworks rather than architecture: “All our projects are imminently buildable...They are intensification and modification of certain trends that already exist, and they don't present a drastic break from the reality. They are all presented as projects that can be built tomorrow. The only reason that we have been called visionary is that we have presented them as paintings.” Rem Koolhaas and Madelon Vriesendorp, interview by Mimi Poser, November 1978. Audio recording, Guggenheim Museum Archive, New York, NY.

03 They taught at the Architectural Association, UCLA, Syracuse, Columbia, Cornell, Princeton, and the Institute for Architecture and Urban Studies.

ter graduating from the AA. She was among the first group of collaborators that included Ron Steiner and Elias Veneris, all of whom contributed to OMA's submission to the Dutch Parliament Extension competition in 1978 and were joined by Stefano de Martino and Alan Forster for the competition for the Irish Prime Minister's Residence in 1979.⁰⁴

Shifting the course of the office toward a reality-grounded practice meant fewer self-initiated projects and more commissions. Consequently, both Rem Koolhaas and Elia Zenghelis adopted proactive approaches in their work, reaching out to potential clients, institutions, and organizations, in particular those in the Netherlands and Greece. While Koolhaas spent more time in the Netherlands—which led to a commissioned research and design project for De Koepel⁰⁵—Zenghelis began a collaboration with one of his close friends who was interested in property development in London. With the client's investments, Zenghelis got a few conversion projects independently from OMA. Their collaboration was so successful that he soon became OMA's first client. In 1981, Elia Zenghelis reflected back on this turning point, in his written piece for the catalogue of their exhibition at the AA, *OMA: Projects 1978–1981*, “what was still to be achieved was the main purpose of setting up OMA, which was to have architecture constructed. For the last two years [1980–81] we have worked exclusively on projects that have tangible chances of being built. Nine of these have been designed in the last twelve months. One [Sixteen Villas in Antiparos] is now under construction, and it is our expectation that more will be so during this year.”⁰⁶

‘LANDSCAPE’ AS A TACTIC APPLICABLE TO THE GRAZING FIELD AS MUCH AS TO THE SUPERMARKET

In 1980, Zenghelis was invited by his friend to design a series of small villas on the island of Antiparos. Located in the Cyclades and close to the sister island of Paros, Antiparos only had a small hamlet consisting of a couple of houses and a few farmhouses scattered across the rest of the landscape. The client had managed to gather some capital and since 1978 had bought up adjoining plots comprising of 100 stremma⁰⁷ of land (10 ha). His idea for the project was to develop the land with small, well-designed residences and to sell or rent them to young artists and creatives, ultimately shaping a community that would revitalize the economy of the island. The client sought to employ local labor and construction techniques, and the project therefore had to be small and simple.

This was in fact OMA's first ‘real’ project. It was an exciting and overwhelming moment for the office. Zenghelis and Koolhaas decided to suspend their teaching activities for a while and to focus on their main goal. Zenghelis wrote to Alvin Boyarsky, the chair of the AA, to inform him about their decision: “I was kept informed of your conversation with Rem and I was meaning to follow this up, and confirm that the suggestion he made was one we had discussed together and something that we might both share, (and do while trying to launch OMA as its real self), if it is a suggestion that you find we might develop.”⁰⁸ He continues: “I was ‘literally’ whisked away to Greece by a client. It does not sound very true but nevertheless it is. I am here often ... in an effort to launch OMA as you know is our wish, in the coming season! In the meantime, while in London I was drawing the plan for obtaining planning permission for a conversion (a favor to the same client, in return for which I am promised [a] ‘real’ job),

04 Zaha Hadid left OMA in 1979 and submitted a separate entry to the competition for the Irish Prime Minister's Residence.

05 In 1979 the Dutch Government Buildings Agency (Rijkgebouwendienst) commissioned Rem Koolhaas / OMA to carry out a study for the renovation and reconfiguration of the Koepel Panopticon Prison in Arnhem. The project was developed in 1979–80 by Koolhaas and de Martino. It resulted in a comprehensive report, including an analysis of the existing building and a design of the new facilities for the complex.

06 Elia Zenghelis, “Drawing as Technique and Architecture,” in *OMA: Projects 1978–1981* (London: Architectural Association, 1981), 14.

07 Unit of measurement mainly used in Greece and Cyprus.

08 Elia Zenghelis, letter to Alvin Boyarsky, July 20, 1980, AA Archives.

a sudden move, which took me all the time I had left till I had to rush to the airport for my appointment here. So this is both an apology for my silent and sudden disappearance, and a report on my activities, since our last meeting.”⁰⁹ Koolhaas and Zenghelis stopped teaching at the AA and over the next five years Diploma Unit 9 was run by Zaha Hadid.



Katerina Tsigarida and Ron Steiner at the OMA office in London, working on the Antiparos model, 1981. Courtesy Zoe Zenghelis

With great excitement, Zenghelis set up a small team in their London office in Kentish Town, with Zoe Zenghelis, Ron Steiner,¹⁰ and Katerina Tsigarida, who had obtained her undergraduate degree at the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki and had just moved to London to continue her studies at a postgraduate level at the AA.¹¹ The main challenge of the project was to calculate and distribute the maximum buildable area on the land. Although the site was composed of seven adjoining plots stretching from the hilltop to the sandy beach of Soros, the plots had not been merged. Therefore, each plot had to be provided with separate access roads, paths, and building mass. According to the existing building regulations at the time, a buildable area of 200 m² could have been allocated per plot. The design team then decided to divide the total buildable area of each plot to three roughly 70 m² units (except for the client's villa), exploring different compositions and distribution of the masses that could both comply with the planning permission requirements while avoiding further fragmentation of the land. The initial scheme comprised sixteen huts. After a couple of visits in the summer of 1980, they made a model of the site and its gently sloping topography, including an existing ruin on the topmost corner of the site where the client wanted to have his own villa. As Zenghelis stated in the years after, the site model alone did not inform any geometric principle for the allocation of the building masses.¹² They included more features of the site in order to inspire their massing criteria,

