

From a critical approach to buildable propositions

Jury report of Archiprix International 2015 – Marina van den Bergen

The adjudication of the 2015 edition of Archiprix International took place at the Superior Technical School of Architecture in Madrid (Escuela Técnica Superior de Arquitectura de Madrid, ETSAM). In a functional and spacious room on the top floor of one wing of the faculty, with strip windows on three sites allowing the November sun to pour in and offering views to the royal gardens and snow-topped mountains in the distance, five jury members had to review 351 graduation projects from 87 different countries in just two days.

The jury members had been selected by the ETSAM and comprised **Eduardo Arroyo**, architect, urban designer, and critic with his own office NO.MAD based in Madrid (Spain); **Luis Fernández-Galiano**, architect and editor of *Arquitectura Viva*, Spain's leading architecture magazine; **Anupama Kundoo**, architect with her own practice in Auroville (India) since 1990; **Zhenyu Li**, dean of the College of Architecture and Urban Planning, Tongji University (Shanghai, China); and French landscape architect **Catherine Mosbach**, co-founder of the magazine *Pages Paysages* and with her own office Mosbach Paysagistes based in Paris (France).

For each edition of Archiprix International, all schools and universities in the fields of architecture, urban design and landscape architecture worldwide are invited to nominate their best graduation project. The graduation projects the jury had to review had been completed between 1 July 2012 and 30 June 2014. The projects mutually differed as much as one could possibly imagine: in scale, in subject, in design approach, and in representation. As one jury member stated: 'Adjudicating the projects provides a unique opportunity to get to know so many different projects and schools, all with different kinds of priorities.' The jury was impressed by the fine drawings – 'drawing is a way of thinking and resolving' – and the sophisticated visuals they saw. The issues many graduation projects testify to great political and social awareness on the part of the designers, and to environmental concerns. 'They don't only want to be good architects, but good citizens as well.' The projects also showed great awareness of the technology that is currently available to realize the proposed designs. Most projects raised important questions, but designers often had difficulty answering them. The jury also queried the mixture of landscape architecture and architecture that occurred in some projects. In all cases, it turned out to be problematic when the landscape design as well as the architecture design was not up to standard. Landscape architecture and architecture are two different playing fields, as one jury member remarked. Questions were also raised when reviewing projects designed for the poor and underprivileged. The intentions of the designers are laudable, but there was concern about whether or not the proposals were perhaps mostly utopian ideas rather than solutions to existing problems.

As part of the process, all jury members were asked to preview 70 projects online to make sure that every project was studied meticulously by at least one person. It turned out that many projects were studied online by more than one jury member. On the first day, all 351 projects (6 panels each) were laid out for the jury. The Archiprix International organization does not set out specific criteria: instead, the jury is asked to assess the submitted plans on their own merits.

The first adjudication round could be characterized by an emphasis on the representation of the project. 'Presentation and mind should be connected. If every aspect of the presentation is good and balanced, you can almost be sure that the project has been well thought through. The graphics, typology and layout of the panels should be in harmony with the concept of the design.' According to the jury, some presentations contained too much analysis. 'I always tell my students: "First show me the conclusion, then tell me how you did it".'

127 projects made it to the second round. The projects that made it to the third round would

be nominated. This selection process provoked passionate discussion. There was discussion about the intentions of the designers and the reasons why schools choose controversial projects – or ‘political architecture’ as one jury member named them – to represent them. There was also discussion about whether or not the jury assumed a standpoint on the issues they address by selecting these projects. Some thought they would do so involuntarily, others disagreed. Other projects were labeled ‘Legal Architecture’, they proposed new laws that would make it possible for people to use architecture in a different way, to enable alterations. Some jury members wondered about the implications this approach might have upon architects and architecture. It triggered an existential discussion about architecture. What is architecture? What is its objective? Should a Master’s Degree thesis project be buildable, or should the project express the position the designer takes as a professional in the world? Ultimately, the jury agreed to disagree and to act as a collective of different opinions. When selecting the winning projects, the jury looked for projects that reflect the very individual and personal language of the designers, expressing themselves in a truly clear voice to the world.

The seven award-winning projects are:

Archipelago Lab – An Atlas of Metropolitan Islands for Madrid

Pedro Pitarch Alonso

Universidad Politécnica de Madrid, Escuela Técnica Superior de Arquitectura, Madrid Spain

The project offers an action plan for the European metropolis. Islands with a concentrated function are regarded as a coherent whole, specifically located in the public sphere and the surrounding metropolitan mass. The archipelago succeeds because it addresses the potential of architecture to create urban pockets of meaning and significance. The islands are prototypes of the city within the city. Each piece, each scene, each island, behaves as a laboratory.

