SUPER STUDIO 2026

23-30 July

$3000 CASH PRIZE

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Australian Institute of Architects

SONA

SUPER STUDIO

BRIEF

PREAMBLE

Pause, Gather, Feel

Where attention deepens, meaning re-emerges. This year, Super Studio invites students to create spaces that encourage observation, presence, and embodied engagement in an increasingly accelerated world.

In every era of uncertainty, art and architecture become more important, not less. They are among the few human acts that resist speed, disposability and automation. They compel us to slow down, to feel, to gather, to remember and to imagine futures beyond those handed to us.

Today, we live in a world increasingly regulated by screens, algorithms and artificial systems. We are more connected than ever, yet many feel profoundly alone. We consume endless images but rarely stop to truly see. We move faster, often without asking where we are going or what kind of world we are creating along the way.

At the same time, we face immense collective challenges: ecological collapse, social fragmentation, global conflict, displacement, inequality and a crisis of meaning. In this context, art and architecture are not luxuries; they are essential cultural acts.

Art gives form to emotion, memory, protest, beauty and belief, allowing us to encounter another's inner world. Architecture shapes the environments where life unfolds—the spaces where we celebrate, gather, love, mourn, heal and belong. Together, they dictate not only how the world looks, but how it feels to live within it.

Therefore, the creative and spatial practices we champion hold a profound responsibility. They do not simply produce objects or structures; they generate possibilities for reflection and encounter. They carve out rare moments where society pauses long enough to ask deeper questions about who we are, what we value and what should endure.

PROVOCATION

In a world moving quickly, this competition challenges students to resist that speed.

We invite you to design not simply a structure, but an experience—a place capable of holding wonder, emotion, contemplation and connection. Your proposal should focus on a single artwork, artefact or narrative: something precious enough to gather around, protect, celebrate or question.

The brief is intentionally focused and deeply human. What does it mean to devote architecture to one object, one story, one memory or one idea? How can space intensify our relationship with art, landscape, light, material and each other? What kind of atmosphere can physical architecture create that a digital experience can never replace?

Connection to landscape remains critical to human wellbeing. We want to understand the relationship between your proposal and its surroundings.

This is an invitation to think beyond function and toward meaning; beyond spectacle and toward resonance; beyond the generic and toward the deeply specific. Your proposal may be quiet or monumental, ancient or futuristic, grounded or experimental, but it must ask fundamental questions:

What deserves our attention in an age designed to distract us?
How might architecture help us remember what it means to be human?
In the face of instability, what brings connection, meaning, hope and healing?

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"I like walking because it is slow, and I suspect that the mind, like the feet, works at about three miles an hour. If this is so, then modern life is moving faster than the speed of thought or thoughtfulness." ***— Rebecca Solnit***

PROGRAM

You are invited to speculate on a design intervention through the following three (3) programmatic components:

1. Select the Creative Catalyst

Choose a piece of art or creative expression that holds deep meaning for you. It can be a painting, sculpture, installation, piece of music, performance, film or text. The chosen work must not simply be displayed; it must actively inform and shape the architecture.

Consider:
What does this work feel like to encounter?
How does it unfold in time, space or through the body?
What environmental conditions (light, material, atmosphere, proximity, distance) does it require?
How might architecture intensify, frame, disrupt or extend this experience?

Move beyond thinking of art as a static object, and instead consider it a condition, event or relationship.

2. Situating the Project: Site and Terrain

Select a real site anywhere in the world with which you are familiar. Be prepared to articulate why you selected this location and what specific meaning it brings to your proposal. The relationship between site and art may be synergistic, controversial, ecological or political.

Your site must demonstrate a strong relationship to terrain, landscape, ecological systems or context.

3. Design the Spatial System

Develop a spatial response that uses your chosen art to engage with a contemporary condition. Your response must resolve three distinct relationships:

The Spatial–Site Relationship (Threshold): What is the physical relationship to the site, landscape and natural systems? Is the structure nestled into the ground or floating above it? How does it integrate or amplify the landscape? Consider how weather, including rain, wind and heat, might become part of the experience, or conversely, if complete insulation from the landscape is required.

The Art–Space Relationship (Experience): How is the encounter with the artwork heightened through architecture? Is the space an organic extension of the work, or is it intentionally disruptive and incongruous? How do the volume and constraints of the architecture dictate the viewer's experience?

The Civic Relationship: Introduce and integrate a programme or condition that expands the project toward a place of encounter, participation, exchange, stewardship or repair that serves the broader community.

