



**University of Brighton**

# CHARLES HOLLAND

## ORIGINS

Investigating the myths surrounding the origins of classical architecture and its teaching

# RESEARCH OUTPUT



**Origins of Construction**  
Central panel installed in the  
Entrance Hall, Burlington House  
Royal Academy of Arts

**Origins** was an exhibition at the Royal Academy of Arts (RA) that ran from October 2016 to January 2017. It took the form of a series of installations exploring the 'myths' surrounding the origins of classical architecture and occupied a number of prominent sites within the main public and circulation spaces of the gallery.

The exhibition was undertaken by Charles Holland in collaboration with Ordinary Architecture co-founder and partner Elly Ward and the RA curators Kate Goodwin and Owen Hopkins. It claimed spaces of specific paintings, which were removed for cleaning and restoration work, and reflected on both the content of the absent artworks and their relationship to the pedagogic role of the RA in developing British architecture.

Exploring specific paintings, sculptures and architectural manuscripts within the RA's collection, it comprised a series of five separate but conceptually related installations. Each of them focused on a specific aspect of architectural theory. The five themes were: On Construction, On Space, On Shelter, On Decoration and On Precedent.

The elements were located in a number of spaces in Burlington House including the entrance foyer, grand staircase, Norman Shaw staircase, Sackler Gallery and RA Library. In addition, a suite of drawings describing the installation was installed in the Architecture Gallery at the RA. The column 'The Grocer's Order' is now held in the permanent collection.

# Origins



**Origins of Space**  
Installed in the Grand Stair  
Burlington House  
Royal Academy of Arts

# Origins



**Origins of Shelter**

Installed in the Norman Shaw Stair  
Burlington House  
Royal Academy of Arts

# Origins



**Origins of Decoration**  
Installed in the Sackler Gallery  
Burlington House  
Royal Academy of Arts

# Origins



**Origins of Precedent**  
Installed in the Library  
Burlington House  
Royal Academy of Arts

# Origins



**The Greengrocer's Order**

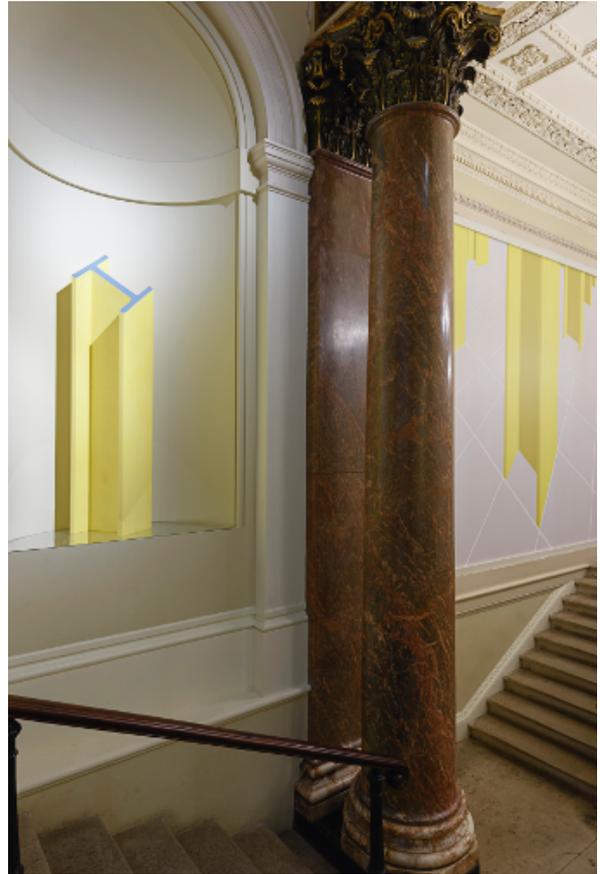
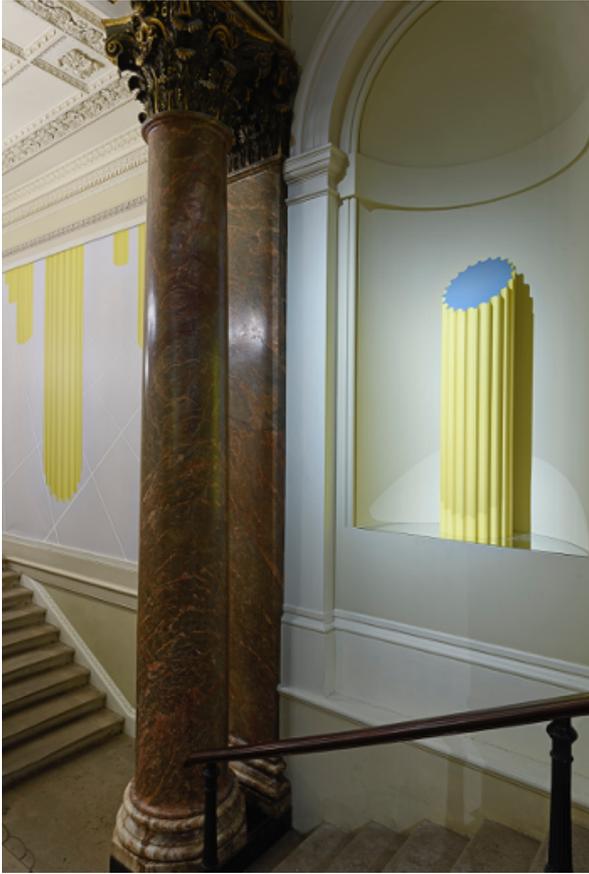
Photograph displayed in the  
Architecture Gallery  
Burlington House  
Royal Academy of Arts

