Wake up!
A path towards better architecture
Salon Suisse 2016
Welcome to the 2016 Salon Suisse, which I have the great pleasure to host as your Salonnière on the invitation of the Swiss Arts Council Pro Helvetia.

This year, the Salon has a two-fold aim: to re-evaluate fundamental ideas resulting from a balanced conception of modernity and to consider how these might be adapted to serve as guidelines for architecture in the twenty-first century.

Today, thanks to the global diffusion of ideas enabled through digital media, a multitude of innovative, effective and cost-efficient architectural techniques and solutions – often based on lessons from the past – are proliferating worldwide, resulting in the users of architecture themselves increasingly being empowered in its making. The Salon Suisse offers a space to reflect on this phenomenon: exploring reuse and recycling, bio-climatic techniques, self-build, the recentering of the human and human need in architecture, as well as providing a place to discuss and revisit ideas such as tradition-as-modernity, ‘small is beautiful’, and ‘Existenzminimum’: minimal dwelling standards for all. A host of Swiss and international architects, engineers, researchers, crafts-(wo)men, filmmakers and artists have been invited to participate and share their expertise and thoughts on the theme of ‘a better architecture for tomorrow’.

I am glad to invite all of you to the Palazzo Trevisan degli Ulivi in Venice for an inspiring series of discussions and events. Guest speakers and contributors from different countries and disciplines accepted to come to Venice to share their experience and perspective along the five Salons of the 2016 Biennale.

For those who cannot make it to Venice, the Swiss architectural magazine Hochparterre is reporting online from all Salons: hochparterre.ch/salonsuisse.

Leïla el-Wakil, Salonnière,
Professor of Architecture History,
Geneva University
Temporary earth-block refugee shelter, Gaza, Palestine, 2009, photo © Bill Bouldin, architecture: Bill Bouldin and Rashid al Ruzzi
Thursday 26 May
6.30 pm
The hell of reinforced concrete. A play.

This play by the great Egyptian architect Hassan Fathy is one of several he wrote: each intended as a didactic tool. Here he argues passionately for the continuity of the ancient vernacular architectural traditions of Upper Egypt, traditions developed over millennia in response to local climatic and environmental conditions but under threat from new modernist construction techniques – like reinforced concrete. This piece provides a fascinating and entertaining introduction to the future of architecture.

Nicholas Weeks, Switzerland: dramaturge. Nicholas Weeks holds an MA in English Literature and a CAS in Dramaturgy and Performance. His long standing interest in theatre, performance and contemporary dance has led him to act as cultural mediator for the Theatre Forum Meyrin as well as dramaturge for the Swiss theatre director Dorian Rossel. Emmet – short for Embodied Metaphors – is the theatre workshop of the English Department of the University of Geneva.

In order to open the Salon Suisse and get to the heart of the subject of Wake up! A path towards better architecture, what could be better than to hand over to Hassan Fathy. He is one of the architects who produced so much work for what he called 'appropriate architecture'. Emmet, the theatre workshop of Geneva University, supervised by Nicholas Weeks, will interpret for our great pleasure 'The hell of reinforced concrete'.

We shall then be the honored to welcome among us three of the most important contemporary architects who have worked at rediscovering and popularizing traditional construction techniques in developing countries as well as in the Western World. Among them will be Hassan Fathy as both the architect and drama writer. On this occasion, we shall share with you their view on the future of architecture.

Thursday 26 May
7.15 pm

These three important figures of contemporary vernacular architecture have been given carte blanche to express their vision of what today's architecture for tomorrow should be. They have kindly agreed to provide their own personal introductions to this year's Salon Suisse.

