

JUL 31 –
AUG 07
2025

THE BRIEF

SU- PER STU- DIO

SONA

STUDENT CONCEPTUAL
DESIGN CHALLENGE

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EVERYTHING ALUMINIUM
& HARDWARE



Australian
Institute of
Architects

The Monolith Condition

It arrives without warning. It does not speak. It cannot be moved. It is indestructible and uncontainable. Nothing grows in its presence. Most importantly, it is unaffected by solar or lunar events. Within its fixed shadow—the surrounding context becomes inaudible: an eerie zone of silence where sound is absorbed, yet speech persists, like within a bubble. Gravity weakens to approximately 0.3 of Earth's strength. To humans, it has become known as the phenomenon: ***The Monolith Condition***.

The year is 2061. Seven (7) black monoliths have appeared—one on each continent. Each takes the form of a towering vertical structure called ***The Anchor***: 30 metres wide, 30 metres long, 30 metres buried beneath the surface, and extending to match the height of the tallest structure on that continent. Their material is unknown—some describe it akin to Vantablack—lightless, dimensionless. Their origin is undetectable, and each is situated within the densest urban centre. These are known as the ***Mega Monoliths***.

Within each continent, another phenomenon occurs: the emergence of smaller Anchors in the capital cities of each state or territory. Standing 100 metres tall, 10 metres wide, and 10 metres deep (also 30 metres buried underground), these are referred to as ***Fragments***.

Despite not interacting with sunlight, both Mega and Fragmented Anchors generate ***The Stillfall***: a fixed field of complete darkness extending from their northeastern face. This is not a shadow, but a constant void—consistent, unshifting, and unaffected by time, weather, or celestial conditions. Its shape is relative to the Anchor's scale and form: it differs between Mega and Fragment Anchors, forming at a fixed 45-degree angle as though cast by a perfect shadow, but independent of solar position. While the Anchors themselves absorb all light, ***The Stillfall*** can accommodate artificial light, colour, and materials—though these appear altered, diffused, and diminished.

All Anchors emit a subtle hum—in audible, yet physically perceptible to some. Many describe it as an aura. Some believe it alters consciousness. Others believe it carries a message. For some, it is sacred. For others, unbearable. Some say the Mega Monoliths and Fragments are connected—perhaps by a system or network, or something else entirely. No one knows for sure. Their function remains a mystery.

In their presence, new economies, rituals, political systems, and psychological behaviours begin to form. These silent masses have irrevocably disrupted the idea of public space. Students must now consider: what new types of civic rituals, services, or responses could emerge?

SuperStudio is a national conceptual design competition. It gives students licence to explore highly creative and speculative responses to a design brief. We want students to reach beyond the familiar—to consider the unthinkable in order to imagine the necessary. This year's brief introduces a disruption humans have never encountered. How do we respond?

Architecture has always carried a civic responsibility to shape spaces not just for individuals, but for communities, cultures, and ecologies. Under the banner of *The Monolith Condition*, SuperStudio 2025 invites students to examine how architecture might respond to large-scale disruption in service of the collective.

But this year, the response does not come first.

First comes the encounter.

Students must begin with perception. Before designing for the Monolith, they must feel its presence.

- What does it mean to stand near *The Anchor*?
- What changes in *The Stillfall*? What shifts in sound, light, gravity, time, or self?
- What does your city feel like when one part of it stops moving?

This is the phenomenology of *The Monolith Condition*. And from it comes the existential:

- When certainty disappears, how do we adapt?
- When ritual breaks, how do we begin again?

Each proposal should emerge from this altered state—whether it embraces, ritualises, or fortifies against the Anchor’s presence. It may soothe or disturb, illuminate or obscure. It can be architectural or systemic, ephemeral or monumental.

What matters is that it means something—and that meaning is drawn from encounter. This is not just a design brief. It is a provocation.

A call to observe.

To imagine generously.

And to act with intention.

Reimagine civic space in response to the Monolith Condition.

Participants must ground their proposals in the reality of a disrupted civic and ecological fabric. Drawing from the narrative established in the *Preamble* and *Provocation*, students are expected to interpret the Monolith not only as an object, but as a force—spatial, cultural, and psychological.

Each design should respond to both the Mega and Fragmented Monolithic presence and the systems it unsettles or initiates.

To support this exploration, participants must respond to the following FIVE criteria:

1. Contextual Response

Participants must investigate two distinct contexts/scales:

- One Mega Monolith site located on one of the seven continents, to consider its impact on global, urban, or ecological systems at a macro scale.
- One Fragment Monolith site within their local Australian context, hyper-focusing on how it disrupts or transforms everyday civic life.