# Origins



**Origins of Construction**  
Details of individual elements  
Installed in the Entrance Hall Burlington House  
Royal Academy of Arts

# Origins



**Origins of Space**  
Details of wall paintings and two  
plastered foam columns  
Burlington House  
Royal Academy of Arts

# RESEARCH QUESTIONS



## The Greengrocer's Order

**Through an investigation of the 'origin myths' of classical architecture the research develops contemporary mythologies that inform current architectural language.**

Principal questions posed by the exhibition are:

- What role have origin or foundation myths played in the evolution of architecture?
- What myths might inform a contemporary language of building and its forms?
- How does an understanding of the role of myth in the development of architectural form historically help to develop meaningful form today?

In understanding the role of myth, there are specific, underlying questions:

- What is the role of history or historical sources in contemporary architecture?
- How do we as architects justify design choices in relation to architectural language?
- In an era of stylistic pluralism, what is the relevance of origin myths of architecture?
- What does it mean to speak of myth in relation to the design process?
- Is it possible to evolve a contemporary origin myth for architecture?

# RESEARCH CONTEXT



**The Primitive Hut from *Essay on Architecture***  
Frontispiece  
Marc Antoine Laugier, RA Collection

**The principal research context for *Origins* is the 'origin' or 'foundation' myths of architecture and how these are incorporated and expressed through architectural language and symbolism.**

Specifically, the research offers a reflection on a number of competing historical origin myths and the role these have played in the development of classical architectural language. It also offers a reinterpretation of these myths into a contemporary symbolic language of architecture.

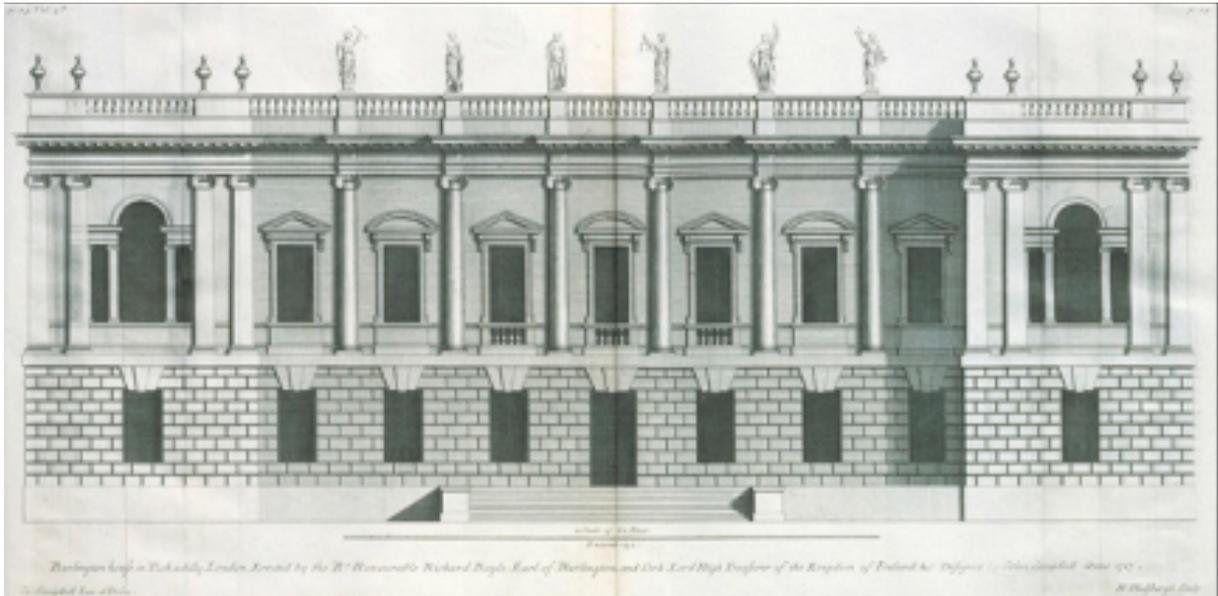
In recent years, there has been a renewed interest amongst architects in classicism as well as the role of history and historical precedent. This is evidenced in recent exhibitions such as the 2017-18 Chicago Biennale *Make New History* and The Architecture Foundation's 'Metamorphoses: Classical Currents in Contemporary Practice' symposium, also in 2018. *Origins* relates to this contemporary interest by focusing on the 'foundation myths' of classical architecture as well as proposing a contemporary and personal version that informed the design of a new symbolic language.

