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HOW TO BUILD? THE MODERNIST BOOK

ARCHITECTURE OF THE 20TH CENTURY FROM THE MARZONA COLLECTION

OPENING: WEDNESDAY, 08.10. 2003, 7 PM

PRESS CONFERENCE: TUESDAY, 07.10.2003, 11 AM

- Egidio Marzona has a world-wide reputation as an art collector. Only recently part of his collection, comprising over 1000 works of Minimal Art, Arte Povera, Conceptual Art and Land Art, was purchased for the Nationalgalerie Hamburger Bahnhof, Museum for Contemporary Art, Berlin. It is a lesser known fact, though, that Egidio Marzona was early to begin collecting architecture publications, and that as a publisher he has a clear penchant for the proponents of Classical Modernism. Egidio Marzona lives in Verzegnis (Italy), Berlin and Vienna with contemporary artworks and a growing archive. The collector himself has compiled a selection of books according to his own subjective criteria and for the exhibition at the Architekturzentrum Wien these are being catalogued and made accessible to a broad public for the first time. Over 500 publications are being shown, organised into 8 categories according to the themes: Education, Isms, Nations, Material and Construction, Monograph, Urban Development, Theory and Practise, Housing Development.

BOOK/MODERNISM

Book production underwent a major transformation in the 19th century due to the introduction of new techniques for printing and binding which made it possible for printed matter to develop to become a mass-media in the 20th century. In the 19th century the architecture discourse focused on people and the society of the time – a broad educational orientation is reflected in the texts, a dogmatic system of values and the concepts are intended for general application. At the same time the book served as a provocative medium – establishing different tendencies and styles in architecture, and providing these with a context. The economic, social and technological changes of the early 20th century called for radical new thinking in almost all areas of life.

- The mediation and illustration of specific contents is foremost in Modernist book production. The significance of the book as the medium for transporting the modern approach of the time becomes increasingly explicit. The book of images emerges as a new form alongside the book of texts – the photographic illustration of the object becomes a theme of its own. Orchestrating photographic reproduction down to the smallest detail is an approach that continues to this day. Architecture has even reached a stage today where it has to pursue the structures of the media for its representation – drawing, photography, film, book and the magazine – in order to achieve significance.

Even today, almost 100 years on, discussions on Modernism can become heated. Can one see Modernism as a closed chapter, i.e. an historical phenomenon, or do similar issues and problems still dominate the contemporary discourse?

The term 'Modernism' implies characteristics like progressive, contemporaneous and enlightened – which means that it offers a couterpole to overt historicity, although at the same time the beginnings of

Modernism cannot be clearly defined. Modernism sees itself as the expression of a world view which is, inter alia, looking for new formulations. Books and magazines have become the media in which the most varied of models for interpretation by architects, critics and recipients alike are reflected.

THE EXHIBITION

Named after a book in the collection, *Wie Bauen?* by the Rasch brothers, 'How To Build?' is the title of the exhibition. The breadth of the subject is implicit: Is the central concern with a the heroes of Modernism's search for style, the formal dilemma in which its proponents seek to be build 'isms', or is the issue the emancipation of architecture from enslavement to pure form? Or does the title address the propaganda of technology in the service of standardisation and the definition of building types?

The more neglected currents of Modernism are featured in the exhibition alongside treatises by those innumerable icons who wrote architectural history with their work. The printed material within each theme is sorted chronologically and into sub-themes, making it possible to follow the course of a particular debate and the personal opinions of the protagonists involved, as well as the ensuing conflicts between different generations. The result is not intended as a new and comprehensive anthology of the history of Modernist architecture, but something closer to a reader providing candid insights and a broad general view of the subject matter.

The rhythm of the open and closed, horizontally and vertically presented publications provides a variety of readings branching out in different directions and adopting the dynamics and weight of the discourse of the time. In order to provide individual readings of the text on show and a tactile experience, a section of the rare and accordingly valuable books are available for public scrutiny. In addition, reprints are available for a deeper analysis of the issues at hand.

The exhibition design by the architects HOLODECK.at in the Alte Halle of the Az W adopts the thematic arrangement of the exponents and the dynamic nature of the assorted reading material with flowing walls and hovering volumes of books. An unhierarchic and varied presentation is achieved by means of layering, overlapping and interconnecting the publications on display.

PUBLICATION

A publication to accompany the exhibition is being produced in German/English: 'MODERN. Architekturbücher Aus Der Sammlung Marzona/MODERN. Architecture Books From The Marzona Collection', with texts by Marco De Michelis and Catherine de Smet, as well as an interview with Egidio Marzona by the editor Elisabetta Bresciani. Schlebrügge.Editor (Vienna); 276 pages & 462 full-colour illustrations. Price: 28.- Euro (Bookstore edition 32.- Euro)

Curator: Elisabetta Bresciani **Exhibition Design:** HOLODECK.at **Project Manager:** Monika Platzer
Press: Ulrike Kahr-Haele

Sponsors of the Az W: Geschäftsgruppe Stadtentwicklung und Verkehr; The Austrian Federal Chancellery Arts Department; Wien Kultur; The Austrian Federal Ministry of Education, Science and Culture; UNIQA Versicherungen AG, Zumtobel Staff Österreich Vertriebs-GmbH