



Playdate

211 Voce.A interview with

Meteora

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meteora.ch

Adil Bokhari is a researcher, practitioner, and tutor focusing on the crossovers between computational vision, automata, and architectural rendering through the lens of cosmotechnics. He investigates how contemporary technologies relate to and unfold global histories of the art of painting, the physics of light, and the mechanics of intelligent instruments. He is currently a Phd researcher and tutor at Studio Meteora at the Chair of digital Architectonics at ETH Zurich. www.themapandtheterritory.com

Dr. Miro Roman is an architect, coder, and scholar. He is Assistant Professor at UIBK Innsbruck, where he founded the House of Coded Objects and StudioOmore, and Senior Lecturer at ETH Zurich's Meteora. His work explores AI, big data, social media, and design. Roman codes and writes about the abundance of digital objects—books, images, indexes, pixels—developing tools like Xenotheka and Ask Alice. He co-authored A Play Among Books and co-created the fashion AI SOLL. His work spans exhibitions, films, and publications, always probing how computation reshapes literacy, aesthetics, and architecture. <https://miro.romanvlahovic.com>

V Welcome, Adil and Miro. Thank you for joining us. We see Meteora as a studio where each individual is encouraged to pursue personal interests while engaging with the world as a “playground of plenty.” We inhabit a world saturated with data, clutter, noise, and distraction, yet rather than being overwhelmed, you suggest embracing the full spectrum of the internet. The studio becomes a search, a quest, a play within this abundance.

AB What is your take on play? I really like the term “playground.” Recently, I was at the Venice Biennale and was constantly bombarded by crises, crises, crises. Somehow, this has become the mode of operation for architecture—the idea that you need to justify your creation as a solution to a problem of the world. For us, the idea of the “playground” becomes very interesting because we don’t want to immediately discuss an alternative to the present or propose solutions. We want to stage these problems through architecture and add resolutions to discussions on global issues that oftentimes feel two-dimensional. The architectural project then would be articulated through a kind of personal attention to interests or fetishes, however still in conversation with the world. We want to talk about things that are present today, to take the world as it is and work with that as a playground. The concern is not about what is to come, but what would be an appropriate architectural artifact for today.

MR We love to play. Everyone today is playing everyone else — politicians, influencers, even AIs. The whole world’s pretending to be in beta version. Truth? That’s vintage. Nobody runs that version anymore. So we play — not to escape, but to stay in sync. We look, collect, remix, throw things around until something starts to make sense again, or at least looks like it does.

And AI is perfect for that. It never complains, and has no idea what it’s doing — but somehow keeps producing insights. That’s the studio atmosphere we love: not solemn, not heroic, but curious, elastic, slightly ridiculous. Play is not a distraction from reality — it’s the only way left to deal with it.

AB To extend this idea, we can perhaps think of two ideas of play. One is to chart out an area closed off from the world where you do whatever you want. The other—the one we’re more interested in—is where you still perform rituals but remain embedded within the world, in constant communication with it. Instead of creating a parallel reality, it is about making connections and playing with the things that are around. This engagement is with the histories, complexities, technologies, and paradoxes that surround us. This is why we work with super classical, almost archaic architectural terms like ichnographia, orthographia, and scenographia. The reason is to maintain continuities with the past, not to chart out a radically new space, but to play within the realm of existing things and update them with contemporary paradigms. If we just took them as they are, it would become a nostalgic practice. The idea is to take these inheritances, extend them, and open them up to be discussed freely. This creates a two-way contamination: histories are reactivated through contemporary technology, while our current tools and methods unfold themselves differently when viewed through the history of architecture.