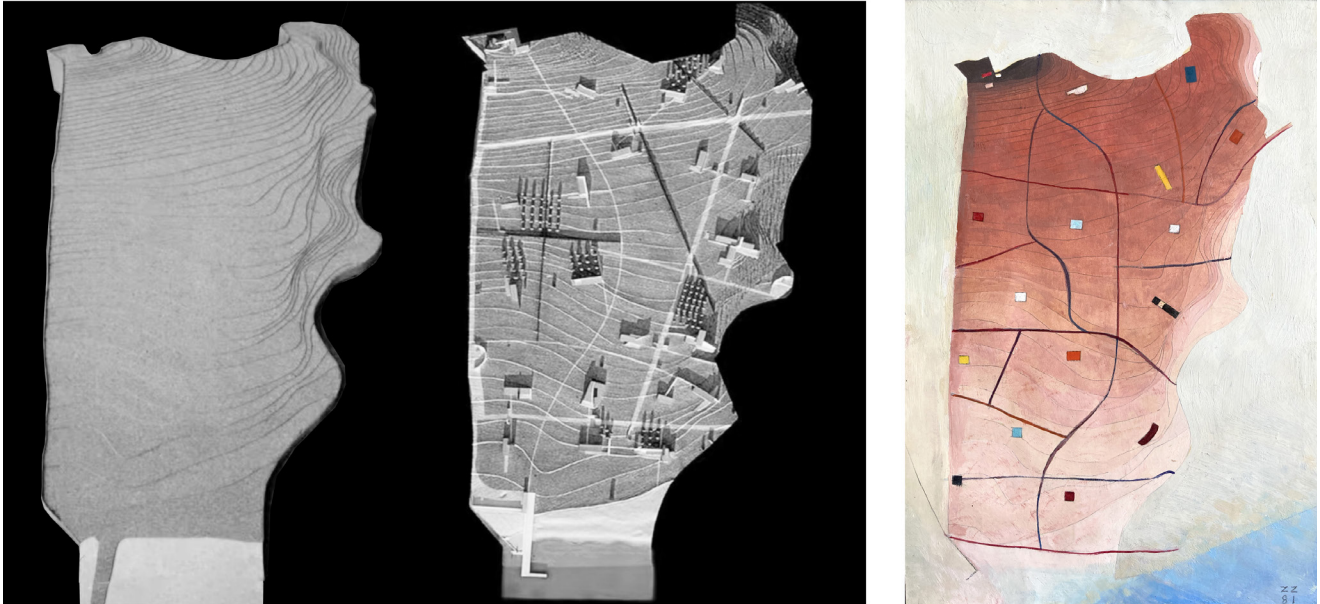
⁰⁹ Zenghelis, letter to Alvin Boyarsky.

¹⁰ Ron Steiner was an AA graduate who studied at Leon Krier's Unit. He began his collaboration with OMA in 1975 on the Hotel Sphinx project and continued working at OMA until the mid-1990s.

¹¹ Both Steiner and Tsigarida began working in parallel on the design of the Lutzowstrasse housing project as part of the IBA Housing Competition in Berlin, later in 1980.

¹² Elia Zenghelis, "A Conversation with Elia Zenghelis," interview by Cynthia Davidson, *Log 30* (Winter 2014): 98.

including two existing wells and a stone wall. Based on the early design iterations, Zoe Zenghelis made a painting suggesting a preliminary distribution of huts on the site, with their connecting paths. At this stage, in early 1981, the huts were not designed; they were only represented as rectangular colored patches floating in chromatic shades of dark red to light pink, a painting that Zaha Hadid called “the pork chop.”¹³



Left: Model of the Antiparos site and the villas, 1981. Designed by Elia Zenghelis/OMA.

Courtesy of Elia Zenghelis.

Right: Zoe Zenghelis, *Conceptual painting of the villas* (“The Pork Chop”), 1981. Acrylic on paper, 28 x 19 cm.

Courtesy of private collection.

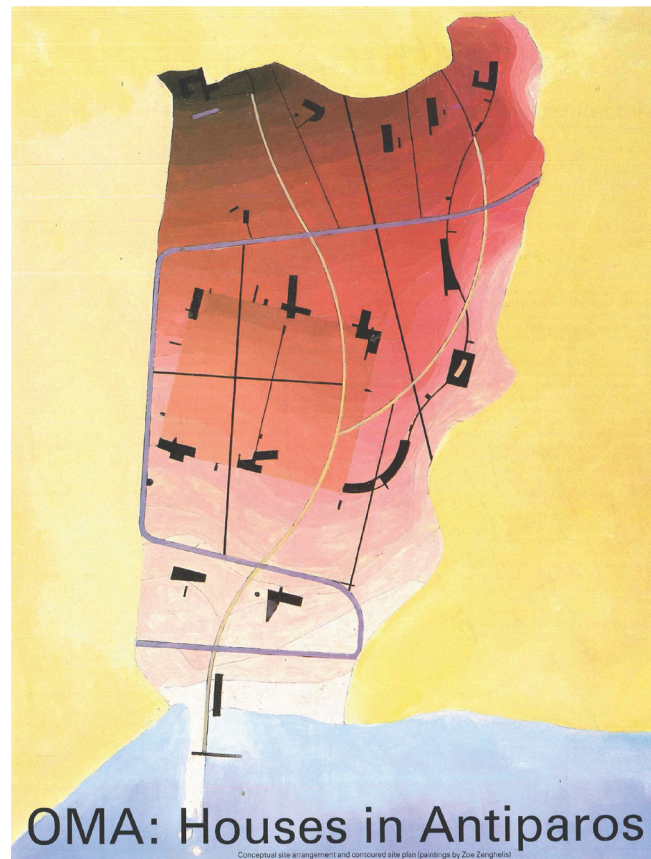
The line of the wall crossing the land and the nodes of the wells informed a series of compositional exercises to group the huts and occupy the landscape. In his interview with Yannis Aesopos and Yorgos Simeoforides for *El Croquis*, Zenghelis expands on this process: “It was with the Antiparos project in 1981, that I realized that the strategies of landscape are the same as the metropolitan. Same in kind, different in degree. I was struck by the fact that, on this tiny Aegean island, human occupation also re-created the territory and that ‘landscape,’ was a tactic applicable to the grazing field, as much as to the supermarket. The roads that crisscrossed the hill slopes, the walls that divided the fields and the points of occupation that identified each lot, transformed the landscape into a system.”¹⁴ In fact, beyond the architecture of the huts themselves, the project evolved into a challenge to colonize the landscape, almost as if it were a metropolitan condition. The design recreated the territory through “a geography of lines, points and surfaces: fields of action, serviced by lines of communication, with points of occupancy scattered across it like confetti”¹⁵—a term used by Rem Koolhaas when he first saw the site plan of the villas. From then onward, ‘confetti’ entered the design vocabulary of OMA.¹⁶

13 Zaha Hadid’s playful name for the early Antiparos master-plan painting was captured by the author in an interview conducted with Zoe Zenghelis on March 11, 2020. It has been confirmed by Elia Zenghelis on multiple occasions, namely within many public lectures and presentations within the past decade, at the Bartlett School of Architecture – UCL, the AA, and the Universities of Patras and Thessaly in Greece, among others.