The context for *Origins* is both formal and conceptual, aiming to reflect on the act of design, the development of theoretical justifications for design choices and the framing of architectural language within a discourse concerning the origins of construction.

The exhibition and its subsequent research outputs aim to question the validity of a search for origins, focusing instead on the role of such myths. The research is concerned with an overall operating methodology - the impulse to find causes and justify architectural language according to an invented mythology - rather than the specific authenticity of any single one.

In this sense, the research context is the current orthodoxies of the sources of classical architecture and the validity of historic precedent as a generator of form.

# RESEARCH PROCESS



**Burlington House**  
Main facade, as designed  
by Colen Campbell in 1717  
Engraving from *Vitruvius  
Britannicus*, 1725

**The exhibition developed through an analysis of the pedagogic role of the Royal Academy in the historical evolution of classical architecture in the UK.**

This influence was examined via a number of key elements including:

- The architecture of the RA itself and the incorporation of art and sculpture into the fabric of the building that served an educational or polemical purpose
- The RA's library and permanent collection
- The RA's historic teaching and exhibition programme.

Permanent sculptures and paintings within the RA were identified as the site of temporary installations which related both to the allegorical content of the work and their placement within the building's interior and circulation system.

Individual elements were developed with the Royal Academy's curatorial team and conservators, and a selection of original source material in the form of drawings and volumes in the RA's collection was included as part of the exhibition.



(top) *The Glorification of Inigo Jones*  
William Kent



(bottom) *Design from The Elements of Art*  
1778-80, Angelica Kauffman

## THE ARCHITECTURE OF THE RA

The format, siting and sequence of the exhibition were developed initially through research into the architecture and spaces of the RA itself. This included a study of the evolution of the buildings inhabited by the RA from the early eighteenth century to the present day as well as the inclusion of paintings and sculptures within the building's fabric.

The role of Burlington House - the RA's original home - in the promotion of Palladian architecture in England and the artistic and intellectual circle surrounding Richard Boyle, the third Lord Burlington, who commissioned it, formed an initial part of the research process.

The promotion of classical architecture via translation of work such as Palladio's *The Four Books of Architecture* as well as later treatises, including Colen Campbell's *Vitruvius Britannicus*, was examined in terms of the manner in which specific sources were used to develop a series of allegorical stories that served as the origin myths of architecture. The development and mutation of these myths were explored and the manner in which key motifs were established and elaborated on.

## ART AND ARCHITECTURE

A number of permanent sculptures and paintings within the RA were identified as having performed a strategic role in the development and promotion of specific forms of architectural style. These paintings and artworks form part of a permanent 'treatise' speculating on the origin of painting, architecture and the relationship of both to the arts in general.

The works include Benjamin West's *The Graces Unveiling Nature* and Angelica Kauffman's *The Elements of Art*, both in the entrance hall of Burlington House, and William Kent's *The Glorification of Inigo Jones*, as well as sculptures by Thomas Gainsborough and JMW Turner.

These works were analysed in relation to the RA's role in the development of architecture and the arts, its creation of a 'canon' of approved masters and masterpieces and the integration of this into a linear narrative of artistic development.

The spatial role of the artworks - the way that they are integrated into the fabric of the building and its circulation - then informed the development of their temporary replacements as part of the *Origins* exhibition.