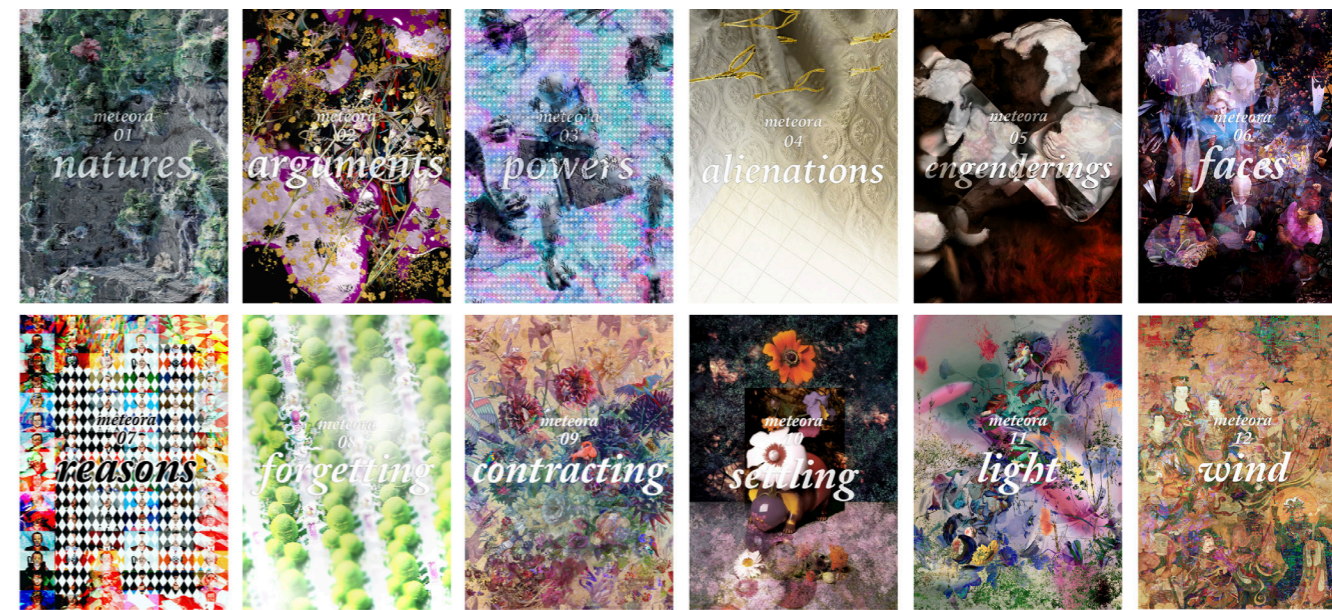
V Could you talk a bit about the concept and context of the studio, your methodology, and its philosophical grounding over the 12 past seasons?

AB For the architectural design studio, we construct the theatre of an architectural project. It’s clear this is not going to be built, but we construct a playground where we can still articulate objects and address all the notions an architectural project encompasses.

Ichnographia, orthographia, and scenographia are literally played out in the setup of the studio through three modules: ichnographia transforms into text, orthographia transforms into image, and scenographia transforms into model—the architectural model serving as the proportioning of the first two. These elements unfold cyclically together—though they occur sequentially, they’re always participating in a larger spiral through these three sensibilities.