Leïla el-Wakil, Switzerland: architect. Born in Cairo and currently living in Geneva, Leïla el-Wakil has been trained both as an architect (École d'Architecture de Genève) and as a historian of art (RNH in Humanities, Geneva University). Benefiting from these two-fold competencies, she has developed an original scientific competence in history of architecture, focusing on the 19th and 20th century constructions, heritage conservation, Egyptian and Arab, as well as vernacular architecture. She published plenty of articles and books on Swiss, European and Egyptian architecture, notably Hassan Fathy dans son temps (Gallion, Paris, InFolio, 2013). Besides her academic career, Leïla el-Wakil is actively engaged in the field of heritage conservation. Websites: https://www.unige.ch/lettres/armuchifair/organigram/archtecture/el-wakil and https://lelwakil.blog.tdg.ch/about.html

Anna Heringer, Germany: architect. At the age of 19 she travelled to Bangladesh and had the chance to learn that the most successful development strategy is to trust in the existing, readily available. Since then she focuses on the use of natural building materials. Her Handmade School in Rudrapur (Bangladesh), received the Aga Khan Award for Architecture (2007), one of the many honors she received. Over the years, Heringer has realized further projects in Asia (Bangladesh, China), Africa (Zimbabwe, Morocco) and Europe and teaches in many schools and universities.

Martin Rauch, Austria: ceramicist, architect. The Austrian ceramicist and architect first encountered his favorite material, clay, through his training as a ceramicist at the University of Applied Arts (Vienna). He realized the building potential of earth after volunteering in Africa and has never stopped using it ever since. He founded the firm Leh – Ton – Erde (1989) first in Austria and then in Switzerland (2012). In 2010, he became UNESCO Honorary Professor in the Chair of Earthen Architecture. Since 2014, he is a guest lecturer at the Department of Architecture ETH Zurich, together with Anna Heringer.

Simón Vélez, Colombia: architect. Born in Manizales, Simón Vélez is a prize-winning architect from Colombia. Over the course of his over forty-year career, Vélez has emerged as one of the most eminent proponents of bamboo as a sustainable building material. He has created many projects in Asia (China, Jamaica, Colombia, Panama, Ecuador and India). He was recipient of the Principal Prince Claus Award in 2009.

These three important figures of contemporary vernacular architecture have been given carte blanche to express their vision of what today's architecture for tomorrow should be. They have kindly agreed to provide their own personal introductions to this year's Salon Suisse. This piece provides a fascinating and entertaining introduction to the future of architecture.
The thematic of the rediscovery of ancient techniques and material feeds today’s projects in many circumstances: contemporary projects with an idea of recycling, restorations works or emergency dwellings. We will discuss particularly about the earth which is reused in different manners. Terrabloc is producing compact blocks of earth that anyone can press with a manual press reminding the way in which the Thousand Villages were constructed in Algeria in the sixties. Salma Samar Damluji restored and built according to ancestral techniques in Hadramut. Bill Bouldin planned in Gaza refugee dwellings in the manner of Hassan Fathy that will be echoed by the visit of the Western Sahara installation set by Manuel Herz.

Terrabloc is a young company based in Geneva that is completely passionate about sustainability and the economic use of resources. Made up of an architect and an engineer, together they developed a stabilized raw earth block using recycled soil excavated from construction sites. Made using a hand-powered mechanical press, the technique reinterprets and revitalizes ancestral methods for shaping mudbricks and after several experiments, many projects are currently under development. Thanks to their systematic scientific approach in analyzing and combining different soils to optimize the final properties of the blocks, earth as a material has never been closer to meeting European standards for use in construction.

Friday 17 June
7 pm  Salma Samar Damluji: Inspired by ingenious design. Presentation and discussion. This is an evening devoted to questions around the preservation and renewal of living urban heritage and architectural culture: defending both the spirit and sense of place. The work undertaken in Hadramut, Yemen by architect Salma Samar Damluji since the early 1980s, most recently with the Daw’an Mud Brick Architecture Foundation (2005–2013), serves as the basis for a discussion about revitalizing vernacular architecture in rural, village and urban contexts. Central to this question is how to approach new design and construction which limits the damage to the relationship and balance between architecture and its environment, engaging with design principles and building techniques, whilst responding to residents’ emerging and future needs.

Saturday 18 June

7 pm  Bill Bouldin: About emergency dwellings. Presentation and discussion. Bill Bouldin, of Mechkat Bouldin architects and ARU advisors, gives a presentation on the emergency shelters built in Gaza in 2009. Inspired by Hassan Fathy’s building methods, these minimal dwellings were built with support of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA), using multilateral construction training programs implemented by the International Labour Organisation (ILO). The project created many new jobs and enabled numerous homeless families to be rehoused at low cost, using simple, economic technology.