### The Royal Academy's Library and Permanent Collection

Beyond the physical expression of architectural theory, a number of important works within the RA's library were explored including architectural treatises by Vitruvius, Sebastiana Serlio, Leon Battista Alberti, Andrea Palladio and William Chambers.

Holland worked with the RA's curatorial team and conservation team comparing examples of historical and contemporary treatises, texts and drawings against architectural trends and developments. A selection of original source material, in the form of drawings and volumes in the RA's collection, were studied as part of the development of the project and were included as part of the exhibition.

A number of books within the RA's collection were interpreted as a series of competing and colliding 'origin myths'. These range from a sixteenth-century edition of the treatise by ancient Roman architect, Vitruvius, to works by contemporary architectural theorists such as Joseph Rykwert (b. 1926).

Research into the RA's library helped develop the individual sections of the exhibition. This process focused on the role of myth, specifically the idea of the origin or foundation myth in the evolution of specific aspects of architecture such as construction principles, materials, space and decoration.

Beyond the immediate collection, further works by a number of architectural theorists were identified as relevant to the development of various origin myths of architecture. The research examined the manner in which these origin myths framed certain forms of architectural expression, particularly the translation of constructional elements into a language of three-dimensional symbolism. Competing or parallel myths were explored to develop an understanding of the role of myth rather than the substantive 'truth' of any specific example. The role of drawing and projection became key and specific forms of representation - the use of perspective or orthographic projection for instance - employed in the development of new forms.

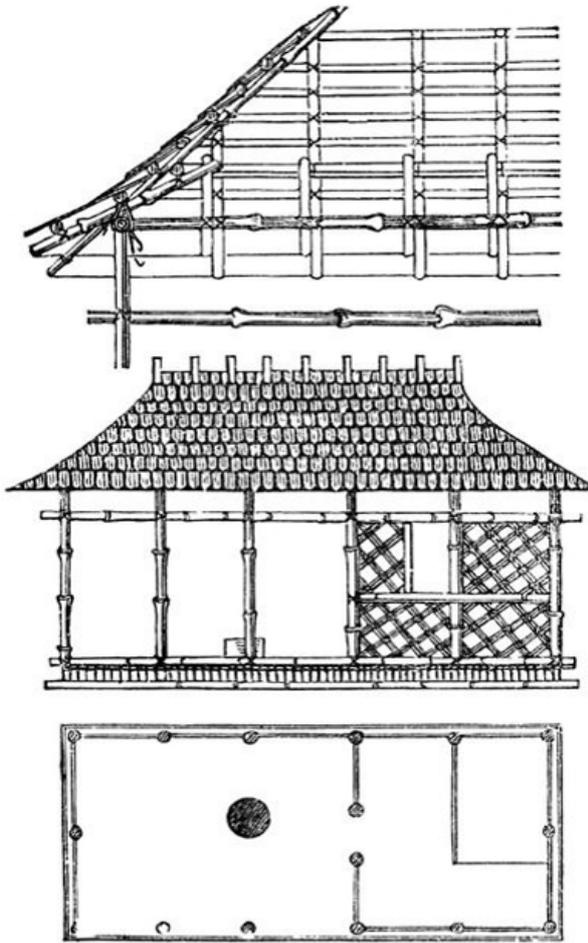
Differing theories of the origins of architectural language were identified in the writings of Siegfried Gideon (*Space, Time and Architecture*) and Colin Rowe (*Collage City*). This led to the identification of the key five elements - Construction, Space, Shelter, Decoration and Precedent - that form the theoretical armature of the exhibition.

The exhibition was however, less concerned with documenting this historical lineage than in working



(top) *The Four Books of Architecture*  
Page from Book 3,  
Andrea Palladio, RA Collection

(bottom) *Space Time and Architecture*  
Cover image  
Siegfried Gideon, RA Collection



*The Four Elements of Architecture*  
Illustration  
Gottfried Semper, RA Collection

within the methodology of origin myths to develop a contemporary architectural language. Drawing on the structural role of illustrations, texts, paintings and sculptures in the development of architectural language, the exhibition comprised a number of objects and installations that formed part of an emerging contemporary language of architectural symbolism.