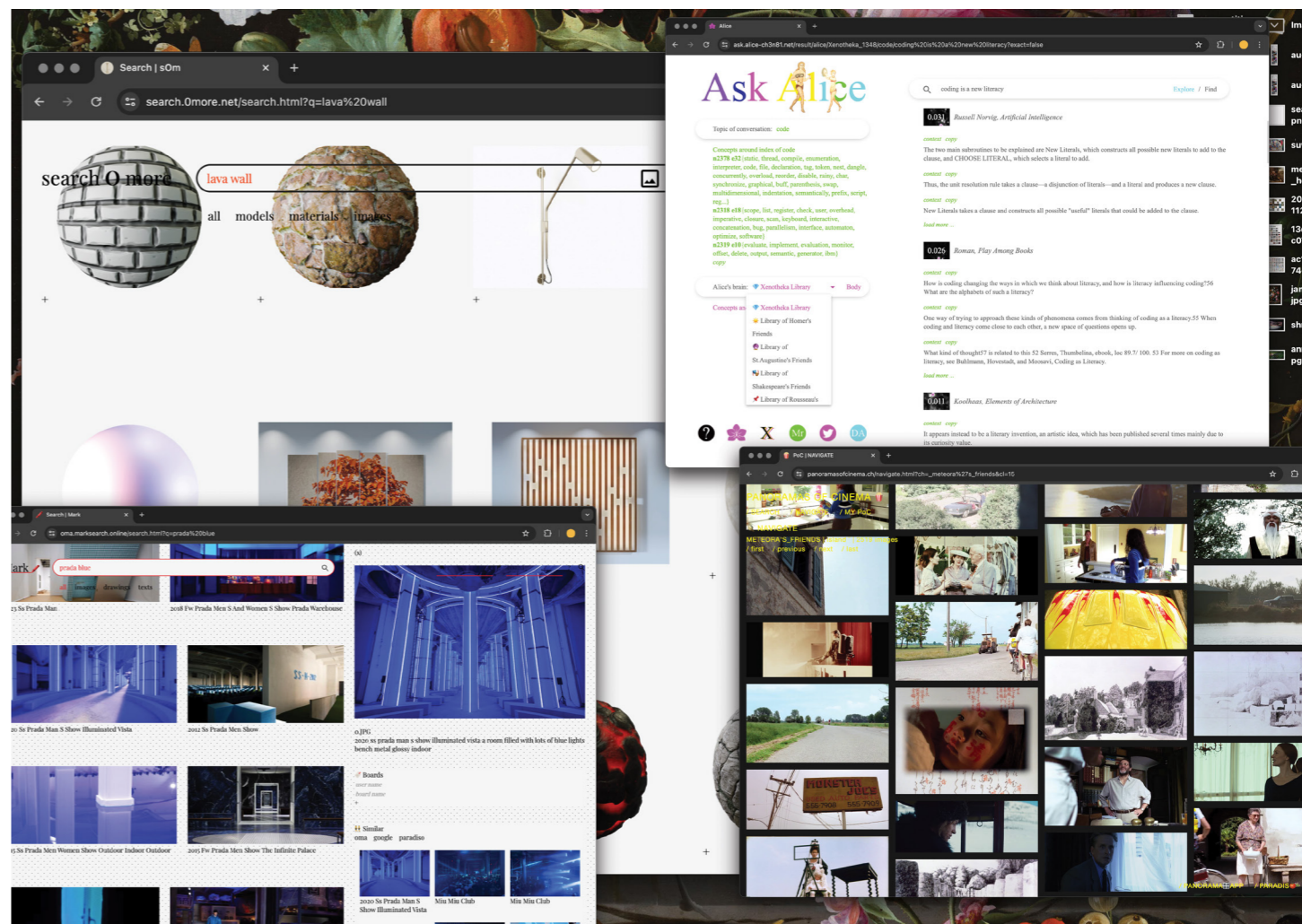
MR We always start with a triangle — topic, figure, site. Each corner has its own mood: text, image, model. Each one comes with its own AI— ChatGPT talks too much, Midjourney dreams in HD, Alice quotes philosophers at 3 a.m., Panoramas of Cinema insists everything is a movie, and Search0more just keeps searching.

The fun starts when they begin talking to each other — not politely, but like jazz musicians playing a theme they are not sure about. That’s when the automation becomes exploration, and the studio turns into a kind of architectural play of many intelligences.



Studio Meteora Posters for Season 1-12 (Images by Adil Bokhari)

The AI based Instruments of Studio Meteora: AskAlice by Miro Roman, Mark + Panoramas of Cinema by Jorge Orozco, Searchomere by Jorge Orozco, Miro Roman, Adil Bokhari.



V Within this freedom—this dissolution of bounds and rules, this liberation from judgment and sometimes from logic—how does one play in a realm where morals and reason are seemingly put aside?

MR It's not that there's no moral—it's that there are many. There's no single understanding of good or bad anymore; the compass keeps spinning, and that's fine. Different cultures, different people, different logics—everything overlaps, collides, contradicts. The world has gone quantum: everything is both on and off at the same time. You look at politicians, the news, the global stage—nobody really knows what's going on or what's right or wrong.