Manuel Herz conducts a guided tour of the installation that he presented to the Biennale Architettura 2016.

9 pm  Dominique Fleury: Hors-Champs d’Oliviers and Diary Under Siege. Films. The filmmaker Dominique Fleury will present her documentaries shot in Palestine and Syria, to inform and contextualize the discussion about the provision of refugee housing.

Thursday 16 June
7 pm  Terrabloc: The reinvented earth. Presentation and discussion. Terrabloc is a young company based in Geneva that is completely passionate about sustainability and the economic use of resources. Made up of an architect and an engineer, together they developed a stabilized raw earth block using recycled soil excavated from construction sites. Made using a hand-powered mechanical press, the technique reinterprets and revitalizes ancestral methods for shaping mudbricks and after several experiments, many projects are currently under development. Thanks to their systematic scientific approach in analyzing and combining different soils to optimize the final properties of the blocks, earth as a material has never been closer to meeting European standards for use in construction.
The theme of self-build, improvised and ‘spontaneous’ architecture is central to this month’s Salon.

Attempts to give back the individual control over their own house construction – taking this back from building firms and construction companies – were made after the Second World War with movements such as Castors in France or the different communities established by the hippie generation at Christiania in Copenhagen or Montréal in Larzac, for example. Today with the financial markets in control of the property market, more and more people from many different backgrounds are taking the opportunity to build for themselves at low cost, a process in which social media is playing an important part, encouraging and fostering the diffusion of inexpensive traditional and innovative building methods – and relatively easy do-it-yourself, from the Tiny Houses movement, to new takes on the primitive hut and the revisiting of traditional construction methods.

Thursday 8 September
7 pm Daniel Grataloup: The cement gun in self-build. Presentation and discussion. The technique of shotcrete employed by Daniel Grataloup from the 1960s onwards has made it possible to lower building costs whilst creating amazing structures that break free of any rationalization or standardization in the way they are built. His buildings, conceived around a metallic skeleton, adopt organic forms that adapt to users’ movements inside the space. This method was taken up by the self-build movement with the theory behind it explored by Joël Unal in his book Pratique du voile de béton en autoconstruction (1981).

Friday 9 September

1 pm Architectural tour. Tour guided by Leïla el-Wakil, Salonnière. A visit to the Villa Foscari (Malcontenta) by Andrea Palladio. Meeting point: Vaporetto stop Zattere.

7 pm Ahmad Hamid: 2 Design = ½ Cost + Beautiful. Presentation and discussion. For seven years, during his early career, Ahmad Hamid collaborated with Hassan Fathy at the Institute for Appropriate Technology. Later he designed and developed several affordable housing typologies based on the vernacular of Egypt’s Fayoum region, constructing them in mudbrick. By utilizing these ancient building vocabularies, he formulated alternative economics for construction, and reinvented an authentic relationship between masons, craftsmen and architects, putting the craftmanship of the experienced mason back at centre stage in the building process. Hamid constantly transposed his mode d’emploi of immediacy and efficiency to work processes across the entire design field, from sketch to execution, managing this without sacrificing his concern for reducing building and running costs – for both rich and poor, but now compromising in the provision of beautiful, affordable social housing.

Saturday 10 September

7 pm Mariana Correia: Local knowledge and capacity building through community engagement. Presentation and discussion. Through the transfer of local know-how and intangible folk knowledge, community engagement contributes to integrating people into society, supporting traditional ways of life and keeping social balance: giving communities’ sustained local values and a sense of belonging. In Mali for instance, through self-organised craftmanship associations, local communities transfer their know-how, encouraging traditional values and respect for the empirical knowledge of the elder generation; whilst in Nicaragua, communities of working-women are addressing capacity building skills among younger generations. Local know-how, often consisting of an intangible heritage of handed-down knowledge, is therefore the essential basis for preserving vernacular environments, where social and cultural cohesion are at the core of local sustainability. Safeguarding this cultural heritage through capacity building is therefore a fundamental element in maintaining both cultural diversity and human sustainability.