Historic techniques were utilised to form new objects and elements of architecture. The installation as a whole formed a contemporary treatise on the potential role of symbolism and decoration in architecture. Rather than borrowing or reviving specific forms of decoration or symbolism from classicism - for instance an 'egg and dart' moulding or a Corinthian capital - *Origins* revisited the operating mythologies behind such forms and the stories told to support them in order to invent new ones. Thus a contemporary language of construction was put forward that drew on the historical role of origin myths. Through this, *Origins* developed a formative language of architecture that could give meaning to contemporary construction techniques in the same way that the origin myths for timber frame construction were developed by writers such as Marc Antoine Laugier.

## MATERIAL RESEARCH

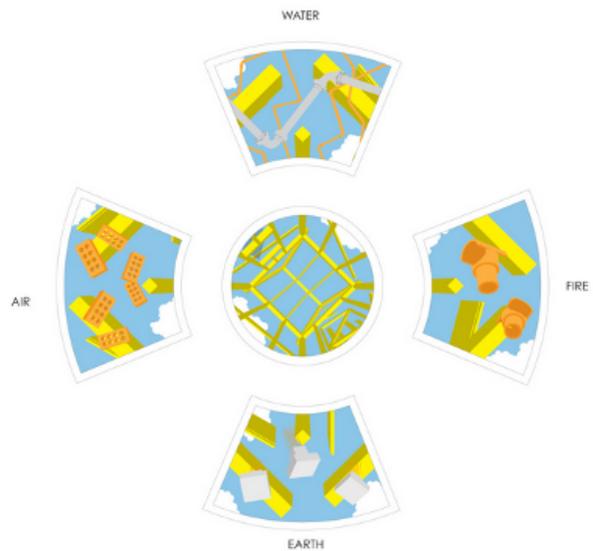
A further part of the process related to research into material techniques and formal language. The exhibition consisted of a number of fabricated, sculptural elements involving different materials.

Each of these techniques was the subject of research through material experimentation coupled with an emerging aesthetic that combined Pop Art references with classical sources.

# RESEARCH INSIGHTS



(above left) **Development sketch for On Construction**



(above right) **Final artwork for On Construction**

## HISTORICAL PRECEDENT

The research draws on a recent revival of interest in historic architectural precedent to develop new forms of decoration and symbolism. Rather than revisit specific forms of historic decoration – as much contemporary neo-classicism or ‘traditional’ architecture does – the project revisits the modes through which those forms of decoration and symbolism were developed.

Specifically, it re-examines the role of mythology and allegory in the origins of construction. By drawing on both the collection of the RA as well as the pedagogic role of the institution in the development of classical architecture, the project offers a contemporary updating of the role of the architectural treatise and the ‘origin myth’ of construction.

The specific and complex relationship of architectural theory – in the form of the treatise – and the buildings of the Royal Academy, become the site for the installation. For instance, the RA includes a copy of the first English translation of Andrea Palladio’s *The Four Books of Architecture* within its library. The building in which the RA’s library is housed, Burlington House, is itself an example of English ‘Palladianism’, commissioned by Lord Burlington to exemplify and propagate a new style of architecture. Within the fabric of the building, wall paintings and ceiling paintings – most notably by Lord Burlington’s collaborator William Kent – explain the origins of Palladian architecture via allegorical representations of primitive construction.

The influence of the Royal Academy itself is also explored through the exhibition. The RA's multi-layered historic role – as a patron of art and architecture, a teaching institution, a disseminator and exhibitor and as a built form of architectural treatise – provided an opportunity to examine the various ways in which architectural legitimacy is established. As a non-teaching institution today, the RA is less concerned with the promotion of specific approaches to architecture, acting more as a repository of historic taste. The *Origins* exhibition took an unusual form by occupying the public circulation and gathering spaces in Burlington House rather than more conventional display space. The exhibition took the opportunity of the temporary removal of a number of artworks intrinsic to the fabric of the RA, to situate a contemporary reflection on this historic role and its current relevance.

The exhibition can be seen as a deliberate subversion of the values of the RA itself. The development of contemporary mythologies as well as a reflection on the role of mythology deliberately undermines claims to truth by any one. *Origins* was concerned with the role of mythology rather than the content of any one myth. It thus reflected on the RA's historic role in establishing legitimacy and establishing the virtues of specific styles, exposing the mechanisms of architectural propaganda. The 'treatise' was deliberately chosen as a form of architectural propaganda. *Origins* was a treatise in six parts, a series of speculative 'chapters' that colonised the built treatise of Burlington House.