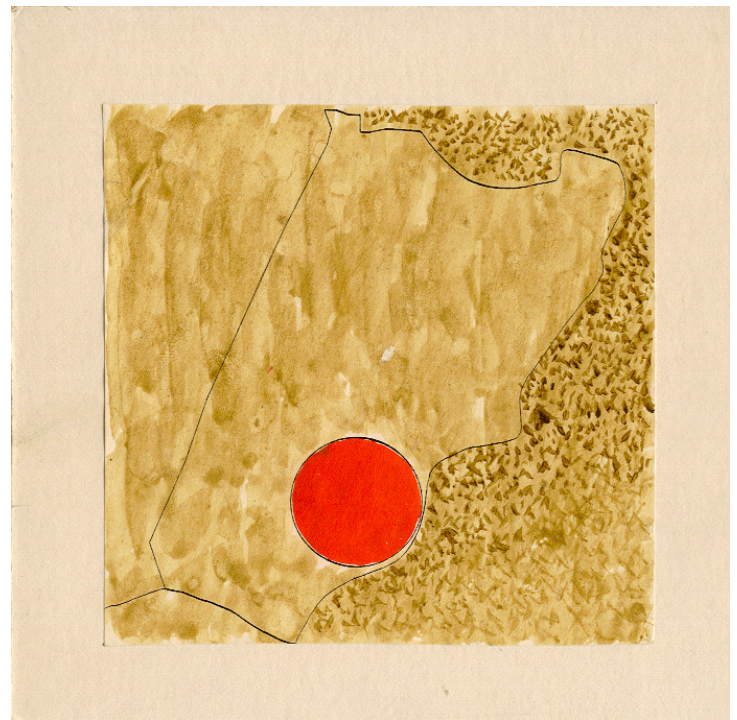
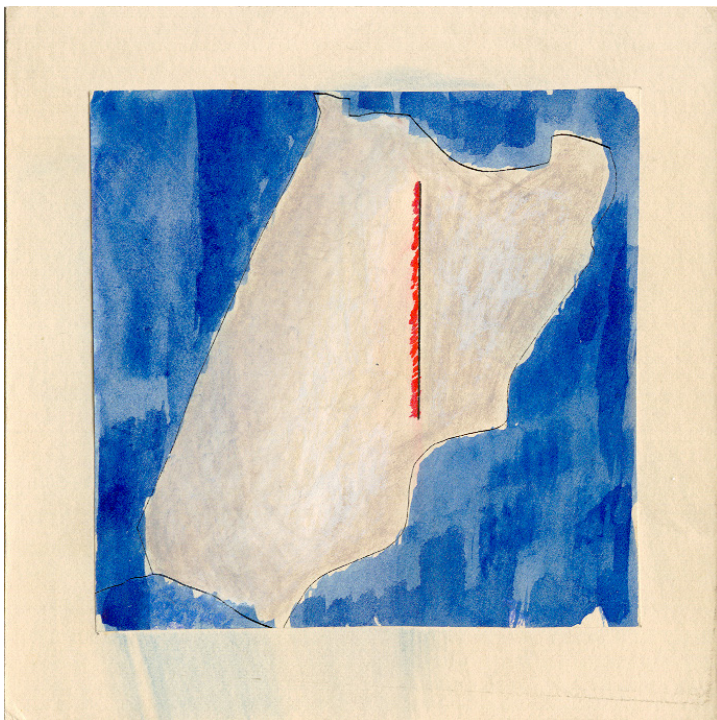
14 Elia Zenghelis, “Conversations with Eleni Gigantes & Elia Zenghelis,” *El Croquis* 67 (1994): 133.

15 Zenghelis, “Conversations.”

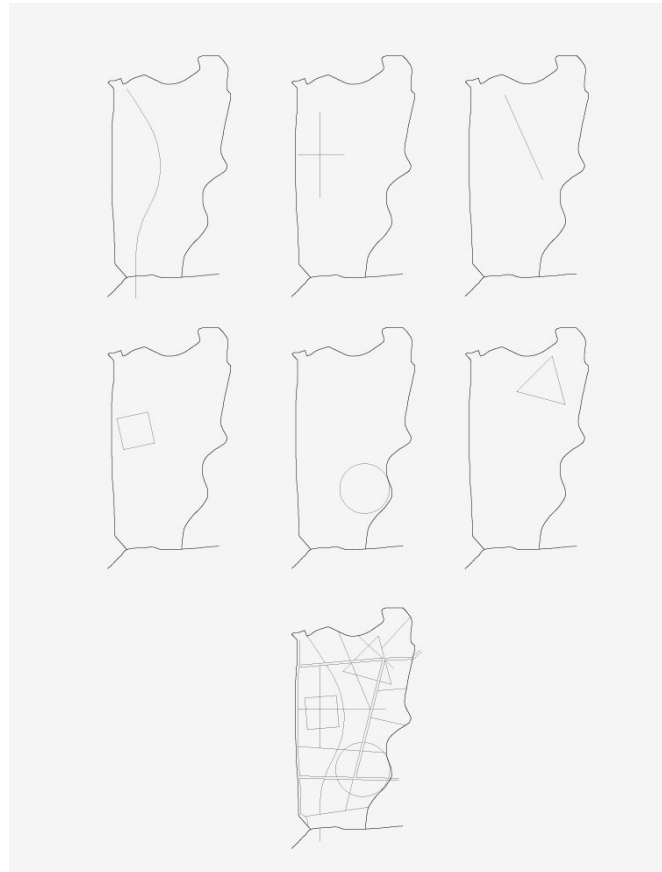
16 Such a design method and compositional strategy were also adopted and used by Zaha Hadid in her early works, often referred to as “tic-tac.” Rem Koolhaas and Elia Zenghelis, “Architettura della metropoli planetaria. Architectural Association. Diploma School: Unit 9,” *Lotus International* 21 (1978): 9.



Zoe Zenghelis, *Plan of the Sixteen Villas on the Island of Antiparos*, 1981. From "Houses in Antiparos," *AD Architectural Design* 6/7 (1981): 58–63.



Katerina Tsigarida/OMA, *Invisible Frames, Antiparos*, 1981. Watercolor on card. Courtesy of Katerina Tsigarida Archive.



Elia Zenghelis/OMA, *Organizational Diagrams, Antiparos*, 1981. Top: Walls, paths, and roads; middle: Invisible frames; bottom: a geography of lines, points and surfaces. Redrawn by the author after Elia Zenghelis.

