



# Art on Green Roofs

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## Abstract

*Green roofs provide habitats for plants and animal species, but generally urban citizens only benefit in an indirect way. Art on green roofs creates an environment for people to engage more directly with nature on accessible, visible or made visible green roofs.*

*Benefits:*

- *Involves people on a new level*
- *Creates a stronger bond towards nature in the city.*
- *Increases the value of green roofs*
- *Improves media exposure.*
- *Attracts new target audience and generates new clients.*

*Art concepts for green roofs are developed by artists through the analysis of the location and its history, users and usages as well as the cultural and social context, followed by a creative idea generation process. Art practises in this context engage with contemporary issues of the urban and natural environment, social conditions, reflects the past and creates visions of the future. The concepts are being refined in dialogue with the clients, architects and green roof specialists.*

*Art concepts implemented in green roofs offer new possibilities for users, owners, and scientist (planners and researchers). Art further improves the cultural and social appreciation of green roofs.*

**Keywords:** art, design, multidisciplinary, social and cultural context, promotion



## **Background**

### **Industrial Context**

Today, architects, landscape designers, and green roof designers mostly design green roofs.

### **Problem**

Green roofs provide habitats for plants and animal species, but - depending on location, accessibility and visibility - generally urban citizens only benefit in an indirect way.

#### **Learning Objectives:**

- Learn about the possibility to integrate art in green roof projects
- Benefits of art on green roofs
- How to approach and how to guarantee quality

## **Approach**

Art on green roofs are interdisciplinary projects that are developed between artists and scientists on a case-by-case process, which will be demonstrated by the use of existing projects. Using a standard art-in-public-space procedure, a curator can manage the projects or it can be executed directly with an artist/artist group.

## **Analysis**

### **1. What art can do on green roofs:**

Green roofs provide habitats for plants and animal species, but generally urban citizens only benefit in an indirect way. Art on green roofs create an environment for people to engage more directly with nature on green roofs.

The primary aim is to introduce art to green roofs for the following reasons:

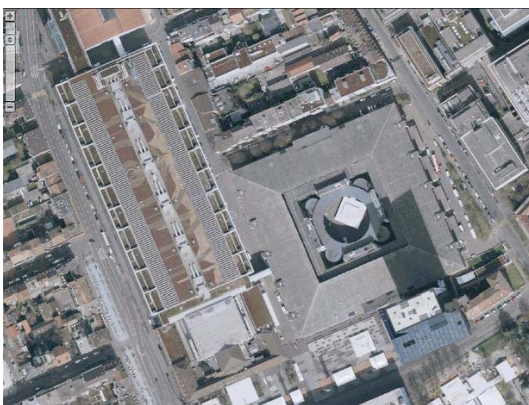
- Enforce the potential to emotionally and mentally please and involve people
- Expands the bond towards nature in the city.
- Increase the perceived value of green roofs by offering a new perspective to experience nature.
- Including social and cultural context
- Improves media exposure
- Attract new target audience
- Generate new clients.

Art concepts for green roofs are developed through the analysis of the location and its history, users and usages as well as the cultural context, followed by a creative idea generation process. The concepts are then being refined in dialogue with the clients, architects and green roof specialists.

## 2. Examples

In collaboration with Dr. Stephan Brenneisen (ZHAW, University of Applied Sciences, Wädenswil, Roof Greening Centre)

- I. Green roof art concept and realisation of Exhibition Centre Basle, Switzerland, completed 2008 (restricted access but visible)





The green roof of Exhibition Hall I at Messe Basle, Switzerland has been artistically redesigned and ecologically upgraded into the largest extensive green roof in Switzerland (overall size 16'000m<sup>2</sup>). Fusing art, design and science this unique project offers habitat for diverse flora and fauna within the city and creates a forum for artistic contemplation.