By developing and proposing a contemporary architectural language through the use of origin and foundation myths, *Origins* critically reflected on the RA's historic role. *Origins* was not an exhibition in the traditional sense, but a re-reading of how architectural legitimacy is conferred. The current role of the RA is less emphatic than its historic one with its architecture programme largely concerned with retrospectives of established names. *Origins* aimed to insert a more radical agenda into the institution and its programme of large-scale, popular exhibitions.

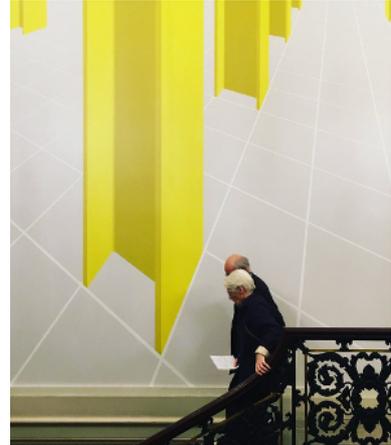
The research installation relates these multiple methodologies to the realities of contemporary construction along with a personal and autobiographical mythology to explore the possibilities for a meaningful contemporary language of decoration. By temporarily replacing specific works of art within the RA, it offers both a 'deconstruction' of their role within the evolution of classical architecture – their role as a form of propaganda in effect – and an updating of them to evolve contemporary forms of decorative symbolism.

## MULTI-DISCIPLINARY DESIGN

The installation is multi-disciplinary, involving the use of sculpture, drawing, painting and assemblage to develop architectural elements.

These modes of composition and material exploration allow for an investigation of form at the level of symbolism, drawing on both historic architectural sources and more contemporary fine art techniques.

This process refers directly to the historical methodology of artists such as William Kent, using both painting and writing to mythologise architectural language. It also helps the development of that language, employing specific artistic techniques to develop new forms. In this case,



(top) Detail of wall painting #1 for On Space

(bottom) Detail of digital print on faux-leather for On Shelter

forms of composition exploring projection drawn from historic sources are combined with contemporary artistic techniques such as flattening, exaggeration, scalar manipulation and collage.

The research also revealed insights into the development of a design language that drew on more recent strands in art and architecture. Specifically, the Pop Art approaches of artists such as Andy Warhol, Roy Lichtenstein and Claes Oldenburg was used as a starting point for developing a contemporary representational language of architecture. This language is inevitably figurative - referring directly to existing elements of construction as well as recognisable objects - whilst containing aspects of abstraction and translation. The deadpan quality of Pop Art drawing was useful in its relation to the technical forms of architectural drawing whilst also allowing a reflection upon those techniques. Graphic and two-dimensional illustration from Pop Art to the present, evident in the work of artists including Allan D'Arcangelo, Julian Opie, Patrick Caulfield was important in establishing representational techniques related to traditional architectural ones that were also capable of conveying contemporary and emotional content.

Inevitably in using Pop Art-inflected drawing and sculpture to reflect on historical architectural motifs, references to Post Modernism are unavoidable, particularly in the work of architects such as Robert Venturi and Charles Moore. However, whilst drawing on early, US-based Post Modernism, *Origins* aimed to evolve new forms of ornamental, decorative content over the representation of existing content. It referred to some of the techniques of Post Modernism such as flattening, extrusion and exaggeration and at the same time sought to develop strategies for new forms of decoration.

If much Post Modernism involved the re-representation of historical forms of decoration, the research undertaken through *Origins* was to simultaneously look further back - at the origins of that decoration - and further forward to develop new content. The exhibition was less concerned with specific forms of decoration than the myths and stories underpinning them and in utilising the structure of such stories to form new architectural language. As such, the exhibition undoubtedly draws on Post Modern architecture whilst developing techniques to evolve beyond it. It is important to note that the formal content of the exhibition is not exclusively concerned with classical architecture. 'The Origins of Construction' for example - a series of ceiling paintings in the main entrance hall of Burlington House - draws on a contemporary and everyday language of construction - air bricks, mechanical and electrical plant - to develop allegorical architectural meaning. The references to classical architecture in this instance rely on the structure of the original ceiling paintings and their use of allegory rather than the forms represented in them.

## MYTHOLOGY AND ALLEGORY

Foundation myths are fundamental to the evolution of architectural styles and provide allegorical frameworks through which to understand the meaning and symbolism of decorative elements.

In developing a contemporary architectural treatise that uses personal allegory to develop new forms, the exhibition explores the role of myth in the creative process.



