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Making Energy Visible to Open at the Center for Architecture

October 3, 2025–March 28, 2026

This exhibition will bring together interpretations, representations, and visualizations of energy across different mediums of architecture.

September 23, 2025, New York, NY – The Center for Architecture is excited to present *Making Energy Visible*, an exhibition curated by architect and architectural historian **Tülay Atak** that considers how energy has come to be incorporated in architecture and design and is seeking imagination in this critical moment of change. While many national and international organizations highlight the significance of energy in addressing climate change and sustainable development, energy remains one aspect of the modern world that is obscure. Atak's presentation brings an urgency to understanding energy and its implications in every field, including architecture, and to articulating what role practitioners will have in the transition to clean and affordable energy.

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The field of design and design education have traditionally been concerned with conservation strategies, yet architecture also plays a critical role in creating the representation of electricity and power grids, in monumentalizing conversion, and in giving form to desires and needs. Acknowledging the importance of decarbonization and the role of technology in finding solutions, the exhibition seeks to explore how we can understand energy beyond quick fixes. This perspective informed a previous iteration of the exhibition presented during the Vienna Climate Biennale in May 2024 at the Angewandte Interdisciplinary Lab (AIL). For the show's second run, the curator has gathered new examples of how US-based architects are approaching the future of energy within their practice.

"Making Energy Visible is based on the premise that architecture and design are instrumental in thinking about how we know and understand energy. By moving energy out of the realm of efficiency metrics, the exhibition aims to expand architectural discourse beyond technical sustainability toward questions of visibility and representation," said curator **Tülay Atak**. "The categories and selected historical examples demonstrate that architecture is entangled with energy across several scales, from that of the body to that of infrastructure, and that the agency of architectural imagination lies in how we understand, live with, and envision the futures of our energy systems."

The exhibition brings together histories of energy outlined in six timelines, each focusing on different infrastructural and environmental projects. The timelines are created from MDF (medium-density fiberboard), museum board, and paper, intentionally avoiding any use of plastic. The six timelines are:

Bodies at Work begins with early definitions of energy as the capacity to do work and concludes with 19th-century definitions of metabolic energy in relation to developments in medicine, chemistry, and biology. Referencing imagery and texts from various cultures, this timeline unpacks the landscape of "energy" as a fundamental concept.

Sources of Energy explores the history of sources and their geographies, stemming from the idea that there are two main sources of energy on Earth: solar and fossil fuels. The timeline frames energy as part of a long material and cultural history, entwined in different traditions and landforms, prompting visitors to think about their current energy systems differently.

Conserving Energy explores models for reducing reliance on power and fossil fuels, including the history of architecture's role as a means of conservation. This section ranges from early alternative systems like wind-powered farms to the 1970s Earthship houses that utilized recycled materials and solar energy.

Systems of Conversion looks at the steam engine, hydraulic presses, and offshore wind farms, unpacking how the drive to energy and conversion systems led to larger scales of construction. While projects such as dams, oil fields, and gas plants have been

seen as engineering feats, they are also architectural, and impact the scale and the imagery of architecture as a world-building project.

Distribution of Power considers the introduction of electricity as an energy carrier and its distribution through power grids. Though historically tied to fossil fuels, electricity is now increasingly reliant on renewable sources, requiring Smart Grid systems and new storage solutions. This timeline showcases images of maps of electric grids and gas pipelines, electricity distribution networks, and an example of a nuclear power plant.

Consumption to Expenditure traces the evolving role of electricity and energy in daily life, from its early imagery representing entertainment (such as Coney Island's electric tower and the Palace of Illusions in Paris) to the rise of individual appliances and electric vehicles. This section highlights how new technologies have reshaped the ways we consume and perceive energy, including a glimpse of present and future AI data centers.

