



Press release

ARCHIT-ACTION !

Emil Filla Gallery Ústí nad Labem
September 15 - October 21, 2006
Opening - September 14, 2006, 6 pm

With: AS-IF, Lina Bo-Bardi, Iris Dullin-Grund and Hans Wotin, 51N4E, Anne Lacaton and Jean-Philippe Vassal, Cedric Price, Richard Rogers and Renzo Piano, SANAA and Walter Niedermayr

A corner for one's memory? A tomb for famous mummies? A warehouse or an archive of human work, made by humans, timeworn and obsolete, and treated with a sense of compassion?

(Lina Bo-Bardi)

A city centre that is approachable for citizens of all social strata. A theatre, a concert hall, libraries - for children, for music enthusiasts...exhibition spaces and meeting places...a café made for reading, a wine bar, a theatre café, club rooms for artistic and technical hobby societies?

(Iris Dullin-Grund)

A tool, a factory...an active building? A centre that constantly provides something new...a cross between the information-oriented, computerized Times Square and the British Museum?

(Piano & Rogers)

A University of the streets?

(Cedric Price)

On September 14th, 2006, the Emil Filla Gallery Ústí nad Labem will open at 6 p.m. the exhibition ARCHIT-ACTION !, curated by Barbara Steiner and Oana Tanase. This exhibition takes a look at architectural practices that strive or have striven in the past to establish a new and enabling relationship between art, architecture and society, by focussing on the user or observer and inviting them to act. Past ideas should be activated for current debates.

In the first half of the 20th century we find alternative approaches to art in various avant-garde movements, such in the work of El Lissitzky or Frederik Kiesler. The deliberate empowering of visitors to the exhibition was coupled with the hope that an emancipated and self-defining public might be the result. After the Second World War the relationship between art, architecture and society developed differently in socialist and capitalist countries.

In the Sixties and Seventies, the plain white exhibition room became a focus of interest in architecture and critical (visual) art in the Western Europe and the United States. Unconnected with history and the social environment, it was designed to suggest, in the words of Hans Haacke, that "art floats above the ground and has nothing to do with the historical situation in which it comes into being". Drastic social changes further exacerbated the conflict that surrounded the idea of art as autonomous. Questions about representation and exclusion, hegemony and power, were vehemently raised and discussed. This had an effect on the way, in which architecture was conceived: instead of cutting itself off from the outside world, lingering in rooms consecrated specially to aesthetic aims, art was now to be more closely linked to the daily circumstances of life and connected to the urban environment that surrounded it. So buildings began to open themselves quite literally to the outside world, with glass panes and giant display screens providing a link between the activities inside and outside the building, so that social and spatial boundaries became fluid and porous. Examples are Cedric Price's *Fun Palace*, the *Pompidou Center* in Paris designed by Renzo Piano and Richard Rogers, and Lina Bo-Bardi's *Museu de Arte* in Sao Paolo. Alternative spatial schemes, functional pointers and presentation systems defined the locus of art and the possibilities of encounter in a new way. This was linked with the hope of bringing about a radical change in the way in which art was produced and received, of opening up to various interest groups - in short, of giving art a new kind of social effectiveness.

The demand for the social effectiveness was always strong in the socialist concept of art. Art was the expression of and had to have a direct function for the socialist society. "Cultural palaces", cultural institutions for the working class people, functioned as venue for visual art but also for political meetings, workshops, teaching, reading and theatre circles. In the first decade of the late 40s and 50s the building

type of the cultural palace was strongly connected to Soviet architecture but modified by younger architects the 60s and 70s. At that time the cultural palace found its way back from the factories and countryside to the cities, opened more to its urban environment and extended its social functions. As a model we can find here the *Haus der Kultur und Bildung* by Iris Dullin-Grund in Neubrandenburg. Programmatically the concept of the cultural house mixes works by professionals and non-professionals. Cultural production and perception should have been accessible to anyone.

Ideas current at the time found an added relevance in some aspects of contemporary architecture. The knowledge that architecture is never a neutral background to the objects exhibited, but rather organises the gaze of the viewer and prescribes distinct modes of reading and interpretation, makes the relationship between the perceiving subject, the object on view and the architectural frame a critical issue. By contrast with the Sixties and Seventies, the social framework (including all the political, economic, social and cultural implications) is taken into account here. If changeability is spoken of, then it is a matter of playing options within quite definitely prescribed rules of play. In this case, flexibility is deliberately restricted, so that the playing options selected and the associated changes, should come into view all the more clearly within a prescribed set of parameters. The changeability of the internal layout structure of the building not only relates to the geometry of spatial links, it also suggests a reformulation of the function of the room in question. The rooms are no longer designed with a single definite function in view - rather they imply the possibility of their own reinterpretation. Starting from the position that the function and significance of architecture exist on the basis of a certain social agreement, an act of communication as a result of which - and only as a result of which - a space can be endowed with significance at all, what we have here is spaces that are provided for negotiation. The buildings seem to invite us to negotiate institutional parameters. Examples are the *21st Century Museum of Contemporary Art* in Kanazawa by SANAA, the *Groeningemuseum* in Bruges and the *LamotTM-Centre* in Mechelen by 51N4E, the *Palais de Tokyo* in Paris, the *Louvre* in Lens and the *Architecture Foundation* in London by Lacaton & Vassal.

The exhibition was also shown at the Galerie für Zeitgenössische Kunst, Leipzig (May 20 - August 13, 2006).

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Under the title *againstwithin* 5 institutions co-operate: The Museum of Contemporary Art Leipzig; the Faculty of Art and Design, J. E. Purkyne University, Usti nad Labem; the Forum Stadtpark, Graz; the Van Abbe Museum, Eindhoven; the Institute for Contemporary Art and Dunaujvaros.

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