A series of analytical drawings were made to single out different forces of the site separately, aiming to ‘discover’ invisible geometries that would group the huts. As Katerina Tsigarida explains, “we were influenced by Suprematism; we superimposed existing elements—dry river, existing paths, walls, wells—and platonic forms, circle, triangle, and square. The result was a complex geometry which worked well with the topography of the site.”¹⁷ While these elements were emphasized into tectonic forms intersecting the land, the platonic shapes became organizational devices, ‘zones of congestion’ pulling the huts together. These ‘invisible frames’ were superimposed on the site to control it and define the location of the houses. The frames were positioned in such a way as to have the huts facing the sea, protecting them from the summer wind from the north, placing them against the slope or along the topographic lines, depending on requirements for access, views, or shelter.¹⁸ In an interview with Patrice Goulet, Zenghelis expands on their methodology for the project, arguing that they had adopted a typological and analytic approach in designing the Antiparos villas. In this sense, it could be seen as a ‘traditional’ project; however, for them it was quite the opposite, since the choreography of the forces released some tensions that could be similar to those sought by El Lissitzky and Kazimir Malevich, going beyond the simple occupation of the ground. Zenghelis further claimed that “the idea of laying the lines and generating envelopes almost without content, yet ready to receive some, seems very modern.”¹⁹

¹⁷ Katerina Tsigarida in conversation with the author, November 22, 2023.

¹⁸ Elia Zenghelis, “Sur une trame invisible: Villas à Antiparos Grèce,” *L’Architecture d’Aujourd’hui* 236 (December 1984): 54–56.

¹⁹ Zenghelis, “Ou le début de la fin du réel.”

INVERTED ARCADIA

If for OMA “eating oysters with boxing gloves, naked on the 9th floor” was a manifestation of the metropolitan condition, or the “culture of congestion”, juxtaposing programs and spaces in an absurd plot, the “invisible frames” recreated the same device in a seemingly empty landscape. In 1985, in a short text that accompanied a review of OMA’s projects in *L’Architecture d’Aujourd’hui*, Elia Zenghelis reflected on the conceptual framework in which their projects had been developed. He described their strategy as that of forming an idealized landscape, a force field, regulated through walls, pathways, and dwellings, to create a matrix of indeterminacy that conveyed a surreptitious program. He added: “A redefinition of Arcadia was born out of this encounter: The recreation of a transposed Arcadia is as far from Virgil’s pastoral simplicity and the ideal of primordial retreat as it is close to the idealized reality of an Arcadian future.”²⁰ Such a shift in the nature of Elia Zenghelis’s work for OMA also had a massive impact on Zoe Zenghelis’s paintings. Metropolis and landscape began to mutate into one another.



Master Plan plan of the Antiparos project Elia Zenghelis / OMA, , 1981.
Ink on tracing paper, 100 x 90 cm. Courtesy of AA Archives

In 1981 Zoe Zenghelis made a series of oil paintings artistically interpreting the evolving plan of the Antiparos project. She took the key principles of the design and the topographic condition of the landscape and turned them into a playful composition of lines, shapes, and fields. The oil painting, titled *Sixteen Villas on the Island of Antiparos*, presents the best examples of the series. Painted in 1981, the villas, also referred to as confetti, appear in more complex shapes, composed of parts and sometimes crossed with small walls. Colored in red, yellow, grey, and shades

of blue, the villas are painted against the white cloudy background with precise outlines while the other features of the landscape dissolve into a force field intensified in the space between the villas. In 1983 Zoe Zenghelis painted another version of this painting with a brown background. As Kenneth Frampton argues, the painting manifests a conceptual break from the work at this instant “as it becomes less architectural and increasingly abstract, although architecture is still the ostensible subject.”²¹



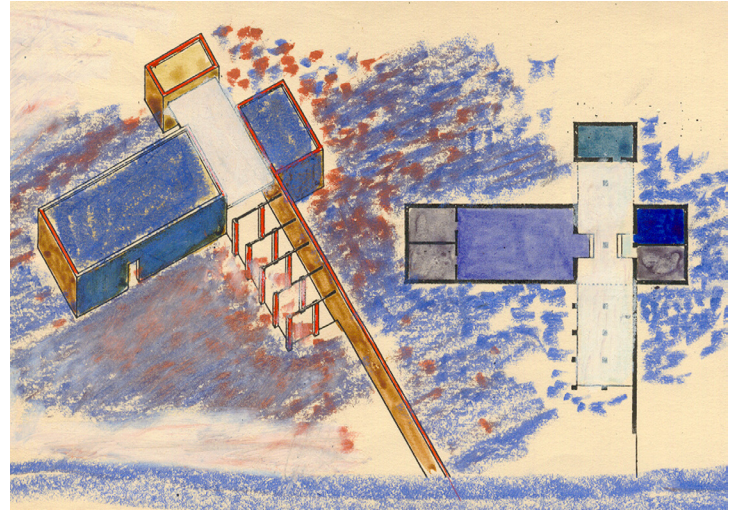
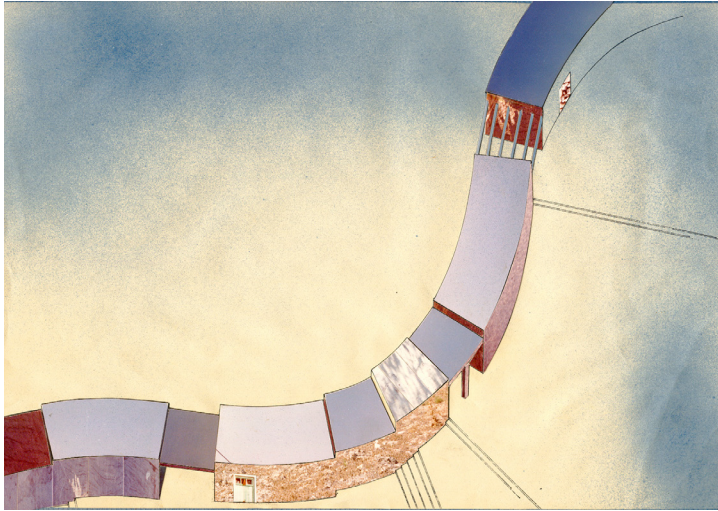
Left: Zoe Zenghelis, *Sixteen Villas on the Island of Antiparos*, 1981. Oil on paper, 35 x 30 cm.
Courtesy The Museum of Modern Art, New York/Scala, Florence.

Right: Zoe Zenghelis, *Sixteen Villas on the Island of Antiparos*, 1983. Oil on paper, 32 x 21 cm.
Courtesy of Alvin Boyarsky collection.