(top) Detail of CNC cut and spray plastered foam column, for On Space

(bottom) Detail of printed design on faux-leather, for On Shelter

It develops new insights into the role of narrative and myth in the development of architectural language. The content of the exhibition and its main critical point of departure is not the validity of historical origins but the mechanism and role of narrative and allegory. Narrative in this sense involves the interpretation and re-interpretation of historic source material as well as the development of contemporary myths.

## RESEARCH AND PRACTICE

The project developed innovative relationships between research and practice. By effectively becoming a temporary researcher-in-residence, Holland was able to utilise the RA's extensive library resources. Through a process of joint research with librarians and curators at the RA, the project developed critical re-readings of work within the RA's collection, drawing out new connections between classical and modernist theory and bodies of work.

This research was allied to the production of new, experimental pieces using a variety of media and techniques. The close physical and conceptual relationship between the collection and the exhibited pieces allowed for a series of dynamic connections to be explored as well as new, multi and cross-disciplinary ways of working. Operating in various ways as historian, artist and architect, the researcher was able to develop insights in the manufacture and construction of architectural theory and its relationship to practice.

## MATERIAL PRACTICE

The installation explored a variety of techniques and materials, many of them non-traditional and experimental. Their use in this context, to access and evaluate the system of mythologies, provided new insight into the relationship between contemporary making and theory.

These included:

### Digital Fabrication

CNC wire-cut high-density foam was used to create sculptural elements. These are spray-plastered to achieve high levels of consistent finish and decorative surface effects.

### Digital Printing

Various materials were used for digital printing including faux-leather and suede, stretched canvas and ceiling plaster.

### Assemblage and Bricolage

Sculptural elements were fabricated using as-found elements including fibre-glass columns, plastic fruit, high density foam, spray paint and decorative plaster.



**The Greengrocer's Order**

# DISSEMINATION

The exhibition was held at Burlington House, Royal Academy of Arts, London, 15 October 2016 - 15 January 2017 <https://www.royalacademy.org.uk/exhibition/origins-ordinary-architecture>

Since 2016, the project has been disseminated through lectures, studies and articles. It has been featured in a number of journal and magazine articles, some authored by Holland, and others by critics or writers, which feed into Holland's current professional and academic activity.

The exhibition was both previewed and reviewed in the architectural and design press. It was featured and discussed on the RA's own website and was the subject of a symposium at the RA featuring Holland, curators and architectural writer Joseph Rykwert, whose writing was an important part of the research.

Subsequently, Holland has been invited to lecture and present content from the exhibition in a number of academic forums including as part of an international series of talks at the ETH in Zurich and lectures at the University of Johannesburg, the Architectural Association and the Bartlett School of Architecture. He has also presented the work within industry forums including at the Sir John Soane's Museum and the Architecture Foundation's 100 Day Studio.

The content of the exhibition has been featured in a number of publications including: *Exhibiting Architecture: Between the Profession and the Public* and *The Values of Colour* by Owen Hopkins, published by the Architectural Association.

Holland presented lecture papers addressing the project's research themes at the Royal Academy, the Architectural Association, the Bartlett School of Architecture, the University of Johannesburg, South Africa, ETH Zurich, Switzerland, University of Brighton and ABK Stuttgart, Germany.

The Grocer's Order column is held in the permanent collection of the Royal Academy.

## Related articles



*Our Collection*

> 3 years ago

### How to read it: "the origin of the Corinthian order"

Sir William Chambers's beautiful 18th-century drawing tells an ancient story about the beginnings of architecture.

