

Zeitschrift: Das Werk : Architektur und Kunst = L'oeuvre : architecture et art
Band: 61 (1974)
Heft: 7: Bauten der internationalen Institutionen = Bâtiments des Institutions internationales : Hommage à Louis I. Kahn (1901-1974)
Rubrik: Ausstellungskalender

Nutzungsbedingungen

Die ETH-Bibliothek ist die Anbieterin der digitalisierten Zeitschriften auf E-Periodica. Sie besitzt keine Urheberrechte an den Zeitschriften und ist nicht verantwortlich für deren Inhalte. Die Rechte liegen in der Regel bei den Herausgebern beziehungsweise den externen Rechteinhabern. Das Veröffentlichen von Bildern in Print- und Online-Publikationen sowie auf Social Media-Kanälen oder Webseiten ist nur mit vorheriger Genehmigung der Rechteinhaber erlaubt. [Mehr erfahren](#)

Conditions d'utilisation

L'ETH Library est le fournisseur des revues numérisées. Elle ne détient aucun droit d'auteur sur les revues et n'est pas responsable de leur contenu. En règle générale, les droits sont détenus par les éditeurs ou les détenteurs de droits externes. La reproduction d'images dans des publications imprimées ou en ligne ainsi que sur des canaux de médias sociaux ou des sites web n'est autorisée qu'avec l'accord préalable des détenteurs des droits. [En savoir plus](#)

Terms of use

The ETH Library is the provider of the digitised journals. It does not own any copyrights to the journals and is not responsible for their content. The rights usually lie with the publishers or the external rights holders. Publishing images in print and online publications, as well as on social media channels or websites, is only permitted with the prior consent of the rights holders. [Find out more](#)

Download PDF: 31.07.2025

ETH-Bibliothek Zürich, E-Periodica, <https://www.e-periodica.ch>

be. The fact remains that architects, called upon to build for bodies of negotiators, might create something more than merely a rationalized office block.

But where is the borderline between the architect's need to realize a building programme and the often unavowed desire to erect a prestige monument?

In other words, the choice is open between functional asceticism—making a machine for resolving international conflicts—and an emblematic architecture incarnating all men's latent longing for beauty, solemnity and splendour. Which do we want: a cybernetic or a ceremonious architecture, one that is cerebral or lyrical, rational or exalting?

This is the question we can rightfully ask ourselves. And an examination of specific projects ought to permit us to draw definite conclusions. However, the choice is not so simple. If the building is on a monumental scale, this may derive as much from the enormous volume entailed by an excessively large programme as from a sense of grandeur inspired by a big-scale building. If the building is sumptuous, this may derive from the use of rare or costly materials, or it may stem from the vastness of the spans. If the building represents an artistic experiment, this may derive from the perfection of the building's proportions, the originality of its articulations, or from the pomp of its decorations.

A heterogeneous complex

To get back to the project of Le Corbusier, which scandalized the authorities responsible for judging the League of Nations competition, it was incontestably revolutionary: vast tracts on elevated piling, main auditorium in the form of a shell, of concrete, but displaying a high degree of elegance; in short, a style, rationalistic on a grand scale but without grandiloquence.

The building could have been a guide-post, a focus for an experimental district in Geneva integrating all the international buildings erected over half a century. It could have been a manifesto for 20th century architecture.

Instead of that we now have a profoundly heterogeneous conglomeration, some projects successful, to be sure, but others failures, banalities, aside from a certain pomposity due to the financial resources lavished on them.

If we have decided to present in this Issue some of the major projects in this field, we have not necessarily done so in order to focus on a number of successes. The fact remains that certain buildings, devoted to international functions, possess both grandeur and charm. ■

The "artistic contributions" in the buildings of the international organizations

An interview with René Berger, Director of the Cantonal Museum of Fine Arts, Lausanne.
(See page 867)

The various member countries of international organizations generally make it a point of honour to participate in the artistic decoration of the headquarters buildings. This makes the problem exceptionally complex, since the contributions come from such widely different sources and vary so greatly in style. The architect, in most cases, cannot directly participate in the choice and application of these "artistic contributions".

It is easy to understand that under these conditions there is great risk of conflict between architect and artist. That is why we have decided to consult an authority on the subject: M. René Berger, Director of the Cantonal Museum of Fine Arts in Lausanne, an internationally recognized expert on modern art.

René Berger regards an "artistic contribution" to an international headquarters building as something appended to the building for prestige purposes. It remains an adventitious element. And the gifts, coming from everywhere, are heterogeneous in character. The leading members of the international community want to appear at their best in the building. However, these contributions are not the result of a "decoration" project. Moreover, this term "decoration" is per se dubious, in that it is a product of bourgeois society, as evidenced by the expression "decorative arts".