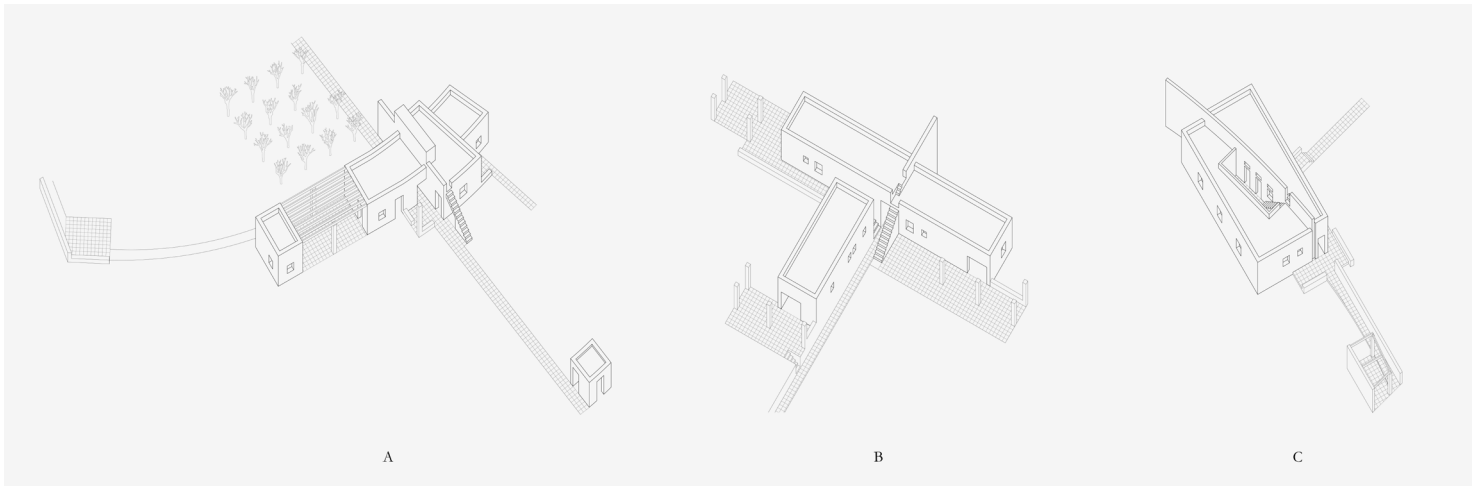
The huts began to take shape based on the force field and geometric framework. They first appeared as linear inhabitable structures laid along the frames. This approach was soon abandoned in favor of confetti pavilions. A set of formal and technical principles were agreed upon: the initial geometric blocks were broken down into the smaller elements of living room, bedroom, chimney blocks, pergola, stairs, veranda, and platforms. The main structure of the huts was to be constructed using the local technique of exposed drystone walls, integrating them in the surrounding landscape. Only certain walls (fireplace cores) would be constructed of concrete, painted in different shades of blue, yellow, red, and grey, accentuating the site. Existing relating walls would be extended to direct the paths and protect the access roads while new curved walls would be added around the wells; lastly, a linear platform would connect the villas to the sandy beach. The final master plan was drawn up in 1981 by Ron Steiner and included

21 Kenneth Frampton, “ZZ at the AA,” in *Do You Remember How Perfect Everything Was? The Work of Zoe Zenghelis*, ed. Hamed Khosravi (London: AA Publications, 2022), 236.

all elements of the project; it was a detailed plan, consisting of twenty-one villas grouped around the “invisible frames”²² and accessed via the main road on the north side that branched out toward the beach and the southern perimeter of the site. The site was crossed by four long walls; a long curved footpath stretched from the client’s villa on the hilltop to the car park and a small pier at the beach; it was connected by multiple footpaths reaching out to other huts. On the northern edge, rows of trees were proposed to protect the site from the northern wind, while grids of trees next to the huts were to provide cooling shade during the hot summer days.



Conceptual paintings of typical villas, by Katerina Tsigarida, 1981. Crayon on paper.
Courtesy of Katerina Tsigarida Archive.



Axonometric views of prototypical villas, 1981.
Redrawn by the author after Elia Zenghelis

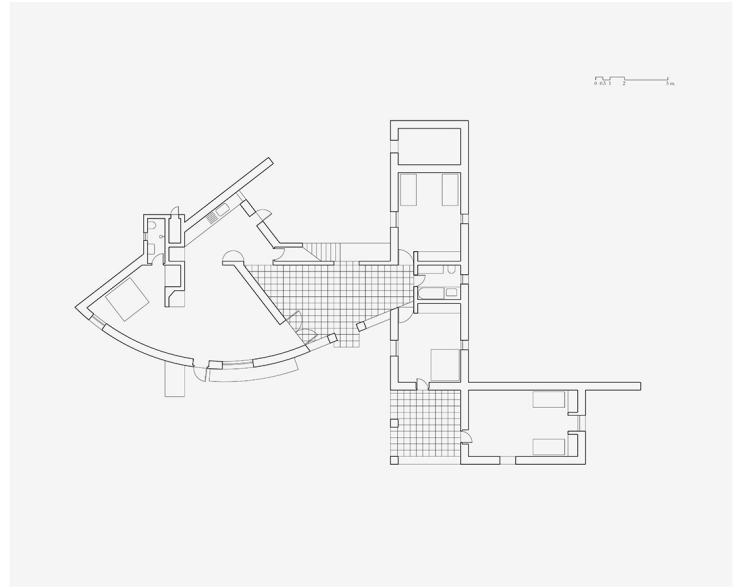
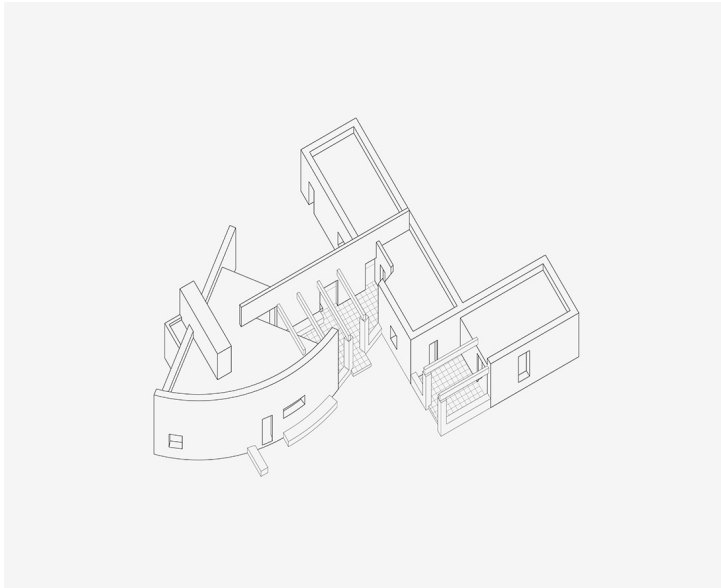
²² The main composition of the plan was initially based on sixteen villas. However, due to the client’s wish to exhaust the site’s maximum buildable area, the number of villas was increased to twenty-one.



