



THE PROFESSIONAL CENTRE
SLIEMA ROAD
GZIRA GZR 1633 - MALTA
TEL./FAX. (+356) 2131 4265
EMAIL: info@ktpmalta.com
WEBSITE: www.ktpmalta.com

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To support members of the profession in achieving excellence in their practice of architecture and engineering in the interest of the community

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AWARD-WINNING AUSTRIAN FIRM FOR LAST ARCHITECTURE NIGHTS DEBATE

The third edition of Architecture Nights for 2008, organised by the Kamra tal-Periti, will come to an end in the fifth debate this November, with the participation of Austrian firm Szyszkowitz-Kowalski. The series has in the past months featured world-renowned architects Kohn Pedersen Fox Associates from the UK, Agnes Couvelas from Greece, Mecanoo architecten from the Netherlands and this year's RIBA Gold Medal for Architecture, British architect Edward Cullinan, last month.



Michael Szyszkowitz and his wife Karla Kowalski worked for some years with Behnisch & Partner before collaborating together in 1973 and subsequently setting up their practice in 1978. Michael Szyszkowitz studied at the University of Technology in Graz. For many years he was Dean of the Department of Architecture at the Technical University of Braunschweig. Karla Kowalski studied at the Technical University in Darmstadt and the Architectural Association School in London. From 1988 she worked as a Professor and later occupied the post of Head of the Institute for Public Buildings and Design at Stuttgart Technical University. After forming an architectural partnership, a number of projects were constructed, mainly in Graz and the Styria region of Austria.

Szyszkowitz-Kowalski were exponents of the Graz school (sometimes called New Graz Architecture), a tendency established in the 1960s that rejected the perceived sterility of the abstract and conceptual styles of Modernism then current. The work of the firm combines a clear, readable geometry with a sculptural, at times expressionistic, playfulness that often borders on fantasy. Their works are also inventively integrated with their surroundings. In their own words,

We pursue an architectural language that aims at existing or desired forms of life with certain expressiveness. It includes a whole range of various social relations and urban space in particular. Most importantly, we believe that each architectural activity represents a kind of interpretation of correlations in life, thus generating new or essential significance.

Their most important architectural works include highly acclaimed private houses as well as a number of public buildings. The latter include: the renovation and new construction of the School of Home Economics Schloss Großlobming, the Institutes for Biochemistry and Biotechnology at Graz Technical University, the Kastner & Öhler department store conversion and extension in Graz city centre, the Study Centre at the University of Technology in Graz, the award-winning Cultural Centre at St. Ulrich as well as the Biotechnology Centre Qiagen, in Hilden (near Düsseldorf).



While many of Szyszkowitz-Kowalski's commissions have been highly prestigious and have won a number of awards, they have also embraced the more humble enterprise of designing housing complexes, including a large number of social housing projects. The projects at Sandgrasse and Alte Poststrasse, both districts of Graz, were collaborations with the future occupants themselves; at Alte Poststrasse about three-quarters of the future residents participated in the design of their apartments. This was a major factor in the humanising of a type of architecture that is typically cold and repetitive. Other notable residential projects include the highly acclaimed Housing Complex Schießstätte in Nordberggasse (1997-1999) and the Housing Complex Küppersbuschgelände, in Gelsenkirchen (1994-1998) that was further awarded the German Architecture Prize in 1999.

The firm has also been acknowledged for its important contribution to planning and urban design, particularly those interventions within the sensitive historic city centre of Graz. Main projects include the Urban Development in Heidelberg, Piazza d'Italia in Wolfsburg, Sparkassenplatz Graz, a main public place in Graz city centre and the Humanic Headquarter extension and conversion within Graz city centre.

Since 1978 the firm has won twenty-six national and international competitions and has been acknowledged with numerous prizes and awards. Awards include the First Austrian Timber Construction Award in 1979, the Styrian Prize for Architecture in 1983, the Special Austrian Residential Building Award in 1987 and the Merit Award from the Ministry for Education and the Arts in 1990. They were also winners of the Award of the "Zentralvereinigung der Architekten Österreichs" (Central Association of Austrian Architects) in 1982, 1988 and 2001; they were distinguished with the German Architecture Prize in 1999 and they were winners of Styrian Geramb Award in 1981, 1982, 1985, 1992, 1997 and 2004. They were further awarded the Engineering Award of the Austrian Industry of Concrete and Cement in 2004 and more recently the European Union Prize for Cultural Heritage / Europa Nostra Award in 2006.

The firm has held a number of individual exhibitions in Graz, Vienna, Oslo, Edinburgh, Aberdeen, London, Liège, Nantes, Wrocław, St. Moritz, Darmstadt, Gelsenkirchen, Stuttgart, Millstatt, Weimar, Berlin, Vancouver, Bologna, Klagenfurt and Müzzuschlag. It has also participated in joint exhibitions in Berlin, Cologne, Hamburg, New York, Los Angeles, Rome, Paris, Cairo, Moscow, Budapest, Prague, Lyon, Copenhagen, Brussels, Belgrade, Seville, Buenos Aires, Kassel, Karlsruhe, Cracow, Turin, Cambridge (USA) and Montreal. Over 20 books and monographs have been written about the firm and its projects, including the highly acclaimed *Idea and Form: houses by Szyszkowitz+Kowalski* by Karin Wilhelm in 2003 and *Architektur_STMK*, by Herausgeber M. Szyszkowitz, R. Illsinger in 2005.

This exciting debate will focus on the firm's innovative and award-winning social housing projects as well as interventions within the historic city centre of Graz, both themes being very applicable to the local context. It will be held at the Aula Magna (the Old University) in St. Paul's Street, Valletta, on Saturday 15th November at 7.00pm. Entrance to this debate is free. Architecture Nights 08 is sponsored by HSBC and Steel Structures, together with the KTP's Corporate Sponsors AirMalta, and is being organised with the collaboration of the Austrian Embassy in Malta.