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Jury Report

Swiss Pavilion
18th International Architecture Exhibition
La Biennale di Venezia 2023
Two-stage competition in a selective procedure

Zurich, 5.4.2022

The competition met with a great degree of interest, with the Jury remarking upon the high quality of entries. The adjudication of the competition in the form of an open call for entries for "the presentation of a national pavilion" is only partly comparable to the adjudication of a normal architectural competition, as the spectrum of the various subjects, all very different in content, is broad, and a cross comparison would be extremely challenging. The following quality criteria used in the discussion, as already mentioned in the call for entries, significantly contributed to the structuring of the evaluation process:

- Clarity, contemporary pertinence of the theme chosen.
- Visual potential of the exhibition concept.
- Potential of the theme chosen in curatorial and spatial terms.
- Capacity of the team to reflect, in a clear and innovative manner, a contemporary architectural issue.
- Representation of the Swiss scene and its present architectural reality.
- Integration of the concept in the architecture of the Swiss Pavilion.
- Communication, legibility and capacity to address a wide international audience.
- Compliance with the budget of 250,000 CHF, including fees, production, visual support, and communication.

The process comprised three main stages of adjudication. The first evaluation stage was
devoted to an in-depth study and comparison of the project entries. It was the primary task of every member of the jury to individually rate the 48 projects and then to select 7 of them for a short list during a jury meeting. The following teams were then invited to present their projects in person at the headquarters of Pro Helvetia in Zurich (mid-December 2021).

Shortlist First Round of Presentations:

- 'ALLES MUSS WEG - Abriss Party'
  Lara Bartsch, Saida Brückner, Laura Bruder, Géraldine Recker, Lara Vehovar

At the 18th Biennale di Venezia, we will 'celebrate' the demolition of the Swiss Pavilion.
Already from the outside, batter boards suggest the imminent 'demolition party'. This is a familiar image in Swiss cities. The real estate market never sleeps and the hunger for maximizing profit lets wrecking balls glow. As soon as one dances on the ruins of the pavilion however, a sour aftertaste sets in. When does a building become worthless and why is it valuable? How is it determined what is worth protecting and what is not? What is sustainable and who decides?

- 'Architettura è territorio, arte di coabitazione equilibrante tra organismi diversi della terra'
  Jetmira Belegu, Riccardo Blumer, Mario Monotti, Franz Oswald, Martino Pedrozzi, Sophie Marie Piccoli, Arianna Sebastiani, Caterina Zatti

  It will be a physical architecture in real scale. It will be a social experience, activated only with the presence of the visitors. It will refer to Venice as a direct example of architecture that is territory.

- 'CFC / BKB / CCC 900'
  Charlotte Nierlé, Carmen Van Pamel

  The Swiss building sector was rationalised by an instrument of categorisation known as CFC-BKP-CCC. A tool to normalise building planning, its last chapter-900-describes the temporal objects that rarely prevail a succession of occupants: furnishings.
  This project catalogues the works of architects under code 900, during the mid-century years. It questions architects to re-appropriate this category, its meaning, and its future by re-interpreting designs from the past in a contemporary dimension.

- 'Maintenance as a project'
  Lukas Burkhart, Dries Rodet, Charlotte Truwant

  SUSTAINING, CLEANING, REPAIRING, PREVENTING, FIXING, RESTORING, PRESERVING, FORESEEING, EMBEDDING, LASTING. The maintenance in a building is a burden, gardening is an honour. Can architecture by means of maintenance adapt like landscape through time? Beyond staging care taking, can the Swiss pavilion convey the potential of architecture as a timeless project with the act of maintenance as the premises of design? Can maintenance go beyond preservation?

- 'Matière Ultime, une taxonomie du quotidien'
  Lucile Ado, Oscar Buson, Céline Guibat, Sophie Mayer

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We propose to show the ultimate stage of matter, to understand its journey and its impact on our territory. Bringing this ultimate material to Venice Biennale aims to talk about the impossibility of perfect recycling and the infinite reuse of material. It means to show the spatial impact on Swiss territory and landscapes of colossal volumes of ultimate matter. It allows the public to understand it in a sensitive, poetic and pedagogical way through a series of spaces.