So the question becomes: how do you act in that mess? How do you move as a young person entering this setup? For us, architecture is a way to practice exactly that—to learn how not to judge too quickly. Don't moralise, don't analyse—just play around, connect things, see how they behave together. The challenge then isn't about finding values, but about building them—carefully, contextually—by collecting, composing, and staging the right constellation of objects.

AB It's an initial provocation. What if we lose judgement for a little bit? What if we rehearse modes of expression beforehand? What if we try to communicate across differences that might be very superficial? Through that, we open up new angles, new perspectives. Coming back to the playground, we don't have many rules for our games, but we have rituals. One of the main rituals is to cultivate different manners of conversation—ways of expressing, articulating, pronouncing—while suspending judgement for a little bit.

MR And we do this in a way that is contemporary, in sync with what's happening in the world. We like social media, we like movies, we like books, we like videos, pop culture, high culture. When all of this is in, how does one play with all this stuff? You have to get a feeling that you live in the 21st century and use things in your environment which are new and resonate.

AB And of course, for that it helps that the conversation involves not just one person, but myself, Miro, and Jorge. We have three different angles on life—different fetishes, different interests, different ideas of what architecture should look like and what it should be addressing. So together with the students, we cultivate a space where all these fetishes can play out without judgement.

MR The question is: how do we tell stories now? Because, honestly, most of what passes for storytelling today feels like déjà vu on autoplay. We have these seven scripts that everyone keeps recycling—save the planet, be a good feminist, rescue the refugees, hit carbon zero, heal, care, repeat. All noble, all necessary, but also... exhausting. It's like watching the same moral PowerPoint over and over. And this is so boring! What we're after is something riskier, funnier, more specific—a story that doesn't know yet if it's right or wrong, but at least dares to sound alive. We want to go beyond common sense.

AB Somehow there seem to be only two angles—either you're against something or with something. Either technology is the savior of mankind or it's the harbinger of singularity, the terminator. What we want to do is hold these things in balance, with humour. Technology is both, and it's always both, with all complex issues. To argue for one side is, for us, killing the whole point of any conversation. This is again what we mean by judging too quickly.

MR We want to create an environment that's open, funny, and full of connections—not one obsessed with being polite and nice. It's about challenge, not charm. I get nervous when everything is too polite; it means nothing's really happening. The world has become so beige. Why not scratch the surface a bit? Be slightly unpleasant. Trigger something. That's when things start to get interesting.

AB We're not interested in answers. We're interested in questions. Simple as that. All these responses to crises give you answers: simple, uncomplicated, heavily judgemental, nullifying their complexity they're trying to answer questions that nobody's asking. For example, at the Venice Biennale, when you come out of a pavilion, you're left with zero questions.

To be left with questions is way more important than to be left with answers.

1001 in 1 at Zentralwäscherei in Zurich
Project by Meteora++ Agostino Nickl, Miro Roman, Adil Bokhari
Image by Anna Maysuk



The new light edition of 1001
Project by Meteora++ Agostino Nickl, Miro Roman, Adil Bokhari



V Speaking of exhibitions, we wanted to now talk about your project “1001 Nights”, where, in your words, “1001 in 1 is an exhibition that plays with big data as if it were Big Macs. It writes using ChatGPT and renders with Midjourney. It moves as fast as fast food and feels as light as Coca-Cola light.” Could you tell us more about your approach to media as well as how databases, general and specific, play a role in this work?

AB With “1001 in 1,” we started thinking about the massive corpus of large language models and how we have other artefacts that work in a similar manner—that can put a huge repository of information into an object. “1001 Nights” is one of those books, like the Bible or the Iliad. These books collect stories from everywhere and somehow consolidate them by introducing a figure, a location, someone who talks, someone who discusses. Suddenly, it becomes a full theatre through which you collect stories from everywhere and yet condense them into an artefact that can travel and acquire its own life.

MR What's also specific with these books is that they don't have an original. Through time, “1001 Nights” had different numbers of nights in different editions. It's a collection of stories from Egypt, India, Greece, everywhere—an immense intercultural mixture.