7–10 September
Ammar Abo Bark: Mural. During the Salon, the young Egyptian artist, Ammar Abo Bark will be painting a mural that makes use of some of the naive motifs common to the villages of Upper Egypt. Venue: Campo S. Agnese.
Let’s rediscover Salon June
Thursday 16 June
7 pm Terrabloc: The reinvented earth. Laurent de Wursteremberge and Rodrigo Fernandez; Samuel Dématraz, filmmaker. Presentation and discussion.

Friday 17 June
7 pm Salma Samar Damluji: Inspired by ingenious design. Presentation and discussion.

Saturday 18 June
4 pm Manuel Herz: The Western Sahara. Guided tour.
7 pm Bill Bouldin: About emergency dwellings. Presentation and discussion.
9 pm Dominique Fleury, filmmaker: Hors-Champs d’Oliviers and Diary Under Siege. Films.

Let’s build Salon September
Thursday 8 September
7 pm Daniel Grataloup: The cement gun in self-build. Presentation and discussion.

Friday 9 September
10 am Daniel Grataloup. Workshop.
1 pm Architectural tour. Tour guided by Leila el-Wakil, Salonnière. A visit to the Villa Foscarì (Malcontenta) by Andrea Palladio. Meeting point: Vaporetto stop Zattere.
7 pm Ahmad Hamid: 2 Design = ½ Cost + Beautiful. Presentation and discussion.

Saturday 10 September
10 am Daniel Grataloup. Workshop.
7 pm Mariana Correia: Local knowledge and capacity building through community engagement. Presentation and discussion.

7–10 September
Ammar Abo Bakr: Mural. During the Salon, the young Egyptian artist, Ammar Abo Bakr will be painting a mural that makes use of some of the naive motifs common to the villages of Upper Egypt. Venue: Campo S. Agnese.

Let’s dig Salon October
Thursday 20 October
7 pm Peter Vetsch: Bio-climatic underground houses in Switzerland. Presentation and discussion.

Friday 21 October
7 pm Mahnaz Ashraf: Troglodytic settlements in Iran – the case of Maymand. Presentation and discussion.

Saturday 22 October
7 pm Maximous El Antony: Coptic troglodytic churches in the Muqattam. Presentation and discussion.

Let’s reduce Salon November
Thursday 24 November
7 pm Paul Humbert, LVP: Small is beautiful. Presentation and discussion.

Friday 25 November
11 am Paola Viganò and Cyril Veillon, Archizoom, EPFL: The Horizontal Metropolis – a radical project. Guided tour.
7 pm David Adjaye and Ellen Baxter: New typology for affordable housing. Presentation and discussion.

Saturday 26 November
7 pm Let’s keep the door ajar. AJAR featuring Aude Seigne, Bruno Pellegrino, Daniel Vuataz, Guy Chevalley, Julie Guinand, Manon Reith. Closing Performance.

Thursday 26 May
6.30 pm The hell of reinforced concrete. Drama written by Hassan Fathy (1964), Campo S. Agnese, world premiere played by Emmet, directed by Nicholas Weeks (University of Geneva).
7.15 pm An Introduction to the Salon Suisse: Leila el-Wakil, Salonnière. Opening Statements: Anna Heringer, Martin Rauch and Simón Vélez.
Thursday 20 October
7 pm Peter Vetsch: Bio-climatic underground houses in Switzerland.
Presentation and discussion.

A key troglodytic architecture pioneer today is Swiss architect Peter Vetsch, who has built more than ninety bio-climatic houses in Switzerland and in other countries, all half-buried underground. The revolutionary architecture is eco-friendly and allows a perfect symbiosis with nature. The houses can be built for just €10,000 by their users, so saving both money and energy!}

Friday 21 October
7 pm Mahnaz Ashrafi: Troglodytic settlements in Iran – the case of Maymand.
Presentation and discussion.