Alongside these timelines, the exhibition will display 12 contemporary works by 11 invited participating teams and individuals, largely New York City-based, to investigate how architecture plays a role in thinking about energy today: **Karen Bausman**, **Lawrence Blough** and **Simone Giostra**, **Exikon** (Bernhard Sommer and Malgorzata Nawara Sommer), **Judith Fegerl**, **Mathias Kessler**, **CASE** (Fengqi Li, Alexandros Tsamis, Kristen R. Schell), **Mosbach Paysagistes**, **Op.AL** (Jennifer Birkeland and Jonathan Scelsa), **Jose Sanchez**, **Emmet Sutton**, and **Michael Wang**.

Individually and collectively, the contemporary projects speak to the core timeline subjects while blurring the lines of the categories. Architect and game designer **Jose Sanchez**'s "Block'hood" is a city-building simulator video game, developed with the Boys & Girls Clubs of America in Detroit, that illustrates architectural and ecological thinking to non-expert audiences. The game's interactive component will be accompanied by a video demonstrating the steps to play. Photography by **Mathias Kessler**, a New-York based artist who critiques and reimagines the concept of nature, will illustrate how energy has "scarred" the earth with interpretations that are both humorous, dramatic, and visually stunning. Sited at the base of the gallery's stairway, an interactive installation titled "Probe" by Vienna-based artist **Judith Fegerl** will respond to the movement of visitors passing through the space, a reminder that our bodies generate energy.

"*Making Energy Visible* is based on the premise that architecture and design are instrumental in thinking about how we know and understand energy. These fields bring out the agency of architectural imagination in a world undergoing change," shared Atak. "We are currently facing multifaceted issues around energy. There is not one solution that would fit all circumstances, and every new and old energy system has to be considered across several scales, and in relation to the environment as well as social values."

With graphic design by **Annija Ceska** and exhibition design by **Clouds Architecture Office,** *Making Energy Visible* will be on view from October 3–March 28. Lectures and workshops in

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tandem with the exhibition are currently taking shape—please refer to the Center for Architecture calendar for updates.

Exhibition Opening

Please join us October 3, 5–8pm, at the Center for Architecture, 536 LaGuardia Place, New York, NY for an opening reception. From 4–5pm, members of the press are invited to a VIP tour with the curators (RSVP to lkim@aiany.org).

About the Curator

Tülay Atak is an architect, an architectural historian, and theorist. Her current research focuses on the intersection between environmental history and architecture. She curated the exhibition *Energy at the Threshold of the Visible World* at the Angewandte Interdisciplinary Lab in Vienna (2024). Her co-edited book, *Pedagogical Experiments in Architecture for a Changing Climate* (Routledge, 2024), brings together essays by architectural educators addressing climate crisis. She received her Bachelor's degree at METU in Ankara, Turkey, and pursued her PhD at UCLA with the dissertation "Byzantine Modern: Displacements of Modernism in Istanbul." In addition to her dissertation, she co-authored the book, *Fragile City* (MER, 2016). Her scholarship has appeared in journals and edited volumes such as *Architectural Theory Review, OASE, Future Anterior, PMLA, JAE, JSAH*, *Invention d'une Architecte,* and *Construction Savante*. She has taught at SCI-Arc, Cornell, RISD, Cooper Union, RPI, and Pratt Institute, and is currently teaching at the Angewandte in Vienna.

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Graham Foundation

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NYC Cultural Affairs

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Pratt School of Architecture

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Federal Ministry
Housing, Arts, Culture,
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Republic of Austria

About the Center for Architecture

The Center for Architecture, founded in 2003 by its partner AIA New York, engages local and international audiences with the value, impact, and wonder of architecture. Located in the heart of Greenwich Village, the Center for Architecture is also the home of the American Institute of Architects New York (AIANY), which cultivates an open, adept, and future-forward architectural community. Together, we advance the value and practice of architecture to promote just and sustainable communities.

Through exhibitions, public programs, educational initiatives, and our Archtober festival and platform, the Center for Architecture brings together architects, designers, students, and the public to foster collaboration within the design community while creating accessible opportunities for the public to experience and learn about architecture. Whether you're an industry professional, a curious visitor, or a student exploring the field, the Center for Architecture offers a space for connection, creativity, and critical conversation—empowering everyone to engage with the transformative power of architecture. centerforarchitecture.org

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