Marcin Kitala’s Floang Island System Imagines a Future for the People of Kiribati

Located in the middle of the Pacific Ocean, Kiribati is a nation state made up of 33 idyllic islands, yet despite appearing as a paradise, the beautiful low-lying landscape is in danger of being lost to rising sea levels. In response to this, YAC launched the ‘Kiribati Floating Houses’ competition to architects and designers across the globe. The brief asked entrants to imagine a possible future for the inhabitants of Kiribati, and the first prize has recently been awarded to Marcin Kitala for his ‘Riiki’ proposal.
marcin kitala’s winning project (https://www.youngarchitectscompetitions.com/competition/kiribati-floating-houses#winners) comprises a system of pentagonal-shaped platforms, which can be easily connected or disconnected. These modules have an overall area of 4300 m², with each side of the pentagon measuring 50 meters. Planned to accommodate only 1 to 30 inhabitants across 1 to 5 houses, the project avoids a high density of buildings in order to preserve the current nature of Kiribati buildings, which are low and interwoven with abundant greenery.

At the back of every house is a green area to accommodate all the necessary tools for families to be self-sufficient. This includes a backyard greenhouse, a water purification system, a vegetable garden and solar panels. It is intended that the inhabitants themselves, after being provided with the skeleton and base, will be able to finish their homes in the traditional way, as is the case now in Kiribati.
the proposal pays homage to the myths of oceania, the processes that have shaped the pacific islands and the local culture of kiribati, marcin kitala narrates the myths in the following text, ‘this begins with nareau, who is a god according to kiribati’s creation myth. he was floating in nothingness and sleeping deeply. but suddenly a mysterious voice called and woke him up. he stayed awaken since then. his head was full of thoughts. he realised, that that strange voice really had came from him.’

tabaura – pink clouds on the horizon on the sunset

‘all of a sudden nareau sneezed and out of his nose came a strange, huge turtle shell like object. it was composed only of compressed sand and water, and inside were fourteen creatures. the artefact was called te bomatemaki. curious, nareau climbed onto it and went inside. the creatures dwelling inside the te bomatemaki, could not move easily. all the living beings and objects, including first maneaba hall were squeezed. nareau ordered them to work on te bomatemaki to make it habitable. various tasks were assigned. riki, the tallest of fourteen god-dwellers, was elected to lift the ceiling to gain living volume.’

part of the village

‘riki lifted the roof as high as he could, but it was still too low. seeing this, other gods put a snake close to riki’s leg. it bit his ankle and made riki jumped from pain higher than he normally would, lifting the roof to desired height, separating water from the sky. place to dwell and move was made. nareau then called the roof (sky) karawa, floor (land) tarawa and water (ocean) marawa. kiribati’s three most sacred elements.’

umatoa – house, strong shelter

‘the gods continued to work on shaping the land. nareau broke tarawa into pieces and threw them in different directions making islands. he cleaned the sun and moon from dust and dirt so they can give light. they established traditions of maneaba hall, the order of boi sitting places. they created humans and spirits. ’
finally, nareau ordered the land and water to produce as much as they can for the benefit of all, and the sky to pour rain so everything grows healthy. he declared sky, land, and water as belonging to people.'

maneaba – the meeting hall and structure of the community

today, the word 'riiki' has many meanings, all coming from the god riiki. in gilbertese riiki means 'change of weather over many days'. it stands for global warming and the uncertainty that comes with it. the islands of kiribati are believed to be submerged in the next 50 years. yet as the ocean encroaches, the inhabitants are determined to stay in their homeland.

catalogue of urban elements

new and old islands
the story of riki

project info:

project name: riki
project type: YAC competition (first prize)
design: marcin kitala

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Marcin Kitala  
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