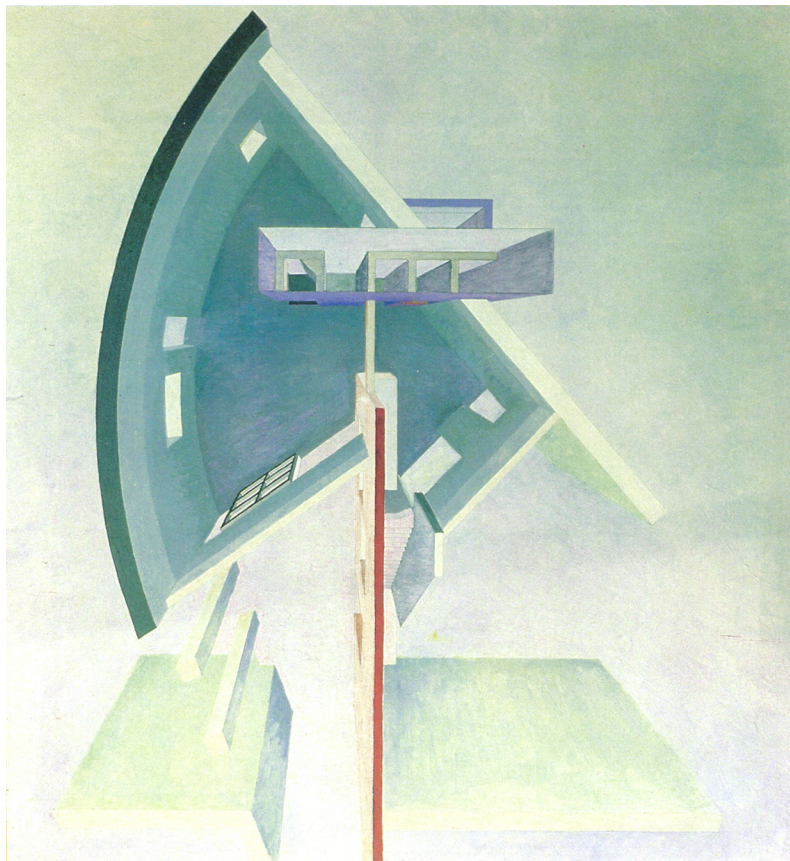
Final master plan of the Antiparos Villas, 1981. Designed by Elia Zenghelis / OMA and drafted by Ron Steiner. Source: "Sur une trame invisible: Villas a à Antiparos Grèce," *L'Architecture d'Aujourd'hui* 236 (December 1984): 54–56

Elia Zenghelis designed the Siotis Villa, on the highest spot, where an old farmhouse once existed. He incorporated the existing structure into the design of the new villa. It was extended into an L-shape summer-wing consisting of three bedrooms joined by a terrace. The old structure turned into a water storage room collecting rainwater from the roofs. Zenghelis describes the spatial organization of the villa: "This 'summer-wing' is linked via the 'veranda'—which is in fact the most important and the most lived-in area in the complex—to the semicircular living room, or the 'winter-wing,' which is curved in the shape of the view. This 'winter-wing' is subdivided into three parts by a wall containing services and a fireplace that protrudes into the middle; firstly into the living room proper, which opens directly onto the 'veranda,' and also out onto an uncovered area for use in warm evenings; secondly into the kitchen which also opens out onto the 'veranda' as well as opening onto a north courtyard for use on very hot days; the third section is a quieter area behind the fireplace, with a window to the south-east, and an adjoining shower; this can be used as a bedroom in winter when the rest of the house remains locked-up."²³ Three other villa types were designed, a linear family unit with three bedrooms and a veranda, a double unit (two two-bedroom huts) for rental adjoining the curved wall crossing the site, and a T-shape unit consisting of three one-bedroom huts, each with a separate terrace, for rental, joined together with platforms and roof gardens.

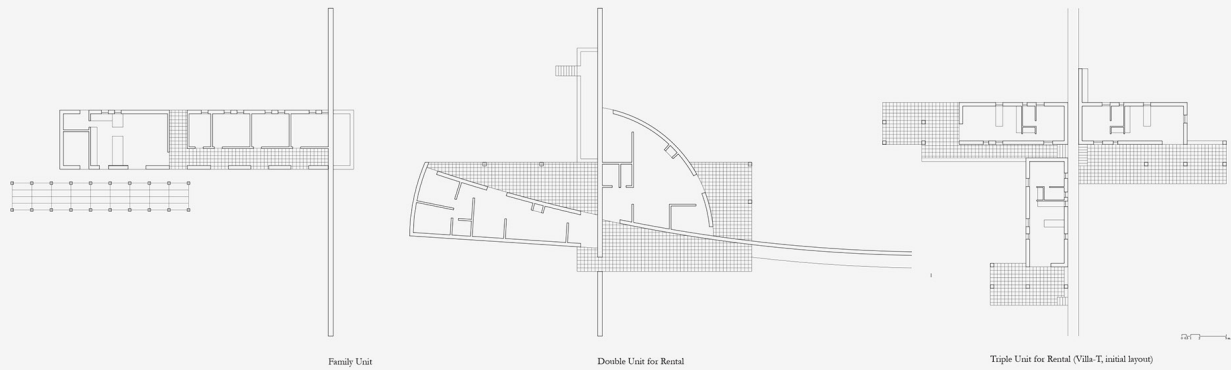
23 Elia Zenghelis, "Houses in Antiparos," *AD Architectural Design* 6/7 (1981): 58–63.



Left: Axonometric view of Siotis Villa, 1981. Redrawn by the author after Elia Zenghelis.
Right: Plan of Siotis Villa, 1981. Redrawn by the author after Elia Zenghelis.



Zoe Zenghelis/ OMA, *Siotis Villa*, Interior, , 1982.
Scanned from photographic slide. Courtesy of Zoe Zenghelis Archive.



