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OTTOKAR UHL. AFER THE RULES OF ARCHITECTURE

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Since 2001 the archives of Ottokar Uhl have been at the disposal of the Architekturzentrum Wien for academic processing. In line with Az W policy of creating a close link between academic work and architecture, when the processing of the material for archiving has been finished the complete oeuvre of Ottokar Uhl is to be presented to the general public in a comprehensive exhibition and publication at the Architekturzentrum Wien from 03 March 2005.

Ottokar Uhl's radical social and architectural stance has earned him a special and significant position in Austrian architecture. His research on industrialisation, on flexible space and on participatory processes have new topical significance for the next generation of architects, which is also concerned about the connection between architecture and socio-political emancipation.

OTTOKAR UHL

Ottokar Uhl, born in 1931, is considered one of the major protagonists of Austrian architecture in the second half of the 20th century. His reputation is based on his innovative church buildings in the late 1950s, his cutting edge role with participatory building in Austria from the 1970s and on his academic work. Ottokar Uhl's oeuvre reminds one of a time when architecture was still seen as an attempt to find a response to issues raised by social developments. "See what is built as the product of a socio-political assignment, is Uhl's message" (Dietmar Steiner).

SPECIAL TOPICS

Early architectural influences: Ottokar Uhl studied from 1950-53 at Lois Welzenbacher's master school at the Academy of Fine Arts in Vienna. Konrad Wachsmann became another influential figure when Uhl encountered his working approach and theories at the Salzburg Summer Academy in 1957. The central issues addressed by Wachsmann, of rational modernism, the industrialisation of construction work and orientation on grids, are also dominant in Uhl's work.

Church building: In the 1960s, in a climate of liberal Catholicism, 37 designs for new churches and conversions of churches and chapels were completed intended to serve a model function, conforming to liturgical amendments following the 2nd Vatican Council. The Demontable Church on Siemensstrasse (Vienna, 1960-63), for instance, or the conversion of the Ebendorferstrasse student chapel (Vienna, 1958) set new standards for sacral buildings. While holding a teaching post at the Academy of Fine Arts in Vienna, Uhl published a study called *Gemeinschaftsbauten von Kirchengemeinden* (Communal Buildings for Church Municipalities) and formulated his basic position as a builder of churches.

The Industrialisation of Building: Ottokar Uhl was convinced that an improvement of the built environment lay in the potential of industrialisation, in the rational organisation of construction elements. His

thoughts on a participatory process tied in with this structural approach. This required an objective approach to planning, a rational design that has enough scope and is flexible enough to accommodate the complexity and contradictions of the participatory process. "Objective, that means pragmatic, but above all it means that it relates to people; it means seeing the realities as well as possible for what they are" (Ottokar Uhl).

Participation: Participatory processes in the planning procedure, the concrete involvement of future residents in the process of creating space and architecture are a central concern to Uhl. He was able to realise this process of democratic emancipation in several housing developments, supported by the so-called 'S.A.R. Method', which separated every building into a primary and a secondary structure according to a strict grid.

Building as a Process: Uhl's central criticism of architecture is the fixation on a state of finality on the day of a building's completion. He demands permanent flexibility defined by changing uses. The "Gebrauchwert" (utility value) of the space is decisive to him.

Teaching – Aesthetic Training: Few people went to the same lengths as Ottokar Uhl to attempt to make his work and architectural achievement understandable, descriptive and the process traceable. Accordingly, he demanded the development of a democratic aesthetic: "Instead of outstanding performances by individual aesthetic experts for a few privileged people, a reduced aesthetic achievement is to be demanded" (Ottokar Uhl).

THE EXHIBITION

The exhibition shows the dialogue in two formats, it documents and interprets the work: core element is the monograph, which has references to the complete archives of the work of Ottokar Uhl. In line with his own approach, the exhibition does not show a few of the results of his work, but illustrates instead the intrinsic processes at specific points. Accordingly, alongside models, photographs, plans, publications and documents in the exhibition, there are also facsimile transcripts of participation group meetings. The second part of the exhibition provides interpretation of the monographic presentation, and also consists of an independently legible element in the form of a montage of images and short texts of relevance to his architecture theory. With a focus on the central themes in the oeuvre of Ottokar Uhl, the exhibition attempts to provide an updated look at his work as well as addressing some problematic aspects of his work in a historical context.

THE PUBLICATION

A monograph is being published to accompany the exhibition. 256 pages, 300 illustrations. Contributors: Christa Kamleithner, Johannes Porsch, Bernhard Steger, with a foreword by Dietmar Steiner. Published by the Architekturzentrum Wien, Verlag Anton Pustet, Salzburg-Munich. German Edition.

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