The Asian endeavour for local and global self-representation through contemporary art museums is a new ongoing trend. It started at the beginning of the 1990s, when a veritable museum wave began to roll over Asia. The factor of newness and innovation has exerted significant impact on the creation of Asian museums for modern and contemporary art: They have transformed into mega-exhibitionary complexes, spectacularizing the institution of the museum as both, a public space of cultural self-representation towards national and international audiences, as well as an urban site of local identity-building within the metropolitan community. Shaped by cutting-edge iconic architecture, the new museums aspire to vanguard futurist image-makers, breaking ground for new imaginations of Asia, its political, social, and cultural redesign in the 21st century.

In order to study the “urban imaginary” as produced by the creative imagination of new art museums for culturally ambitious East Asian cities, three museum projects were selected whose virtual design process from the main concept to the architectural competition has been completed although they are not yet realized as built entities: 1. The Museum + at the West Kowloon Cultural District in Hong Kong, China (planned opening in 2017); 2. The New Taipei City Museum of Art in Taipei, Taiwan (unscheduled opening); 3. The UUL National Museum of Art in Seoul, South Korea (planned opening in 2013). The lecture will analyse the newly designed museums as public spaces of cultural self-representation and urban identity building. It will monitor the complete design process, from the City Government’s urban and institutional planning strategies, its cultural mandate to commission a new museum, over the architectural design competition for the respected new museum, including the selection and adaptation process, to the museum’s mission statement, in order to find out what elements, functions and definitions shape the new urban, audience-centred model of Asian museums in the 21st century.

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