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***Sustainability...pragmatic optimism, or new modesty...***

*A new modesty, then? Yes, for a while. But, when the wheel of fortune turns up again, expect a reaction to the New Modesty.*<sup>1</sup>

Every year as the Salon of Architecture grows nearer the spotlight turns once again on the current moment in architecture. In the middle of the global economic crisis it is becoming more obvious than ever, although the process has been ongoing for some years, that before our very eyes, for the second time in the last one hundred years, a huge shift has been taking place in the history of architecture. The cruel architectural recession has stopped work on designing trophy buildings, so widespread in the past two decades; the end has come to the 'form follows funding' Bilbao era which produced magnificent designs but where the social purpose of architecture was often lost.<sup>2</sup> Architectural philosophy is changing, new social, cultural and economic paradigms are appearing, a new modesty and distancing from projects aimed mainly at catering to the vanity of the rich are being proclaimed. The influence of architects with a global status like Frank Gehry, Norman Foster and Richard Rogers is diminishing, and architects are looking at returning to the roots –public architecture, schools, hospitals and infrastructural projects, but this time in a Sustainability Architecture spirit.

Serbia's transition idyll is also grinding to a halt in the throes of the economic downturn and baring all our problems, including those in the architecture. In that context we observe that the motto chosen for the 31<sup>st</sup> Salon of Architecture - *Sustainability...pragmatic optimism, or new modesty...* – does not imply just sustainability in the ecological and architectural sense, but also the need for existential sustainability, not just sustainability *in the* architecture, but sustainability *of* architecture.

The general impression is that construction activity is rife, but how much of it is good architecture, quality architecture? Of the 180 works submitted less than one hundred were selected for presentation at the Salon: an oasis of decent architecture in an ocean of disorder made up of newly-built and half-built 'turbo'-styled houses and existing dilapidated urban facades.

One spark of optimism is that judging by the vast majority of the competing works this year there is a strong tendency away from the dominance of Post-Modernism in our architecture. A step has been taken towards contemporary Neo-Modernist trends, a style that has become prevalent even in individual houses (Z. Radojčić, L. Kuzmanov and M. Cvjetić). Neo-Modernism is seen in reduction of curvature of volume and cleansing and simplification of form.

Of the designs selected the dominant part are commercial buildings, combined commercial and residential facilities and residential architecture (J. and R. Sarić, S. and T. Mičić, G. Vojvodić, Z. Matić, V. Mladenović, K. Bulatović and V. Cagić Milošević)

In a desire to promote intelligent and high-quality architecture at the Salon, of the interior designs submitted we chose those where the design seems not to be an end in itself (Dj. Gec and N. Stojović, J. Ercegovac Todorović and S. Todorović). Of particular interest here is the recycling of space, begun with the re-development of the 'Beton-hala' (A. Rodić, Grand Prix in 2006) and continuing in a fine vein with the 'Supermarket' (M. Vidaković and team: M. Basarovski, M. Jurić, S. Mandić). This design is neither spectacular nor original, but rather badly needed as a model conveyance of a modern approach to re-development of semi-industrial spaces for a new purpose.

Modern sacral architecture is an apocryphal subject; although booming, so much so that even valuable religious cultural monuments are being 'modernised' and defaced, this segment of the building trade is rarely represented at the Salon. The reason may be found in a fact directly connected to the need to reform views on the architecture of the Orthodox temple: until that happens, this architecture will continue to be on the sidelines. A deviation from sterile canonical model may be seen in S. Krunić's design for the Chapel of St. George on Mount Goč.

<sup>1</sup> www. ArchNewsNow.com

<sup>2</sup> Robert Campbell, *Marking the end of 'The Bilbao Decade'*, The Boston Globe, January 11, 2009

The Catholic Church of the Holy Archangel Michael in Equatorial Guinea, by Serbian architects D. Ignjatović, N. Čuković Ignjatović, V. Popović and D. Vasović, comes from a completely different religious milieu and shows how the demanding subject of sacral architecture can be tackled successfully in a modern manner.

The relationship of Belgrade with the rest of Serbia is also easy to see at the Salon: there is a huge disparity between architectural output in the disproportionate yet inadequate Belgrade and that created in the modest milieus of Serbian towns. Two positive and encouraging examples of enriching and urbanising long-neglected areas are a landscape architecture and re-development design for the 'Knauf insulation' waste dump in Surdulica by S. Stanković Aleksić, and a family house in Bujanovac (A. and G. Sadiku) whose simplicity of form must have an educative effect on the local environment.

