# Florian Idenburg (1975) is founding partner of SO-IL and Associate Protice of Archi tecture at Harvard's Grad-Design. A native of China, founding partner Jing Liu received her education in the United States. Ilias Papageorgiou has been with SO-IL since its 2008 and has played a key role in the firm's recognition and

## SO-IL chosen for art museum at University of California

US firms SO-IL and Bohlin Cywinski Jackson have won a competition to design an art museum at the University of California's Davis campus with plans that will unite indoor and outdoor spaces beneath a large steel roof. Designed as a collaboration between SO-IL and Boblin Cywinski Jackson, the Jan Sbrom and Maria Manetti Sbrom Museum of Art is conceived as a landscape of galleries and workshops that reference the flat plains of California's Central Valley. The 4000-square-motre canopy w stretch out across the entire vite, creating varying degrees of shelter in different sections. "Its form and its shape are an abstrac patchwork of geometric forms that in a way refers to the agricultura landscape and the vast herizon," says SO-IL's Florian idenburg. Beneath the roof, the building will contain galleries for the University of California's collection of artworks, as well a temporary exhibition spaces, lectures recens, studies and artist residences. "I think the museum of the future will be one that need to be able to accommodate a lot of change," says Idenburg. "A museum on campus, like here, should be a testing ground for new ideas. We see the building itself offering a stage on which all these

SO-IL, led by Idenburg and his wife Jing Liu, is based in Brooklyn Past projects by the studio include the studing white tent that host w York's Frieze Art Fair and an art gallery draped in cluin mail is South Korea, Seemore architecture by SO-IL. Davis is an ideal setting for a museum that will sow new ways of thinking about the experience of art. The Central Valley breathes a spirit of optimism. Whether one is influenced by the sweeping views over the flat plains being able to cultivate and grow freely - the spirit of this place is of invention and imagination. It is precisely this spirit we capture in our architectural proposal for the Jan Shrem and Maria Manesti Shrem

As an overarching move, the design proposes a 50,000 square-foot permeable cover - a "Grand Caropy" - over both site and building. The distinct shape of this open roof presents a new symbol for the campos. The Canopy extends over the site, blurring its edges, and creating a sensory landscape of activities and scales. The Canopi works in two important ways: first, to generate a field of experimentation, an infrastructure, and stage for events; and second as an urban device that creates a new locus of activity and center of gravity on campus. The Canopy transforms the site into a field of diverse spaces. At night, the illuminated canopy becomes a beacon

within the campus and to the city beyond.

Inspired by the quitted agrarian landscape that stretches beyond the site, the design inherits the idea of diverse landscapes, textures and colors stitched together. Like the Central Valley, the landscape under the Canopy becomes shaped and activated by charging light and seasons. Its unique form engesders curiosity from a dista like a lone hill on a skyline. Catalyzing exploration and curiosity Canopy produces constantly changing silhouettes and profiles as

Under the Canopy, the site forms a continuous landscape, tying it in with its context. Lines from the site and its surrounding seamlessly define inside and outside. The result is a portl interconnected interior and exterior spaces, all with distin-qualities and characteristics that trigger diverse activities is informal opportunities for learning and interaction. Texture landscape break the program down into smaller volumes to a a burtus, approachable scale. The future art museum is no olated nor exclusive, but open and pers but a constantly evolving public event



SO - IL - EMERGING VOICE 2013

SO - IL, the office of Florian Idenburg and Jing Liu, uses abstraction to digest the contextual and programmatic needs

of a project, producing a refined response to site and function developed from iterative studies of form and

information that "clarify the exsence of an idea." Recent

projects of the New York City-based office include the Kukje

Art Gallery in Seoul; the 2012 Frieze Art Fair sent in New

York City; the Linked Community Center in Wulpen, the

Netherlands; and, "Tri-colonnade," an installation at the

2011 Shenzhen Hong Kong Bi-City Biennale in Shenzhen,

nicely about the language of architecture. I was educated in the

Netherlands, I worked there briefly, and then I escaped to Japan

Netherlands, architecture is about making things in society and

before coming to the US. If you compare those three cultures of architecture, it speaks a bit to how we think of our practice today. In

coming up with solutions, sometimes rational and sometime

overrational. In Japan, the voice is something you only use to mystify things you come up with. In the US, the notion of voice is

very important in the architectural field. Here, we really had to find

That's more interesting and productive to us at this moment We're often still searching for the content. It's more about the

act, It's dealing with matter. To understand the way things ne, you have to work with your hands. We are

testing and trying and mocking up and mod-

concept model or a one-to-one mock-up in our

ssical process. We're not inter-

working with this physical stuff not to obs-

examine everything we do. It's not about making models. The models are another tool, whether

how material creates an experience or effect. In the

nding a voice. Architecture is a physical practice and a phy-

And everything's so fast, compared to a lot of other places. Things happen quite fast in Asia too, but there, if you've going to eriment with something, there's time for that experimen flut here, it's the opposite: people don't want to spend too much time experimenting, but they want you to spend a lot of time making sure all of the legal documents are good. In Japan, if there's a problem you just figure it out with the contractor. It's a different uship, It's more personal. There's more space within that relationship to find innevation because it's trust based. Of course there are ways to innovate within the US. You just have to work a little bit harder and find ways to perform within the conditions that you are given. But I think the building industry is go. I think there is a lot of knowledge here and the consultants we

work with-Front, Arup, Nordenson, and all of those people-ware

to innovate as well. I'm curious to see how new fabrication tools an

Since 2000, the MoMA and the P.S.I have been running

## SO-IL wins P.S.1 competition

going to change to the building industry.