The Iranian plateau contains one of the richest concentrations of troglodytic dwellings anywhere in the world. Different types coexist, some underground, others located in the heart of mountains and on cliffs. The village of Maymand, recently classified as a World Heritage Site by UNESCO, is a living example of the adaptation of traditional architectural models to the contemporary world and their contribution to sustainable living.
Let’s reduce

Salon November

The forgotten concept of frugality seems now to be a veritable precondition for our continued survival on this planet and indeed of that of Earth itself. Imposing turning our backs on useless luxury and wastage of resources and raw materials, in architecture it means questioning the way we build and finding answers to its costs, be they monetary, social or ecological. How can we build smartly and for the poorest amongst us? This Salon addresses these questions and ends in an artistic synthesis linking this quest to creativity.

Thursday 24 November
7 pm LVPH: Small is beautiful. Presentation and discussion. Paul Humbert from LVPH, an emerging young Swiss practice based in Fribourg, which is involved in many different types of construction in Switzerland and abroad, presents their small-scale housing built on limited budgets. These exceptional projects in the Cantons of Vaud and Fribourg will act as prompts to discuss and question the economic dimension of architecture in rich countries like Switzerland.

Friday 25 November
11 am Paola Viganò and Cyril Veillon, Archizoom, EPFL: The Horizontal Metropolis – a radical project. Guided tour. This exhibition investigates the concept of the ‘horizontal metropolis’: its space, traditions and authors and its relevance today as a charged ecological and social design issue. Beyond a simplistic centre-periphery opposition, this concept reveals the dispersed condition as a potential asset, rather than a limit, to the construction of a sustainable and innovative urban realm. It explores scenarios and design strategies for the recycling and upgrading of city-territories in a radical project.

Saturday 26 November
7 pm Let’s keep the door ajar. AJAR featuring Aude Seigne, Bruno Pellegrino, Daniel Vuataz, Guy Chevalley, Julie Guinand, Manon Reith. Closing Performance. The Swiss literary collective AJAR, founded in 2012, is a group of young French-speaking authors who promote a redefinition of the writer’s status: based on collective work, sharing of knowledge, mutual critique and group activity. This creative performance, in both French and English, is specially designed for the Salon Suisse and focuses on the main questions of our program – reuse and recycling, bio-climatic techniques, self-build, human need in architecture, tradition-as-modernity, ‘small is beautiful’, minimal dwelling standards for all – transposed in an artistic way.

David Adjaye, UK: architect, Adjaye Associates was born in Tanzania but brought up in Antigua. He completed his degree at St Martins School of Art in London (1991) and began his work in a small office in Hackney. Three years later, AJAR is composed of 18 authors who are now involved in more than 20 projects throughout the world. His most prestigious commission to date is the Smithsonian Institution’s National Museum which opened in 2016 in Washington DC. 

Ellen Baxter, USA: founder of Broadway Housing Communities (BHC). Ellen Baxter has been involved in early childhood education and an innovative cultural institution, the Sugar Hill Children’s Museum of Art & Storytelling, to create meaningful and lasting change for underserved children and adults. Architect David Adjaye and Ellen Baxter, BHC’s founder and executive director, will discuss their partnership in realizing the potential of this ambitious development, financed through a mix of public and private funding and only made possible with grassroots community support.
Laufen Bathrooms AG is delighted to be the partner of the Salon Suisse in the fifth year. As a brand standing for a symbiosis of design, quality and functionality, we have been supporting the events at the Palazzo Trevisan since the beginning with the intention to participate in and encourage an international dialogue in the fields of architecture and design.

Alberto Magrans,
Senior Managing Director, Laufen Bathrooms AG

The Salon Suisse 2016 will be exclusively accompanied and documented by the Swiss architecture magazine Hochparterre, its official media partner. Hochparterre will provide background information with written articles, visuals and free live streaming of part of the Salon Suisse talks on hochparterre.ch/salonsuisse
The Salon Suisse is the event program accompanying the participation of Switzerland at the 15th International Architecture Exhibition – La Biennale di Venezia. It is initiated and organized by the Swiss Arts Council Pro Helvetia.