The jury: This project tells the story about the apparently inevitable juxtapositions and incompatibilities of the European metropolis. It expresses a way of thinking and problem solving. And also the capacity of drawings to articulate this.

Architecture and Extreme Environment – Sandwright

Adriana Debnárová

Academy of Fine arts and Design, Department of Architecture, Bratislava Slovakia.

The project is a response to expanding desertification. 3-D printing techniques are used to melt sand into a solid glass-like material. A layer of this material on top of a sand dune prevents the grains of sand from being blown away and thus slows down the process of desertification. The second phase allows the creation of inhabitable spaces within the excavated interior of dunes.

The jury: Innovative technique is used to shape a harsh environment into something new where people can live. The project is an example of the way design is embedded as part of a process to make things.

Architecture of the Synthetic the Spectacular and Belligerent – Constructing Wynyard Island and its Urban Littoral

Frances Cooper

University of Auckland, School of Architecture and Planning, Auckland Australia.

The project speculates upon a reconciliation of Auckland City’s relationship with the Waitemata Harbour by means of a designed intervention. In the project, this once private, reclaimed peninsula is re-appropriated through a seascape island and a mutable urban littoral. It contends with the accumulated history of Auckland’s reclaimed land, its perceived ownership, and the ever-contentious public and private debate over access.

The jury: This project is a very personal approach through powerful means of expressions. It’s a catalogue of thinking. It has intellectual irony: by naming everything and expressing it in

drawings, it gives meaning to it and shows how the interventions must be used.

COOP – a manifesto present in our city

Santiago Benenati and Javier Tellechea

Universidad de la Republica Uruguay, Facultad de Arquitectura, Montevideo Uruguay.

Collective housing involves a wide range of issues that can be approached from a political, ideological and ethical dimension. 'Coop' incorporates systematic logic as a mechanism capable of adaptation to different criteria, formats, property dimensions and density ranges. Spaces and programmes involve the attenuation of limits, encouraging intense use and appropriation, and enriching the collective purpose of the operation.

The jury: It's a true manifesto expressed in great graphic clarity. The project is an example of social innovation and shows great social awareness. Existing self-help mechanisms are used to define spatial tools that can improve everyday life in cities.

Diary of an Architect – a manual of architectural insurrection

Verónica Francés Tortosa

Universidad de Alicante, Escuela Politécnica Superior, Alicante Spain.

Diary of an Architect records and responds to current conflicts and processes concerning the housing problems in Madrid that the architect herself has registered and tackled during a period of a year. The diary offers an open learning system where registration itself serves to test each process in continuous self-assessment. It contains contra-geography, the domestication of a 170-m² industrial flat, and defending housing rights through direct actions.

The jury: Diary of an Architect is a project by a new generation of activist architects. It reflects the political situation of contemporary Spain, asks questions, and takes action.

Recording and Projecting Architecture – A library for the blind in the city of Rome

Filippo Doria

Delft University of Technology, Faculty of Architecture, Delft The Netherlands

The library for the blind in the city of Rome relates to the history of Rome in which representation looms ever large. To a blind person, there is always an intermediate phase between the confrontation with physical reality and the formation of an idea of the surroundings. Without the supply of vision, movement becomes an instrument of knowledge by which, step by step, architecture emerges in the memory of the blind.

The jury: It is a very poetic project, rich in observation and complexity. The intriguing personal language of the designer leads the observer deeper and deeper into the project, revealing new and surprising layers along the way.

Red Meat – New Centre of Re-education and Political Propaganda

José María Martín Padrón and Ana Caracuel Urbano

Universidad Europea de Madrid, Escuela Superior de Arte y Arquitectura, Madrid Spain.

The political context is the network of forced labour and re-education camps scattered throughout North Korea. The first space one encounters after crossing the border from China to North Korea is an amusement park, built but never used. The project is installed in this symbolic space, using its logic to reconfigure it by juxtaposing 'the universalist, modern, progressive story' and the unique narratives told by people about their individual experiences under the regime.

The jury: With very sophisticated graphics the architects created a cacotopia based on actual testimonies from those who managed to escape from North Korea. The project should be understood as architectural criticism of a political system.