

Press Information

phæno Wolfsburg: Discovering the World

Germany's unique Experimental Landscape embedded in spectacular architecture by Zaha Hadid

phæno – Germany's unique Experimental Landscape – opens up an entire world: the fascinating and exciting world of science and technology. The tantalising nature and special beauty of the amazing, fundamental and also mysterious phenomena of natural science – that is the theme and concern of phæno.

On an activity area covering over 9,000 square metres, phæno's guests have a host of multifarious opportunities to discover and explore the thrilling world of these phenomena. 300 interactive Experimental Stations form the centre of attraction, which invite visitors to try things out for themselves and follow their own research inclinations. The stations in the complex come from nine different countries. They have been specially constructed for phæno, and several are unique to the science centre in Wolfsburg. The exhibits have been assembled, and in part specifically composed, by Joe Ansel, one of the leading lights of the American Science Centre movement, who serves as curator at phæno. The fascinating themes of natural science and technology can also be approached in phæno through three Visitor Laboratories, the Science Theatre or the Ideas Forum. These installations are the sites of a varied programme of events aimed at a diverse range of different groups. On three levels the exceptional building structure houses two restaurants and room for special events. The "Supermarket of Knowledge" – the phæno shop – provides a shopping experience of the special kind with different items from the world of the sciences.

Experimentation in phæno means, for example: marvelling at the world's largest fire tornado, a five-metre-high air vortex revealed by fire, setting a sphere in motion alone through relaxation, floating on a flying carpet, making sounds visible, listening to an enthralling acoustic collage of micro-sounds, simulating the movement of waves, performing a crash test with one's own body, watching the creation of a geyser, producing ice at a temperature of 4°C without the addition of cooling, generating sounds with heat, constructing cantilever bridges and letting them cave in again, simulating a traffic jam, testing one's own reaction speed, analysing DNA, experiencing the weightlessness of objects, generating electricity for everyday appliances through muscle power, or fixing one's own shadow to a wall.

phæno, just as much a place of leisure and recreation as one of informal learning.



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Experimental Landscape

The avant-garde design Zaha Hadid envisaged for phæno in Wolfsburg now stands in full splendour. After a construction period of more than four years, the vision of this revolutionary building, which has broken with many architectural conventions, took on its functional dimension on 24th November 2005. It has only been with the use of state-of-the-art building materials that an international team has been able to translate the conception of the Pritzker Prize-winning architect into built reality.

Zaha Hadid's exhibition space, resting on conic supports and sublimely illuminated, emerged clearly victorious from an international competition in 2000. The London-based architect has devised a truly impressive home for phæno, enthroned high above street-level. It liberates the area beneath it as a new kind of urban space in the form of a covered artificial landscape with gently undulating hills and valleys. Its interior, at a height of seven metres, opens up an architectural adventure playground, a constructional wonderland shaped by craters, caverns, terraces and plateaux, the exciting location for 300 Experimental Stations on thrilling themes from the world of science and technology.

The architectural design entailed a constructional realisation that has been unattainable in the conventional terms of supports, girders and roofing, but has called for a sculptural, plastic moulding that is "of a piece". The achievement of such a complex structure has been just as much a feat of logistics as it represents a static and constructional masterpiece. In contrast to the widely used, standard method of building with concrete, mostly with the help of flat formwork systems, phæno is distinguished by the predominant use of individually fabricated formwork elements and special cast-in-situ concrete. phæno is the largest building constructed from "self-compacting concrete" (SCC) to date in Europe and will therefore be significant as a reference object. Without the new type of concrete, the diverse forms of phæno – its jagged angles, looming curves, fractured planes and daring protrusions – would have been difficult to achieve. As a trailblazing work of architecture, the project has written a chapter of technical history. Formwork elements were necessary with which one could have covered nine football fields – concrete that would have filled a cube with 30-metre sides and that has been reinforced with iron as heavy as 5,000 small cars.