Students should explore how each scale presents different challenges and opportunities for design, and how architecture might negotiate or reframe the systems that are unsettled by these presences.

2. Spatial Strategy

Propose a design that is sensitive to both the fixed stillness of the monolith and the dynamic conditions it generates. There is a duality in responding to both the Monolith (itself), and its Stillfall. What Happens:

- On the Fringes,
- Within, and
- Beyond.

3. Temporal Thinking

Integrate time as a design factor. Consider interventions that are temporary, cyclical, evolving, or responsive. How might your proposal adapt if the Monolith vanishes, multiplies, or transforms?

4. Systems Awareness

Demonstrate an understanding of the interconnected systems, such as natural, infrastructural, digital, or social, that the Monolith affects or reveals. Your design should work across scales and disciplines.

5. Ethical Imagination

Consider the broader implications of your proposal. Who benefits? Who is excluded? How does your design encourage equity, sustainability, and collective meaning-making in a time of uncertainty?

JUDGING CRITERIA

Welcome to The Monolith Condition.

Your work will be evaluated against these lenses, which value imagination, resonance and the stories your design dares to tell:

1. Civic Resonance- Public imagination and social value (20%)
 2. Originality / innovation- creativity in response to the provocation (20%)
 3. Atmosphere and Affect- Evocative spatial and visual expression (20%)
 4. Environmental & Psychological impacts- Addressing the ripple effects of the Monolith & its networks (10%)
 5. Quality of submission and presentation- narrative and story-telling (30%)
- state/territory Jury note: The jury is not permitted to tie first place State/Territory SuperStudio winner.

SUBMISSION & PRESENTATIONS

To be eligible to participate in the state/territory level of SuperStudio and for the chance to progress to the national level of judging, teams must fulfill both of the following requirements:

1. **Digital submission:** Due 9:00 am AEST (7:00 am AWST, 8:30 am ACST) Thursday, 7th August 2025 (see Digital submission requirements below)
2. **In-person presentation:** 5-minute (plus 2-minute Q&A) presentation to the state/territory jury on Thursday, 7 August. Check the presentation day program as start times and presentation day locations vary in each state/territory.
<https://www.architecture.com.au/sona/super-studio-program-2025>

Digital submission requirements: must be submitted as one PDF document A3 landscape, less than 20MB, that includes:

- TWO (2) x illustrated A3 landscape panels.
- An additional page with sources referenced and documented appropriately (if applicable).
- An additional page with a 300 (maximum) word description of your design intent and proposal.
- Physical models are optional. Please include photos in your digital submission. The physical models should not be used in your presentation.

Important considerations for the digital submission & presentation:

- Submissions will be downloaded by the SuperStudio coordinator in each state/territory and provided back to participants to be used for the presentation.
- Any physical models must be captured in the digital submission, otherwise they will not be considered for final judging.
- No additional materials are permitted during your presentation, including digital files, hardcopy materials or physical models.
- Final ideas and submissions must be original. Refer to judging criteria 'originality / creativity'.

For additional submissions to help SONA promote your project on social media and for consideration in the student de-Pict zine ([insert link](#)), you will also be asked to submit

- 2 x original images that best represent your concept.
- Accepted file types: PDG & JPG/JPEG.
- Size: 1080 x 1080 pixels.

When assembling the panels, consider these aspects of your presentation:

- Carry narrative weight (to convey a story diagrammatically and/or visually).
- Resist literal explanation.
- Powerful, evocative & surreal atmospheric imagery.
- We're looking for work that exists between the known and imagined.
- Use the tools of cinema — mood, sequence, timing, tension — to explore how the monolith and the void is perceived, encountered or adorned.
- Don't over-explain. Let the work speak.

[SUBMIT HERE](https://aiaforms.wufoo.com/forms/mv3x0sr1wjcry2/) (<https://aiaforms.wufoo.com/forms/mv3x0sr1wjcry2/>)

Important Policy Regarding AI Use for SuperStudio

Please be aware that the use of artificial intelligence (AI) is strictly prohibited at any stage of the creative process when generating responses for the SuperStudio design brief. All work must be entirely your own, demonstrating your individual understanding, creativity, and effort. Submissions failing to meet this standard will be disqualified.

The digital submissions from the state/territory winners (first place) will be assessed by the national jury.