New to the Salon is presentation of architectural exhibitions and the architecture of exhibition designs, notably the 'Wohnlich – 11<sup>th</sup> International Exhibition of Architecture in Venice' –Serbia's presentation at the Biennale of Architecture in Venice in 2008. The authors - L.J. Blagojević, D. Vasiljević Tomić, V. Milenković, M. Cvetić, T. Stratimirović (the design was selected for the first time at a competition of the Ministry of Culture) – chose to present the Venice exhibit at the Salon with its catalogue. As regards the architecture of exhibition designs, architect S. Selinkić chose a novel approach in his design for the October Salon in Belgrade 2008, held in the 25<sup>th</sup> May Museum. Also worthy of mention is an extremely theatrical and in some regards naïve approach in the design for the Museum of Applied Arts' exhibition 'From the Treasuries of the Chilandar Monastery' (I. Mangov).

There is very little conceptual architecture; in the designs submitted architecture is viewed solely as a job – it also notable that there is much thinking using a detached-house and brick-on-brick logic. There are few examples of conceiving and solving space from a more distant, more general, outlook, like that of K. Bulatović, whose 'Symbiotic Architecture' design is a lively and intelligent concept borne on enthusiasm.

We in the Museum of Applied Art and the Architecture Department have succeeded in realising the proclaimed and desired international character of the 31<sup>st</sup> Salon of Architecture in respect of two elements: the composition of the Jury, and the participation of a number of foreign architects in the competition. Three of the five members of this year's Jury - Tanja Damljanović, Bratislav Gaković and Stanko Gaković - are of local origin but have been living and working abroad for years (in the USA and Great Britain). They are very knowledgeable about the contemporary and also the latest trends, as well as our own architectural present, from which they enjoy an objective distance. Contributions to the work of the Jury will also come from the Belgrade architects Sanjin Grbić and Zoran Abadić, last year's Grand Prix winner. From the 180 or so initial entries, the Jury selected ninety works for adjudication and has chosen the winners of the Salon's Grand Prix and of awards in the other categories: architecture, urban planning, interior design, publications and Salon's guest.

As for foreign participation, we need to say that in spite of years of effort to make the Salon a truly international event, this year once again there will not be many foreign participants. This can probably be explained by the still insufficiently developed building industry – this region is still not an attractive target for serious and major foreign investors, hence also foreign architects who would exhibit their works at the Salon.

The situation in the architectural sphere is shown not just by what is presented at the Salon, but also by what isn't. Public architecture – hospitals, bridges, museums, opera houses, galleries, schools – is totally absent (except for a school designed by the Slovenian architect A. Kalamar). In spite of an invitation, the 'Smart House' in Terazije Square is also absent; one must assume that in the lengthy design, realisation and construction phases many complications arose that led to unresolved authorship issues, so it was not possible to present this design that is attractive in a phenomenological and typological context at the Salon without risk.

Urbanism is all but totally absent. It is ironic that at a time when the existing urban matrix continues to erode, a megalomaniacal Danube bank and harbour development project by the mega architect Daniel Libeskind is being promoted. One can well ask how this project fits into our modest means, especially in light of the fact that in the past century we managed to build in Belgrade just two bridges and just two museums, which speaks volumes about the architectural parameters of this milieu. Aside from the design itself, on which we will not comment, it needs to be said that the project is quite untimely, as iconic architecture is no longer topical, in the light of the general global architectural climate, for which reason, like all bygone fashion, it shifts eastwards...

The Salon continues its practice of promoting a new generation of students of architecture and young architects, represented mainly in the category of competition and students' works – as a rule, these works inject the brightest fresh ideas, demonstrate above-average mastery of computer graphic skills, and show that architecture is an international discipline more than ever before.

This segment also endeavours to cultivate plurality and champion new and alternative ideas and designs. In that context has been conceived the Salon's accompanying programme, which presents two students' workshops. In the spirit of the so-called 'green architecture,' which cultivates more responsible attitudes towards the global climate and resource crises, is an exhibition named 'Awakening,' a project for reviving the banks of the Danube and its Veliko Ratno Ostrvo by students of the Faculty of Applied Art in Belgrade. Another futuristic technology aspect of modern architecture, in which students were encouraged to study new materials and constructions instead of purely artistic shaping, is an exhibition of the results of student workshop research performed as part of the 'Construction systems and spatial structures' course at Belgrade University's Faculty of Architecture. Both feature a dynamic programme made up of presentations of works, lectures and workshops.