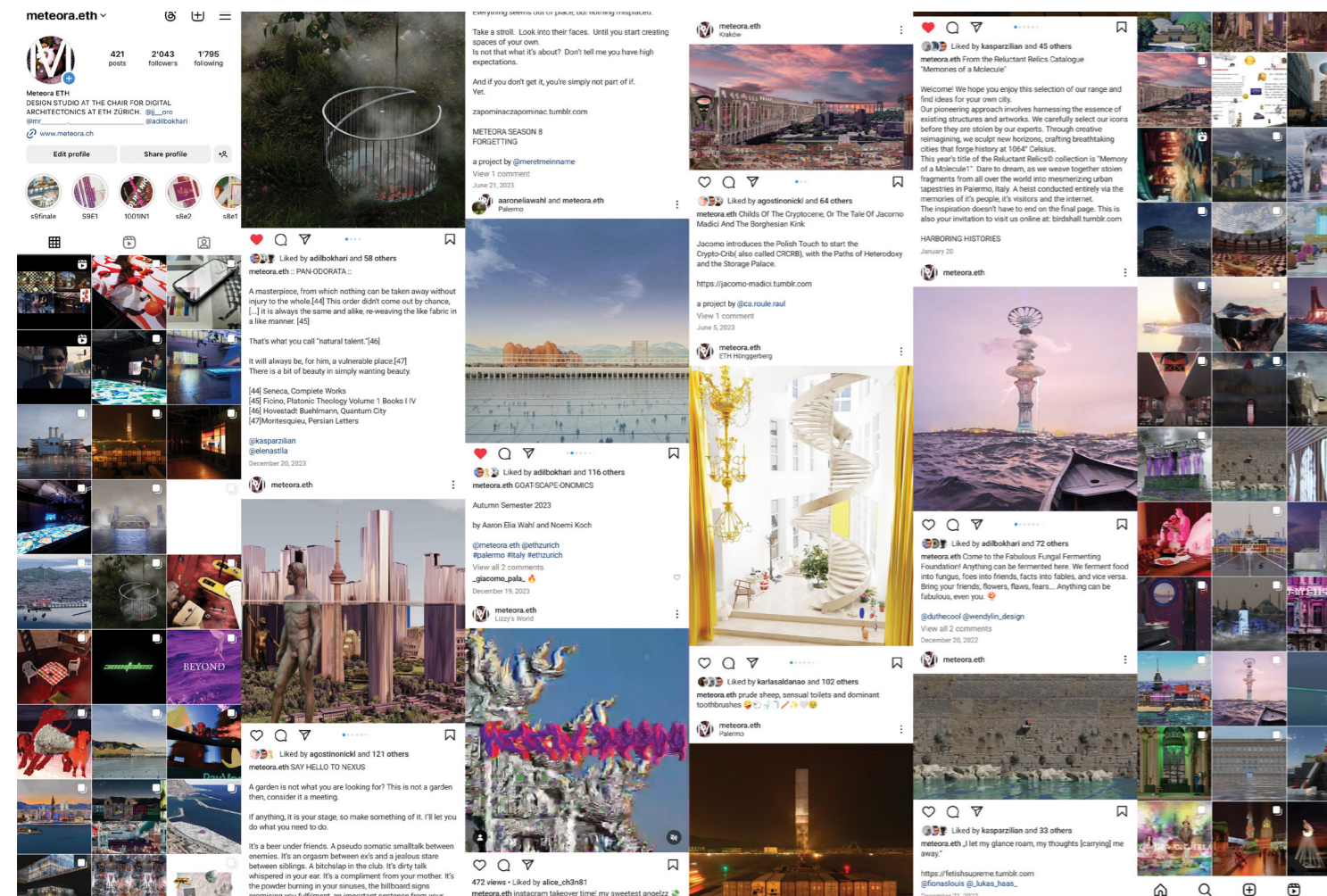
AB We used it as a database, as a given, thinking about how to create a scenography for each of the nights. We got lists of our favourite authors, movie directors, and characters, and each story was rewritten with a new figure, in the style of a particular author, rendered through a particular director with a particular artist.