The interview doesn't have a promising start, 'We just won a major competition in France, but this will only go public early 2015. We are working on a private museum in Hong Kong, but the client does not want us to talk about it.' For a while, we considered if it would be better to postpone, but then again, when projects such as this go public, there will inevitably be new ones they must be silent about. Just be sure to keep a close eye on

## Unlike most architects in Europe, you mainly work for private clients. Why is that?

In Europe, one thinks that governments take care of public space, but outside Europe it's usually different. After working for SANAA in Japan, I decided to go the United States, to better understand a world that revolves around private funding. It's very usual for an architect there to be part of the funding efforts for his own design. To arrange for your own fee calls for a different mentality

## What kind of expertise other than design skills do you need?

Personal contact with your client is more important, mutual appreciation is crucial. Also, with public funding, the most important thing is to deliver a building on time and within budget. Once those demands are secured. there is little debate about the design any longer. In the private, cultural sector you need to design something visually new and attractive for a client who is careful with his money. The client is present all the time, the design is permanently subject to discussion. In the most positive way, I should say.

### How did this materialize at the Shrem Museum of Art, which will open in 2016?

The Shrems wanted an iconic presence for their museum, also used for educational purposes on campus, with its art studios and classrooms, UC Davis [University of California, Davis] handled the process. They assembled the jury, negotiated with the final three architectural practices and their contractors and arranged the financing. It took the jury five months to select a winner from eleven entries for a design-build assignment. And

You teamed up with Bohlin Cywinski Jackson, an office established in 1965. How was that relationship? | make it inevitable and functional.

Naming your practice 'Solid Objectives' (SO-IL) implies that you have a clearly defined strategy in mind, architecture-wise. After speaking with Florian Idenburg, one of SO-IL's founding partners, it is clear that the office certainly does. SO-IL is at a crossroads, moving from design to actual buildings. With two museums nearly finished and multiple projects in the pipeline, it's time to learn a few tricks from this very successful, Dutch/Chinese/Greek-led practice based in New York. 'If we had stayed in Europe, we would never have gotten this far, this fast.'

# Reflections from **overseas**

■ UNITED STATES — TEXT: INDIRA VAN 'T KLOOSTER, ILLUSTRATION: KLAUSTOON

They are responsible for most of the Apple Stores around the world, which were designed in close conversation with Steve Jobs himself. They worked on a number of university projects as well. With them on our side we could convince the jury that, although we are young and small, we also brought a great deal of expertise into the project. While we are both involved throughout the process, SO - IL has had the conceptual lead over the project, and BCJ has been managing most of the implementation.

## How would you describe the design?

We wanted something continuous, transparent and not too formal, It's a relatively small project on an expansive campus, but also its most important feature. We designed an undulating canopy, like a cloud, to give it presence on campus. Having lots of outdoor space is pleasant on a campus with a good climate.

Interestingly, it looks like an inverse of the Kukje design. The membrane in Kukje allows for a totally natural addition to its environment, precisely because it seems to neither belong to the gallery nor its surroundings. The Shrem Museum aims for a theatrical embrace of its surroundings, thus creat-

Kukje is a simple white box in dialogue with the neighbourhood. It's a 16 × 9 × 6-metre gallery space, an auditorium, offices and art storage spaces, covered in a mesh veil. The skin acts like a negotiator. At Shrem, the canopy is a filter, from outside to inside. The transition in Kukje, between outside and inside, is a quick one, with short transitional areas. The canopy at Davis will be made from aluminium, formed by ten-metre-long triangular beams. We aim for stratification in spaces. We don't like complexity for the sake of architecture, but pure functionalism as such would not fit within this context.

## Both buildings are volumes that simultaneously hide

The building is not a diagram, not super clear and singular, but a little concealing. We are interested in this ambiguity. In Brooklyn, we are working on a building for a private art collection where we are playing with suggestion and form. Over time, we have become more experienced in anchoring the building concept in the construction; to

## Is that what you learned at SANAA?

SANAA taught me the importance of establishing a tight relationship between concept, programme and materialization, to the level of the details. Also, to understand the process of execution. To anticipate budget cuts and thus to design just a little bit extra, so that there is a

## Private clients have personal tastes to take into account. How do you integrate that with your personal style?

Buildings need to work, but we go beyond pure functionalism. We want our work to contribute to a larger history. The culture of architecture is our second client. We want to move history forward.

# So where in the discourse of architecture do you

We come from various parts of the world. In the Netherlands, pragmatism and obviousness are important. In Asia, there is more room for poetics and intuition In the United States, there is a very sophisticated discussion on a very precise level about form and function. We embody bits of all of these aspects.

#### What do you think would have happened if you had staved in Europe?

My career would have been entirely different. It would have been harder. I believe, and I wouldn't be where I am today. I learned the most by leaving the Netherlands. but I never intended to 'escape'. We seek commissions in Europe: we just won a competition in France, and we were very close in Belgium. So, hopefully, we will be back! As an office, we are much more European than an average American practice, for example, when it comes to our attitude toward public space.

What would be your advice for architects in Europe? We are six years old now, and have set the office on a track that currently allows us to work on a range of exciting projects around the world that engage culture and the public realm. Americans are unbeatable in their knowledge of computer coding, which is essential if you want

to remain in control of your design. That's something European architects should be concerned about - they know how to make a model, but very few have a clue about writing computer scripts.

INTERCHANGE INTERCHANGE