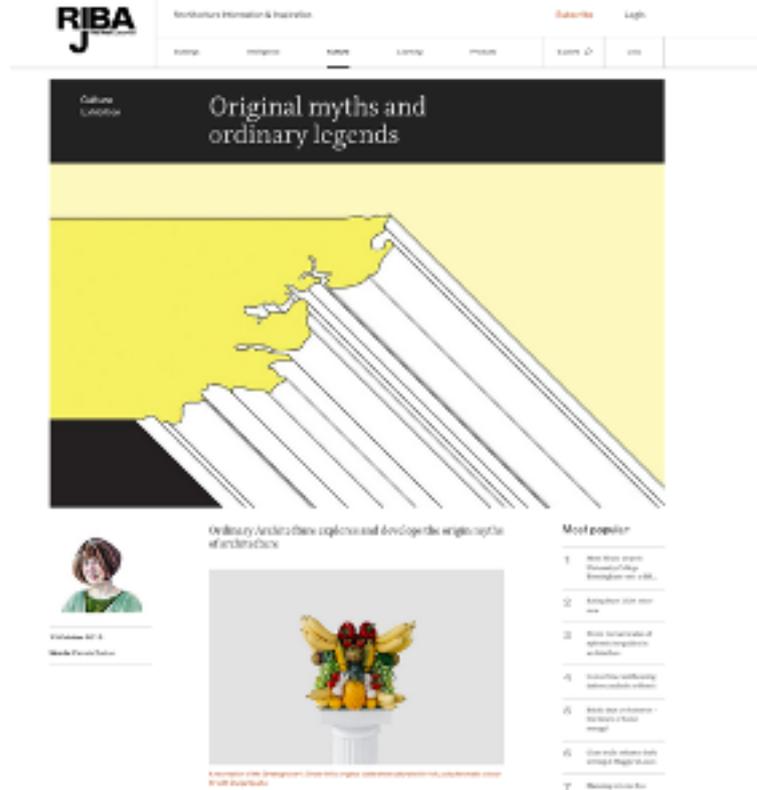
#### Royal Academy website

Promoted article supporting the *Origins* installation

# Origins

(right) Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA) online journal

(below) Royal Academy website



# Origins



(left) Royal Academy website advertising and preview to introductory talk

(below) Architectural Association lecture recorded for website  
Access to film at <https://youtu.be/g90xYB64tok>

## Charles Holland and Elly Ward of Ordinary Architecture introduce 'Origins', before a discussion with Joseph Rykwert on the broader capacities of architecture to carry narratives and meaning.

From 15 October 2016 to 15 January 2017, the RA's iconic Burlington House is the setting for a series of interventions by Ordinary Architecture, which forms an intriguing contemporary counterpart to various 'origins myths' of architecture that have accompanied history. Rooted through a number of techniques and materials, the interventions are grouped according to particular themes, which together pose a new way of seeing architecture in both natural and supernatural.

In this event, Ordinary Architecture discuss the ideas that informed the Origins project and reflect on its implications for the contemporary architect and audience. This will be followed by a response from the distinguished architectural critic Joseph Rykwert and artist Glenn Feldman, before a panel discussion and questions from the audience.

### Speakers

- Charles Holland - Director, Ordinary Architecture; Former Director, FAT
- Glenn Feldman - artist and Head of Undergraduate Sculpture, The Slade School of Fine Art
- Joseph Rykwert - distinguished architectural historian, author of many books including *The Idea of a Town* (1960) and *On Dialectic* (1972)
- Elly Ward - Director, Ordinary Architecture

Illustration: artist photo by artist/illustrator/illustrator (credit of 000 architect studio)

+ Fully booked  
**Monday 31 October 2016**  
 6.30 - 8pm  
 Royal Society of Chemistry Burlington House  
 10.000 connections  
**Event details**  
 Architecture programme Architecture  
**Share**  
 1 2

A screenshot of the Architectural Association (AA) website. The top navigation bar includes links for AA SCHOOL, STUDY, APPLY, PORTFOLIO, PUBLIC, and MEMBERS. The main content area features a video player for a lecture titled "Foundation Myths - Charles Holland". The video player includes a play button, a "Watch later" button, and a "Share" button. To the right of the video player is a "LECTURE" sidebar with a calendar view for December 2016 and a "CONTACTS" section. The bottom of the page provides details for the lecture: "Charles Holland", "Foundation Myths", "Series: AA Visiting School x 194 Forum Annual Lecture Series", "Date: Thursday 21 September 2017", "Time: 18:30", "Venue: Lecture Hall", and "Running time: 102 mins".

# Origins

**Lecture**

***Cornice Conversations: Charles Holland in conversation with Emma Letizia Jones***

Organizer: Chair of Prof. Delbeke

Date: Wednesday, 3 April 2019

Time: 18.30

Location: ETH Hönggerberg, HIL E 67 (Rote Hölle)

ETH HÖNGGERBERG, HIL E 67 (ROTE HÖLLE)  
STEFANO-FRANCINI-PLATZ 5, 8093 ZÜRICH

Prof. Maarten Delbeke  
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Telefon 044 633 01 95



# COR- NICE CON- VER- SA- TIONS



WEDNESDAY, 3 APRIL 2019, 18:30 HRS

**CHARLES HOLLAND** LONDON  
IN CONVERSATION WITH EMMA LETIZIA JONES

Cornice Conversations, Zürich  
publicity

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(overleaf)  
**Origins of Space**  
(detail)

# Origins