MR For the event, we built a small theatre of synchronisation: two screens, one a dinner table, the other a window to the outside world. Music played in sync, scenes kept changing—every twenty seconds a new song, a new table, a new window, a new flower, a new object. It felt like reality in shuffle mode.

AB We also played with the temporal aspect of the stories, cycling through days and nights. We took a version of 1001 Nights that had 281 stories. After every cycle we would then have a sudden moment when all of the stories that were told would cycle through and then we would enter another day. The exhibition was only on for one night, which was also important.

We need impolite AIs whose biases we can embrace and talk to as characters...

Circulating Stories of Studio Meteora on Instagram



- V You work intensely with the digital, simulated, and synthetic. How do you perceive the relationship between fiction and reality? Do they fuse into one?
- AB The way it feels today is that all times, histories, and stories are collapsing into one. Large language models contain everything from all time that has survived. You look at the news, and it feels generated. The images, the headlines, all. It feels like to grasp the truth is not in one's reach, but maybe that's how it has always been...
- MR Compared to reality, fiction is easy. Reality is the difficult one — it pretends to be stable. But everything we call “real” stands on stories anyway. The nation-state is a great example: a myth dressed as paperwork. We all agree to believe in it, so it becomes real. Is it fiction? Yes. Is it real? Also yes. The same goes for religion, science, money — all built on carefully maintained consistencies. What AI allows is to play with those consistencies, to engineer new kinds of believable fictions — synthetic myths that wobble just enough to reveal how fragile “reality” has always been.
- AB We're most interested in a kind of media agnosticism — the ability to stitch stories across media, from an Instagram post to a high-resolution rendering to a beautifully written text to emojis. The media isn't what holds the story together; instead the project hosts and renders through a plethora of formats and colours.
- V Being at the forefront of this research, where do you see the future of intelligence going?
- MR Politically, it's very important that we have as many of these AIs as possible. For every ChatGPT there must also be a DeepSeek: a model from the East, trained on a different canon and cadence. And beyond that, we need one from the North, one that sings, one that listens to plants, one that is mine, one yours... Intelligence must multiply, must coexist. Not in a cloud of uniformity, but in a forest of difference. Then you can talk to them, and they will show you the world from their perspective.
- AB A huge push nowadays is for equity in the databases. We want to embrace bias. We want to be able to talk to things with a certain character. If it becomes characterless, if it becomes truly equitable, in itself an impossibility, then AI will be in the place of the judge, calling the shots based on an idea of truth that doesn't exist. Much more troublesome, it would concentrate power in the hands of the few who have the resources to train and develop these models.
If anyone claims an AI is neutral, that is an imperialist gesture.
- MR This is why these AIs are becoming “polite” when it comes to handling complex questions and situations. If ChatGPT says something “wrong” about a culture or a subculture, it immediately reveals a bias, and so they clamp it down and reinforce the model so it avoids these questions. They become neutral agents that refuse to dwell on risky questions, giving answers devoid of any character, any bias — a feigned neutrality, a feigned objectivity. We need impolite AIs whose biases we can embrace and talk to as characters, especially now as we can slowly even move towards training personal models with dedicated databases, as we do in Meteora.
- MR What we are saying is that craftsmanship — of writing, rendering, solving math problems — will all be replaced by AIs. What is left over is exactly to have an attitude, to be able to tell a certain story which goes beyond the AI, which goes beyond the common sense of a certain setup. Sophistication is no longer in the sentence but in the arrangement of the systems and data that constitute the world around it. That is what we have to juggle with.
- AB Whenever these technological shifts happen, somewhat paradoxically, age-old questions become interesting again. We step into a different world in terms of craft, in terms of virtuosity, in terms of expertise and a new mechanics of writing a nice essay or designing a rendering come to the fore. But the fundamental questions remain — the inexhaustible ideas of love, humour, joy, evil, terror. These remain as fresh as they've always been; a fertile playground where architecture can live and talk.