National winner presentations & announcement- Friday, 15th August 2025- 9 am- 10 am AEST

All state winners will be invited to present online to the national jury. Your original digital submission from the chapter presentations can support your presentation (no changes can be made to this submission). If you cannot attend, you should submit a recorded presentation. Failure to present live or submit a recorded presentation will result in a disqualification from the national level of judging.

Following all presentations, the national jury will deliberate and announce the national winner of SuperStudio.

All participants and supporters of SuperStudio are free to attend.

[REGISTER HERE](https://members.architecture.com.au/EventDetail?Event-Key=NAT250731S) (<https://members.architecture.com.au/EventDetail?Event-Key=NAT250731S>)

PRIZES

State winner receives:

- 2026 complimentary SONA membership.
- Architecture stationery voucher (\$100 per team member).
- Progression to national judging, chance to win \$3000.
- Office immersion experience.
- Feature in de-Pict.
- Featured on national socials.

State runners up (up to 2 teams):

- 2026 complimentary SONA membership.
- Office immersion experience.
- Architecture stationery voucher (\$50 per team member).
- Featured on state socials.

National Winner receives:

- \$3000 prize.
- 2026 SONA complimentary membership.
- Work featured in Architecture Australia Magazine.
- Feature in de-Pict.
- Featured on national socials.

REFERENCE

- **Moon Hoon:**
<https://www.gusdonohoo.com/moon-hoon/th04sebabvch8xa9bd9px9b6tk1eqt>
Youtube Videos: <https://www.youtube.com/@moonhoon4206/videos>
- **Parc de la Villette, Bernard Tschumi:**
<https://www.tschumi.com/projects/3>
- **Planet City, Liam Young:**
<https://planetcity.world/>
- **The Office for Collective Design:**
<https://theocd.com.au/filter/matt-drysdale/> ABOUT
- **Jewish Museum, Daniel Liebeskind:**
<https://libeskind.com/work/jewish-museum-berlin/>
- **Kunsthau, Sir Peter Cook:**
<https://arquitecturaviva.com/works/kunsthau-graz->
- **New Babylon, Constant:**
<https://www.macba.cat/en/obra/r3207-new-babylon/>

- **SuperStudio, Archigram:**
<https://www.architectural-review.com/archive/archigrams-cook-on-superstudios-natalini>
- **The Walking City, Archigram:**
<https://www.archigram.net/projects?view=article&id=77&catid=8>
- **Etienne Louis-Boullee, Cenotaph for Isaac Newton:**
<https://www.archdaily.com/544946/ad-classics-cenotaph-for-newton-etienne-louis-boullee>
- **Superstudio: Twelve Cautionary Tales for Christmas:**
<https://socks-studio.com/2011/09/17/twelve-cautionary-tales-for-christmas-12-ideal-cities-by-superstudio-1971/>
- **The Metabolic City, Kisho Kurokawa:**
<https://sabukaru.online/articles/the-promised-tokyo>
- **9/11 Memorial, Handel Architects:**
<https://handelarchitects.com/project/national-september-11-memorial>
- **Ian Strange:**
<https://ianstrange.com/>
- **Burning Man Festivals:**
<https://trancentral.tv/2016/10/burning-man-festival/>
- Henri Lefebvre (1991). *The production of space* (D. Nicholson-Smith, Trans.). Blackwell. (Original work published 1974)
- Juhaani Pallasmaa (2012). *The eyes of the skin: Architecture and the senses* (3rd ed.). Wiley.
- Sir Peter Cook. (2023). *Architecture workbook: Design through motive*. Thames & Hudson.
- Maciej Stasiowski, M. (2020). Anarchitectural experiments: When unbuilt design turns to film. *Architecture and Culture*, 8(1), 45–62. <https://doi.org/10.1080/20507828.2020.1739677>
- Bernard Tschumi (1981). Violence of architecture. *Artforum*, 20 (1), 44–47.
- Audiobook Phenomenology: A Note on the Philosophical School by Pons Mal-leus (Spotify).
- Jonathan Hale: Phenomenology, Merleau Ponty & Architecture (A is for Architecture Podcast Youtube).
- Movies:
 - Arrival (2016, directed by Denis Villeneuve)
 - Blade Runner (1982, directed by Ridley Scott)
 - High-Rise (2015, directed Ben Wheatley)
 - Stalker (1979, directed by Andrei Tarkovsky)
 - Mad Max Movies (various, directed by George Ogilvie and/or George Miller)