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KAMRA TAL-PERITI

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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NETWORK CULTURE AND ARCHITECTURE



This month, the fourth edition of Architecture Nights (AN09), will feature Hans Ibelings, architectural historian and editor / publisher of A10 new European architecture, a bimonthly pan-European magazine. AN09 has in the past months seen the participation of husband and wife team Franco Purini and Laura Thermes, who enthralled an audience with their presentation of works during the Malta Property Expo last February. Eduardo Langagne Ortega, an architect with 35 years of professional practice in architecture and urban planning all over Mexico, in the USA, Guatemala and Chile, also delivered a lecture last March to a packed hall of enthusiastic participants.

Rather than reporting on the latest undertakings of the all-too-familiar big names that crop up in all the architecture journals, A10 casts its net more widely to take in the many other interesting things that are happening in the old continent, devoting equal attention to the architectural production in Western, Central and Eastern Europe. With clear and informative reporting, A10 presents new buildings and projects by tomorrow's stars, forgotten masters and as yet unknown talents.



Recent developments like the expansion of the European Union not only prompt a reconsideration of the geographical borders of Europe, but also raise the question of whether there is, or can be, such a thing as a European culture and, more specifically, a European architectural culture. Europe has been divided throughout its long history and is still divided today –

economically, politically and culturally – yet at the same time the continent is more than ever before in the process of becoming an entity, especially in the cultural arena. There are identifiable areas in which a European unity, transcending the EU, is emerging amidst all this diversity and contrast. One of these areas is certainly architecture. Without dismissing all the local, regional and national differences in culture, conventions and traditions, and without ignoring the significant asymmetry in coverage between East and West, and to a somewhat lesser degree, between North and South (with the East and South as the underdogs), there is a remarkable consistency within European architecture.

There are all kinds of indications that architecture in the nineties has set off in a new direction after the domination of the two last decades by postmodernism as a style or attitude. This trend, which can be seen in the work of architectural names like OMA, Jean Nouvel, Dominique Perrault, Herzog & De Meuron and Toyo Ito, can be connected with one of the dominant forces of the present time: the globalisation that is taking place in virtually every field. One of the consequences for architecture is the erosion of the postmodern axiom of the uniqueness of the site. The context, let alone contextualism, no longer seems to play an important role in an increasing number of designs and buildings.

Hans Ibelings in *Supermodernism* argues that modern architecture has lost all contact with context, ‘an architecture in which superficiality and neutrality have acquired a special significance’. *There are good reasons for regarding globalisation as the dominant theme of the nineties, exerting all kinds of direct and indirect influences on contemporary mentality ... a new architecture now seems to be emerging, an architecture for which such postmodernist notions as place, context and identity have largely lost their meaning...ii* (Hans Ibelings, 1998, 9-10)

It is nearly a decade since Hans Ibelings published *Supermodernism: Architecture in the Age of Globalisation*, his manifesto for an architecture of “superficiality and neutrality”, and many of the predictions now ring prophetic. He sees recent architectural developments, both in their aesthetics and their circumstances, as symptoms, but not leading indicators, of a broader cultural shift toward more global, neutral and non-representational forms of art and exchange.

One might draw a parallel here with what has been happening in Malta. An extract from The Urban Challenge, the Kamra tal-Periti’s Position paper on the Built Environment, states that “*The economic, social and cultural developments in the post-war period in Malta, as in much of Europe, have been substantial. Land use requirements, family structures and their housing expectations, and mobility have all witnessed significant rapid change responsible for delivering a radical and ongoing transformation of the urban and rural environment. The resulting shift in the environmental balance has affected air quality, water management, biotic support (the environment’s ability to support other species) and the delicate symbiosis of the built and unbuilt landscapes. The car became a defining tenet of urban space as ownership increased dramatically, a result of greater affluence, longer travel distances and the absence of adequate, reliable public transport. Historic village cores were taken apart in the post war decades to free up access through and to their centres. ... As is characteristic of periods of rapid growth, particularly in the absence of an adequately managed planning system, much of the development of recent decades has been largely utilitarian, quality in design and construction subordinated to immediate exigencies and economic expedience in the absence of a real culture of the aesthetic, of a true appreciation of the worth of built and environmental heritage and of a recognition of the value of place to societal identity.*”

As Prime Minister Lawrence Gonzi, stated in his speech at the opening of the exhibition Modernist Malta at St James Cavalier earlier this year, “...architecture, like other forms of art, is a reflection of society in the social, cultural, economic and political contexts of that time. Architecture is never static; it is constantly changing according to the needs and aspirations of every society.”

The poster features a circular logo with 'an09' in the top left. Text includes 'under the patronage of the Dutch Embassy in Malta', 'with thanks to joinwell', 'Holland.' with a tulip icon, and 'DIS GROUP OF COMPANIES'. The main title 'ARCHITECTURE nights' is in large, bold, black letters. Below it, a portrait of Hans Ibelings is shown. Text on the left side of the portrait reads 'hans ibelings THE NETHERLANDS', 'sat 16.05.09', 'venue to be confirmed', and '19:00'. At the bottom, logos for 'KAMRA TAL-PERITI', 'HSBC The world's local bank', and 'airmalta*com' are displayed.

Hans Ibelings will be the Kamra's guest on Saturday 16th May. This lecture in the AN09 series promises to be an engaging one, an event which the Kamra tal-Periti looks forward to presenting to its members, students and the general public. The topic will be “Reviewing European Architecture” and will be both about reviewing contemporary architecture, in the common sense of the word, as architectural critics usually do, and about developing a different view on European architecture and its history. Hans Ibelings studied Art History and Archaeology at the University of Amsterdam and worked as curator of the Netherlands Architecture Institute in

Rotterdam between 1989 and 2000. He has also been the editor of the Yearbook Architecture in the Netherlands and architectural critic of De Volkskrant, a Dutch daily newspaper. His publications include “Supermodernism: Architecture in the Age of Globalisation”, “The Artificial Landscape: Contemporary Architecture, Urban Design and Landscape Architecture in the Netherlands”, and “Unmodern Architecture: Contemporary Traditionalism in the Netherlands”.

Architecture Nights 09 – Hans Ibelings is being organised under the patronage of the Dutch Embassy in Malta. Special thanks go to event sponsors DIS and Joinwell, as well as the KTP's corporate partners HSBC and Airmalta.

Danica Mifsud

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