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METHOD

In keeping with the spirit of this brief, we seek tactile, thoughtful engagement with the prompt. Treat this project as a design charrette where we want to see clear evidence of creative thought, curiosity and heart. We are far more interested in process than perfection, and in the raw testing of ideas rather than their final resolution.

We invite you to step away from computers, artificial intelligence and digital production as much as possible during the development and representation of your ideas. Manual, analogue and tactile methods are strongly encouraged. Drawings, collages, paintings, physical models, mixed media and photography are highly valued. This competition is not about polished digital renders; it is about thinking through making.

SUBMISSION & PRESENTATIONS

Participants should stop working on their proposal and submit by 10am AEST on Thursday, 30 July 2026. Your presentation must rely strictly on the information provided in your online submission. No resubmissions or additional work outside of the original submission will be permitted.

One (1) submission is only needed per team. SuperStudio 2026 Submission Form

File name should be your state & team names used for your registration (eg QLD_tim-sally-john)

You will have five (5) minutes to present and two (2) mins for Q&A/feedback from the judges. A strict total presentation time will not exceed seven (7) minutes.

SUBMISSION REQUIREMENTS

In addition to your live presentation submissions must be delivered digitally and comprise the following components:

Two (2) A3 Landscape Panels: Visually illustrating the proposal. We encourage you to photograph physical models as contextual elements within your collages and drawings rather than presenting them as isolated objects.

All physical models and artworks must be photographed and presented exclusively on the two (2) landscape A3 panels. Any physical artworks presented in-person will not be assessed. Only the two (2) submitted A3 panels will be evaluated; no additional materials will be considered.

Written Statement: A maximum of 300 words explaining the chosen artwork, the architectural concept, and the overall proposal.

Thank You to Our 2026 Creative Directors

Sincere thanks to Madeline Sewall and Keith Westbrook (Up to Something) and our SONA VP, Zoeanna Upadhyay, for volunteering their time to develop this brief. Their commitment to shaping this framework is incredibly valued and plays a huge role in bringing the program to life and inspiring our next generation of architectural talent.

JUDGING CRITERIA

The submissions will be evaluated based on the following breakdown:

25% Experience Sequence: A thoughtful, resolved relationship between the chosen art and the designed space.

25% Presentation Visuals: The evocative quality of the imagery and how effectively emotion, atmosphere, and sensory experience are conveyed.

25% Consideration of Space, Site, and Context: The physical and ecological relationship to the site, terrain, and natural systems.

10% Impact and Clarity of Communication: The clarity and conciseness of articulation of the proposition across its conceptual, visual and written components.

15% Uniqueness and Innovation: The design proposition offers a unique and innovative vision to the provocation. All ideas and submitted work must be the student's own, completely free of AI-generated content, and not taken or re-used from past work or other sources.

REFERENCES AND RESOURCES

Recommended Reading

Berger, J., Ways of Seeing, London, British Broadcasting Corporation and Penguin Books, 1972.

Goldsworthy, A., 'The Slow Fade of Music Education: An Elegy for Music, Learning and Impoverished Culture', The Monthly, November 2022, pp. 42–48.

Pallasmaa, J., 'Space, Place and Atmosphere: Emotion and Peripheral Perception in Architectural Experience', Phenomenology & Practice, vol. 7, no. 1, 2014, pp. 23–45.

Pallasmaa, J., The Eyes of the Skin: Architecture and the Senses, Chichester, Wiley-Academy, 2005.

Zumthor, P., Atmospheres: Architectural Environments, Surrounding Objects, Basel, Birkhäuser, 2006.

Projects

Chichu Art Museum by Tadao Ando: An exploration of subterranean architecture, natural light and permanent art installations. Review the project via This Is Paper.

Roden Crater by James Turrell: A monumental large-scale artwork carved into a volcanic cinder cone, interacting directly with celestial light. Explore the project details.

Presentation and Collage Inspiration

'Dada and Surrealism: Dadaism and Photo-Collage', Tate, n.d., https://www.tate.org.uk/, accessed 15 July 2026.

'Drawing in Layers: How Architectural Collage Can Expand Your Design Possibilities', Architizer, 2021, https://architizer.com/blog/practice/details/rethinking-architectural-collage/, accessed 15 July 2026.

Winder, Adair, 'Winning Design Team Revealed for Coburg Library and Piazza', ArchitectureAu, 13 March 2026, https://architectureau.com/articles/Winning-design-team-revealed-for-Coburg-Library-and-Piazza/, accessed 15 July 2026.