- 'Nachbarschaft Vecindario'
  Sophie Agata Ambroise, Karin Sander, Philip Ursprung

  The Swiss and Venezuelan pavilions form an ensemble of extraordinary architectural and sculptural quality. Nevertheless, due to their representative function, they are thought of separately and staged accordingly. The concept instead focusses on the immediate proximity of the buildings – concretely and as an occasion to address the current significance of 'neighbourhood' in relation to architecture in its various dimensions.

- 'Swiss Favela'
  Balàzs Földàry, Melchior Füzesi, Augustin Rebetez, Camille Regli, Marie-Annick Staehelin

  How can we imagine the future of architecture in Switzerland? Is it legitimate to think that the Swiss population lives in extreme architectural comfort, an excess of luxury?

After this first round of presentations, the jury sat down for a joint discussion questioning
and comparing the themes proposed and their potential for development. Finally, three projects were selected for the second and final round of presentations in mid-January 2022. This second round took place digitally due to the pandemic situation at the time. The teams were contacted by the jury shortly after the first round of presentations, so that they had time for a revision phase in which the individual projects were optimised and refined with respect to content and form.

Shortlist Second Round of Presentations:

- 'Slow Dancing in the Burning Room' (prev. working titles 'Swiss Favela', 'Dark Matter')
  Corentin Fivet, Balàzs Földàry, Melchior Füzesi, Célia Küpfer, Augustin Rebetez, Camille Regli, Marie-Annick Staehelin

- 'The Hidden Half' (prev. working title 'Maintenance as a project')

Lukas Burkhart, Dries Rodet, Charlotte Truwant, Nemanja Zimonjic

- 'Nachbarschaft Vecindario'
  Karin Sander, Philip Ursprung

1. Slow Dancing in the Burning Room (prev. working titles: 'Swiss Favela', 'Dark Matter')

The project takes as its theme the inertia of our society in the face of the pressing climate crisis. In an orchestrated interplay of architecture, scientific documentation and artistic expression, the potential of the Re-Use concept in the field of building with concrete will be presented.

The centrepiece of the exhibition would consist of reused concrete elements from around Venice. After the Biennale, they would be used in a new construction elsewhere. The Swiss Pavilion would thus be a stage for storage, display and demonstration of the feasibility of reusing concrete. The idea would be to create a temporary exhibition that does not produce waste and highlights the potential of concrete in reuse.

The jury judged the project to be extremely topical and relevant. The reutilisation of concrete in architecture is discussed today primarily in relation to recycled concrete. The fact that concrete elements can also be used as such for further construction is still little known.

The collaboration of the Neume office (Földàry, Staehelin, Füzesi) with the Laboratoire d'exploration structurale of Corentin Fivet / EPFL gives the project a strong foundation. The team is interdisciplinary and also includes a visual artist, Augustin Rebetez. The potential of this kind of collaboration is judged very high.

However, the jury also sees a risk: in the implementation phase, the artistic component could become over-decorative. In this respect, it regrets that Augustin Rebetez was not involved in either the first or the second presentation of the project to the jury and did not personally explain his role in the team.

The jury has another major question in relation to the structural implementation on site. The 3D visualization of the installation envisaged for the painting room gives rise to fears that a very large volume of concrete will be required. The sustainable planned re-use of the concrete elements after the Bienniale is thus inevitably contrasted with a large-scale transport effort.

Assessment criteria of the jury

Topic significance: high – focuses on the reuse (≠ recycling!) of concrete, an undervalued topic
Conceptual clarity: high – the jury welcomes the interdisciplinary team
Feasibility: critical – a huge amount of concrete has to be transported through Venice and stocked in the painting gallery

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Performance potential: seems high – unfortunately not explained by the artist of the team

2. The Hidden Half (prev. working title 'Maintenance as a project')

The preservation, maintenance and care of a garden is perceived as a beautiful task, but that of a building as a burden. And yet preservation and building in the existing fabric are more important today than ever before. The team would like to demonstrate this in an exhibition designed as an installation.