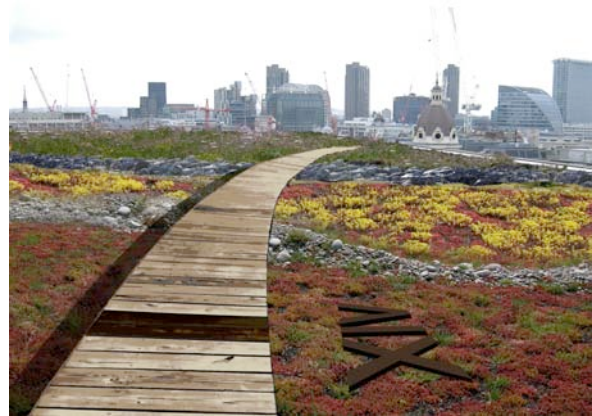
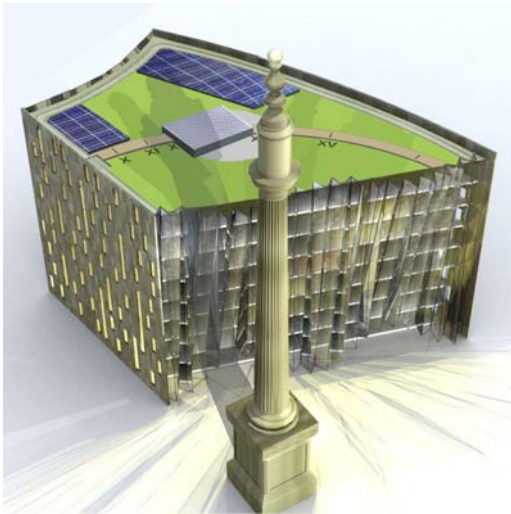
The colours and structures of the plants form a three-dimensional 'drawing', which reflects the social and economical context of the building. Interpreting the exhibition hall as an epicentre of innovation, energy and communication, the concentric circles represent this expanding movement. The pulse line that goes across illustrates the lively energy that such a place creates. It is the first green roof of its kind in Switzerland to interdisciplinary combine art and nature and is designed to act as a prototypical project advocating sustainability and communication within the urban space.

The project has attracted visitors and had great media exposure.

2. Green roof art concept for The Monument Building, London UK for Make Architects, London, planned. (accessible and visible)







The proposal 'Sun Dial' takes the immediate neighbourhood of the Monument into account and highlights the interaction between the historic landmark and the contemporary office building. Using the Monument as the needle of a sundial draws a larger context around the cityscape and the natural influences. The sun, as it passes the Monument throws its shadow over the roof, providing shade and offering a dynamic play of light on the roof. The design is a combination of several fields of plants in different colours (controlled by the height of the substratum) and the actual shadow of the Monument. The wooden boardwalk offers the building inhabitants the possibility to promenade over the green zones without destroying the plants. At the same time, this boardwalk indicates through the shadow of the monument the time at a particular date.

Further proposals include:



3. Green roof art concept for the live/work area 'Erlentor' in Basle, Switzerland (no access, but partially visible), planned.



This project draws in the urban space as multilayered structure of history, progress and change. This process creates layer after layer of physical space and collective memory. The drawing created by different plants and wood illustrates these strata in a dynamic and stylised form.

4. Green courtyard Raiffeisenbank Galgenen, Switzerland, planned.





This project called 'RESERVOIR' is a combination of a green roof and a green courtyard. On the bottom it creates a forest ground by using a high volume of leaves which will – over time – transform into soil and allow plants to grow from the seed reservoir held in the material. The sculptural elements are designed a hybrid objects between Trees, lookouts and pool ladders. They symbolise communication, observation, expansion and positively irritate by their ambiguous meaning.

### 3. Process and Quality

The art industry has created a standard procedure for art in public space. In order to recruit suitable artists it is advisable to approach a curator. This well-networked person has a pool of artists, from which they can draw suitable candidates for a project. Those invited artists are assigned to the project by offering background information and a written statement of the judgement criteria.

Overall artistic concept

Context, coherence towards architecture and environment

Practicability (technique/costs)

Cost-effectiveness (maintenance)

The curator will be assigned to develop the call for entries and the guidelines. He will also be in charge to advise artists and project managers and work as a communicator between the two.

If there are no financial means to include a curator, the project management can approach an artist or artist team directly and take the journey of collaboration.



## Results and Business Impacts

### Key Findings

Including art on green roofs adds another communication layer to the projects. It offers contemplation on an emotional and conceptual level. Art can establish different accesses to nature, sculptural interventions have the capacity to irritate and raise awareness. Art is a vehicle, a connector and a signal.

### Business Impacts

Art concepts implemented in green roofs offer new possibilities for users, owners, and scientist (planners and researchers). Art further improves the cultural and social appreciation of green roofs. It has the potential to attract new audiences and generate media attention.

The project Exhibition Centre Basle, Switzerland is a good example how art on green roofs can attract visitors as well as media and thus help proliferating the vision of green roofs.

### Conclusions

Art on green roofs is a journey worth tasking. It offers new possibilities to look at green roofs and not only provide habitat for different species but also offers a contemplative space for visitors.

#### Key Lessons Learned:

- Including art to green roofs offers new perspectives on nature and the urban landscape
- Art adds new target groups and helps increasing awareness for green roofs
- It's a journey worth taking





## Authors' Biographies



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