Prototypical plans of the villas, 1981.
Redrawn by the author after Elia Zenghelis

In June 1981, OMA included the Antiparos project in their exhibition at the Architectural Association, *OMA: Projects 1978–1981*.²⁴ The project was celebrated as their first substantial commission and was included in the exhibition catalogue. The July issue of *Architectural Design* (1981) covered the project quite extensively with an accompanying text by Zenghelis. All this publicity in the midst of the design process worried the client, as he was not fully satisfied with the design of the villas and the total proposed number of the rental huts (sixteen).²⁵ The construction of the Siotis Villa had already begun when the client expressed his dissatisfaction to Zenghelis. For the client, the project had derailed from its main purpose, which was to be simple, easy, and profitable. This clash of two different visions culminated in a rupture²⁶. Zenghelis quit the project by the end of 1981 and always remembered, with regret, that “this project was never realized because my client started becoming competitive and from a good friend he became a very irritating person.”²⁷ When Zenghelis left the project, the design for three other villas was ongoing. The client commissioned Tsigarida to develop the rest of the project. She accepted the offer after consulting Zenghelis. Tsigarida remembers that she had once gone to Antiparos to mediate, if possible, between the client and Elia. She got on the back of the client’s tractor, reading the master plan of the villa as he drove through the site to mark the main paths. Feeling frustrated at having to navigate the rough topographic landscape, The client cynically said, “It is impossible to follow the lines you have drawn, I’ll go just straight through.” Tsigarida believes that the plan could of course have been modified to meet the actual reality of the site, but “the client was determined to prove himself right and to spoil the design that had been made.”²⁸

24 The exhibition displayed eight projects, the most representative of OMA’s second period: Extension of the Dutch Parliament in The Hague; The Irish Prime Minister’s Residence in Dublin; Renovation of the Koepel Prison in Arnhem; IBA Housing Projects in Berlin; Two Structures for Rotterdam; Housing in Amsterdam Noord; Sixteen Villas in Antiparos; Office and Apartments in Mytilene.

25 Aris Siotis in conversation with the author, December 5, 2023.

26 The author did not have the opportunity to reflect the client’s view. He passed away in 2023, a couple of months before the writing of this article.

27 Elia Zenghelis, “The Image as Story Line and Emblem” (lecture at Harvard University GSD, October 26, 2016).

28 Katerina Tsigarida in conversation with the author, November 22, 2023.



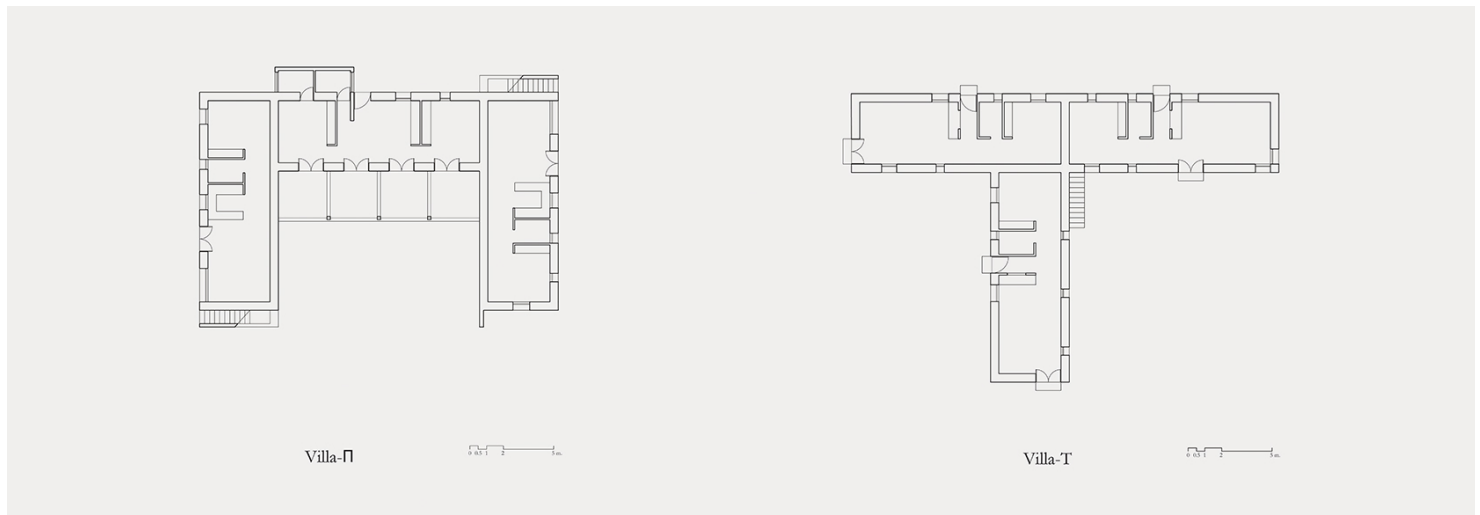
Siotis Villa under construction. The client and his son standing in the living room, 1982.
Courtesy the client's family.

Tsigarida—who was the only registered Greek architect on the design team and who had signed the planning permission for the Siotis Villa—continued to work on the rest of the project, submitting other planning applications to the local authority. In the following months, she developed three other villas: Villa T, Villa L and Villa II, all located on the north side of the site. In 1983, two of these villas were built; Villa II, composed of three one-bedroom huts, was not part of the final master plan and was added to the circular frame.²⁹ Villa T, however, followed the design initially developed by the team, while the spaces between the three units were removed and open tiered terraces were dissolved in the landscaping of the villa. Tsigarida left the project in 1983. In the following years, she designed and built her own independent projects on the island, which all carry some of the main design principles of the Antiparos project.



Villa T, under construction. Rolls of raffia used for the ceiling insulation, 1982. Courtesy Katerina Tsigarida Archive.

29 The adjusted master plan, drawn up in 1983, shows that in fact it does not fit the carefully composed groupings.



Plans of Villa T and Villa II designed by Katerina Tsigarida, 1982.
Redrawn by the author after Tsigarida

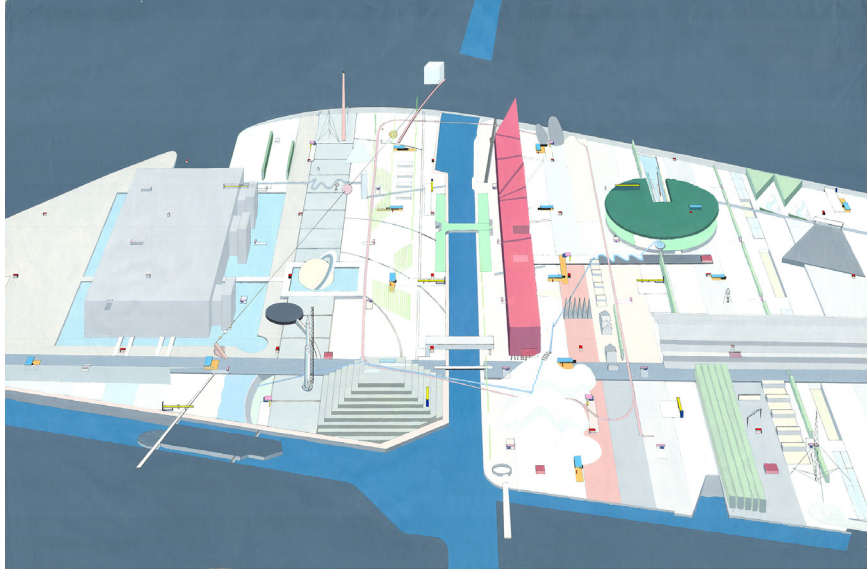


Villa T, under construction, Antiparos, 1982. Courtesy Katerina Tsigarida Archive.