In reality, in the ancient civilizations, there is a profound unity between the individual work of art and its setting, the building. Whether in Egypt or in Angkor, for example, one can hardly distinguish between the architectural and the decorative aspects. Sculpture or bas-relief is an integral part of the total creation. However, in our culture the dichotomy is so violent that the artistic appendage often seems to be an impertinence – in the original sense of the term, i.e., unclean.

The parts of the building that are reserved for decoration are generally left to the play of chance: wherever there is a "blank" space, one "puts" something. It is an activity of filling in; what is put in the empty space often runs completely counter to the underlying intentions of the architect. It is usually the weak points of the building that are "heightened" by works of art.

There can be noted also a kind of simultaneous perversion of art and architecture: there is introduced into the building a sham museum owing its existence solely to the "big names" assembled in it. The public visits international headquarters buildings like pseudo-galleries. This process can only destroy architecture by focussing attention on a secondary, adventitious element.

In reality, everything happens as if we "were paying for a good conscience" by means of aesthetic adjuncts. The artist is transformed into a star, for only the big stars figure here. The artist becomes a property man. He is recouped.

René Berger sees only one way out of this distressing situation: interdisciplinary integration when programmes are drawn up. Thus there ought to be consulted, besides the architect, sociologists, psychologists and even psychoanalysts, to contribute to the working out of a basic conception. This is the only way not to limit ourselves to a purely rationalist approach, for architecture has never been restricted to the exclusive fulfilment of needs. Certain "hidden dimensions" deserve to be expressed. We have to get in touch with the unconscious. In fact, there are frequent cases in the history of architecture where immediate needs can cease without there resulting any loss of quality. In particular, this is true of medieval Italian cities, which preserve all their charm and their urban authenticity, although defensive considerations no longer matter and there are no traffic problems.

It must not be forgotten that in art there is no work which is not complex: art is multi-dimensional and appeals to many senses. Artistic decor ought to enrich the parameters of architecture. All advertising people know about the "art of persuasion". The artistic decor of a building ought to be convincing.

In a second phase, the realization of the building programme ought to be based on a real collaboration between the architect and the artists. Basing himself on the theory of "open systems", René Berger thinks that all parameters interact in the work of art. What is experienced contains an element of contingency, of risk. That is why excessive planning runs counter to the experience it can propose. There should be built into the work a temporal dimension, an expression of lived experience, for the object that is restricted to its function remains inert.

No more than cosmetics can guarantee vitality (make-up is not youthfulness) can art be a balm for a building.

Recorded by Henri Stierlin ■

Ausstellungskalender

Aarau	Galerie 6	Max Hegetschweiler	24. 8.–21. 9.
Ascona	Galerie AAA	Hans Erni, Luzern	31. 5.–18. 7.
Basel	Kunstmuseum	Lukas Cranach	15. 6.– 8. 9.
Bellelay	Abbatiale de Bellelay	Jean-François Comment	29. 6.–15. 9.
Bern	Kunstmuseum	Unbekanntes Kunstmuseum – 2. Ausstellung	Ende Juni–Anfang Aug.
	Gewerbemuseum im Kornhaus	Tierbücher aus vier Jahrhunderten	Juli/August
Bülach	Sigristenkeller, Galerie und Kellertheater	Freilicht-Plastikausstellung mit Robert Lienhard	9. 5. bis Ende Okt.
Freiburg	Museum für Kunst und Geschichte	Mittelalterliche französische Plastik aus Bordeaux und dem Bordelais	ab 9. Juli
Glarus	Galerie Beat Gähwiler Crazy House	Luginbühl, Lohse u. a.	August
Heiden	Kursaal-Galerie	Josef Ebnöther, Herbert Albrecht, Malerei, Graphik, Plastik	28. 6.–17. 8.

Lausanne	Musée des Arts décoratifs	Bijoux, objets et dessins d'orfèvres contemporains	Juni–Ende Aug.
Luzern	Kunstmuseum	Österreichische Kunst zu Beginn des Jahrhunderts	7. 7.– 8. 9.
Rorschach	Heimatismuseum im Kornhaus	Albert Saner, St. Gallen, Schiffe	14. 7.–11. 8.
Solothurn	Museumsfoyer	Sammlungszuwachs der Kunstabteilung	Juli/August
St. Gallen	Historisches Museum	«Kunst als tägliches Erlebnis»	6. 7.–25. 8.
Thun	Kunstsammlung der Stadt Thun	Wilhelm Schmid, Bré (1892–1971)	22. 6.– 4. 8.
Zürich	Kunsthaus	Kunst in Polen – Von der Gotik bis heute	30. 5.–11. 8.
	Helmhaus	Die Schweiz im Bild – Bild der Schweiz	30. 6.– 4. 8.
	Modern Art Roswitha Haftmann	Ernst Ludwig Kirchner, Aquarelle, Zeichnungen, Holzschnitte, Lithographien	22. 5. bis Aug.
	Galerie Bettina	Neueste Werke von den Künstlern der Galerie	Juli