The sick plane tree in the courtyard of the Swiss Pavilion becomes the main protagonist. The team wants to dig a big hole in order to expose its monumental roots and understand the disease. How could we reuse the wood of this tree? During the Biennale, the cut stem would be used to secure the wall of the courtyard, which the team would like to cover like an archaeological site. Meanwhile, the excavated earth would be stored in the painting gallery, where the visitors would step into a multisensory experience, with water dripping from the ceiling and new species growing on the heap of earth, as an image of a possible future.

The jury was won over by the basic idea of the project, which consists in showing, revealing and even exposing the different maintenance works of the pavilion as well as the patio. Building means continuing to build, and building also means reusing, preserving and maintaining, further developing and also sometimes patching and cleaning. However, the team lost sight of this central theme during the revision phase, which the jury regrets.

The jury has a major question with regard to the realisation of the project. Exposing the root space poses static problems. The pavilion becomes one big construction site. The roots of the tree have become the core element of the project, and the potential of the concept of maintenance – of architecture or a garden – is not fully exploited.

Nor is the jury convinced that the installation of a kind of artificial greenhouse in the painting room really does justice to the theme of preservation and maintenance. It regrets that the team apparently did not use the revision phase to rethink and refine the expressiveness of the installation.

Assessment criteria of the jury

Topic significance: high – the maintenance of buildings as a form of curating the future
Conceptual clarity: critical – the development of the project after the first presentation seems hazardous and too focused on the sick tree in the courtyard
Feasibility: critical – exposing the roots could cause static problems
Performance potential: critical – the visitors might be attracted by a "building site", but the exhibition inside the pavilion does not express the potential of the subject

3. Nachbarschaft Vecindario

Karin Sander's and Philip Urprung's project envisages physically highlighting the architecture of the Swiss Pavilion and that of its South American neighbour as a built-up territory and addressing this neighbourly relationship in its various dimensions. The interwoven and interrelated ground plan figures, the architecture of Bruno Giacometti (1951-52) and the "response" by Carlo Scarpa (1954-56), conceived a few years later, are to become exhibits themselves.

In its almost minimalist simplicity, the project fascinated the jury: it is planned to deconstruct part of the Swiss wall in the perspective of the colonnade. This opens up a new perspective for the duration of the Biennale, inviting visitors to look beyond their own pavilion to its neighbour, both architecturally and symbolically.

The project implicitly encourages exhibition visitors to reflect on the meaning of neighbourhood in our built environment. In the Painting Room, this is to be done through a sculptural carpet that maps the layout of the ensemble formed by the two pavilions.

The jury considers the simplicity of this idea as positive, but would like to see a substantive examination of the theme of neighbourhood. In this context, it would appreciate it if the Venezuelan component of the project team could be specified and, if necessary, strengthened.

Because there is no architecture without neighbourhood. And when neighbourhood is discussed, it is not only about density, about common walls, about a shadow gap, an open or closed perspective, but always also about social and cultural proximity or distance.

In this respect, the jury is convinced that the exhibition sought by the team can also lead to a productive discussion of the function and use of the national pavilions in the Giardini.

And last but not least, Sander's and Ursprung's exhibition can also reformulate and discuss the question of how to exhibit or display architecture, a question that comes up repeatedly in the professional world.

Assessment criteria of the jury

Topic significance: high – architectural, cultural, and social neighbourhood is unquestionably a key topic nowadays
Conceptual clarity: high – a minimalistic intervention with a huge potential of questioning not only architectural, but also cultural topics
Feasibility: high – the team refined the project after the first round in a very convincing way
Performance potential: seems high – unspectacular at a first glance, but can be very efficient if refined in collaboration with Venezuelan partners

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Final adjudication:

In its final evaluation, the jury unanimously decided to propose the project 'NACHBARSCHAFT VECINDARIO' by Karin Sander and Philip Ursprung to the Pro Helvetia directorate for nomination. The jury is impressed by the minimalist precision of the architectural intervention that the team proposes and is convinced that the exhibition that the team will create has the potential to contribute to an exciting exploration of the theme of neighbourliness and the role that architecture plays therein at the 2023 Biennale.