Villa T, under construction, Antiparos, 1982. Courtesy Katerina Tsigarida Archive.

The three villas (Villa Siotis, Villa T, and Villa II) were built using local stone and the client employed local masons to build them. Details of the local architecture were incorporated into the construction. Raffia³⁰ was used for the ceilings; the lintels were left with unfinished cement coating; and although the initial designs had particularly emphasized the use of concrete elements such as the chimney cores and columns, these features were almost removed entirely from the projects. What's more, the proposed color palettes—red, grey, yellow, and shades of blue—were not used and, in the years after, exposed drystone facades of the villas were covered with white plaster, a more familiar and inviting image for visitors to the island.



Zoe Zenghelis / OMA, *Parc de la Villette*, 1982
Acrylic on paper, 52 x 80 cm. Courtesy of private collection.

Although the built project was nothing close to what was initially planned and designed by the OMA team, it successfully met, and may have even surpassed, the expectations of the client in the years after. Thanks to the newly built villas and the investors, Antiparos, from a relatively uninhabited and deserted island, became one of the most popular tourist destinations in the Cyclades. For Zenghelis and OMA, however, the Antiparos project marked a transition from Metropolitan architecture and the one of the Arcadia, “a metaphor for the subordination of nature to ‘Civilizing’ transformation.”³¹ Such a methodology was employed most effectively in their more widely recognized Parc de la Villette competition entry in 1982. As Zenghelis argued, “Antiparos was a watershed. It provided a dynamic explanation of the modern with regards to its variable degrees of impact and explicitness, and was the catalyst for our strategy for La Villette a year later and many of the projects that followed. Until that time our agendas were contained within an ideological framework that did not encompass these kind of metropolitan extensions, nor their implications, and our repertory was limited to the early OMA language for the metropolis.”³² The modernism Zenghelis claims was far from the “white cubic houses” praised by the 1933 International Congress of Modern Ar-

³⁰ Rolls of woven palm straws that were used to cover the wooden beams.

³¹ Zenghelis, “Conversations,” 133.

³² Zenghelis, “Conversations,” 133.

chitecture (CIAM IV).³³ It came closer to how Anthony Vidler read it in his short text in the *Skyline* magazine: “In the scheme for 16 villas on the island of Antiparos in Greece (1981; Elia Zenghelis, principal), the environment of Greece is not overtly protected by an appeal to roots, to the vernacular, nor is it deliberately shocked by the imposition of a modern object. Rather, what in experience seems to be the innocent result of contextualism becomes in plan, as painted by Zoe Zenghelis, a powerful exercise in suprematism.”³⁴

FORMS WITH ALMOST NO CONTENT

The project had a massive impact on Zoe Zenghelis’s paintings. Metropolis and landscape began to mutate into one another. Not only that, working on the Antiparos project was also an opportunity to reconnect to the Mediterranean islands, their landscapes, and the rural architecture that had begun to appear in Zenghelis’s independent paintings soon after: force fields, regulated through color grids and punctuated by scattered forms, confetti. The architectural landscape series she developed in 1982 could in fact be read as a direct reflection on the Antiparos design. The elements of the project appear later in her other works, such as *Stairs* (1982), *Architectural Landscape* (1982), and *Confetti* (1992). But perhaps the most important manifestation of Antiparos appears in Zoe Zenghelis’s *Parc de la Villette* (1982), which followed OMA’s design idea and imagined the park as a building mass with scattered architecture. Vegetation and forests are rendered as solid tectonics: a massive rose slab, representing dense pine trees, marks the centre of the painting; to its right is a floating disk, painted in dark green, indicating a circular cedar forest planned for the centre of the park. Zenghelis remembers that she spent hours studying trees, their colours and forms in various seasons for this painting. For her, the OMA entry for the competition was too complex; “the site was congested, full of programmes, gardens, and facilities.” So she made her own version of the *Parc de la Villette* painting, *Cassata* (1983). “I cleared it of all the fuss, I only kept a few elements that I liked from the project and painted this carpet of light colors, highlighted with little kiosks.”³⁵ Apparently, the jury of the Parc de la Villette competition shared the same idea as Zoe Zenghelis; they ranked OMA’s entry as runner-up to the winning entry by Bernard Tschumi, whose proposal was much simpler and more airy, and which paradoxically looked more like Zenghelis’s *Cassata*.

33 The congress meeting of CIAM IV was held in Greece, where the attendants had a cruise trip to the Aegean Islands. The visitors, including Le Corbusier, Siegfried Giedion, and László Moholy-Nagy, were impressed by the simplicity and plasticity of Greek vernacular architecture. They saw the white-plastered cubic houses of the islands of Santorini and Mykonos as the foundation of modernist architecture. See Alain Colquhoun, “The Concept of Regionalism,” in *Architectural Regionalism: Collected Writings on Place, Identity, Modernity and Tradition*, ed. (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2007), 146–55.

34 Anthony Vidler, “The Irony of Metropolis: The Office for Metropolitan Architecture,” *Skyline* 5 (1982): 21.

35 Zoe Zenghelis and Hamed Khosravi in conversation with Edwin Heathcote, Architecture Foundation, January 21, 2021.



Zoe Zenghelis, *Stairs*, 1982. Oil on card.
Scanned from photographic slide. Courtesy Zoe Zenghelis Archive



Zoe Zenghelis, *Architectural Landscape*, 1982. Oil on card.
Scanned from photographic slide. Courtesy Zoe Zenghelis Archive



Zoe Zenghelis, *Confetti*, 1992. Oil on canvas, 40 x 55 cm.
Scanned from photographic slide. Courtesy Zoe Zenghelis Archive



Zoe Zenghelis, *Cassata*, 1983. Conceptual painting after Parc de la Villette.
Acrylic on paper, 53 x 86 cm. Courtesy of Drawing Matter Collection

As pointed out by Vidler, the Zenghelis / OMA design methodology comes closer to the true nature of constructivism, although not stylistically. “Style, in the art-historical sense, is inoperative as an analytical device: the projects might look like this or that modernism; however, they are not, for all that, repetitions—or even extensions—of the modernisms of the 1920s and 30s. The explanation, insofar as such ironic devices allow if any, is to be found more than ever in the ‘nature of the project,’ in its idea, its fundamental aim to disrupt all previous positive ‘natures.’”³⁶ Confetti successfully translated OMA’s thesis on the metropolis into a series of tactics for colonizing the entire territory and constructing an idealized landscape—scattered units whose aggregation generates force fields, intense zones of urbanity, juxtaposing a multiplicity of programs on forms with almost no content.

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