

Summaries in English

Objektyp: **Group**

Zeitschrift: **Das Werk : Architektur und Kunst = L'oeuvre : architecture et art**

Band (Jahr): **51 (1964)**

Heft 6: **Schulbau**

PDF erstellt am: **20.09.2024**

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Rotation Symmetries in School Construction

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by Roland Gross

There are definite limitations to how classrooms can be disposed in relation to a corridor. This is particularly the case when additional requirements are called for, for example, cross-ventilation. We shall not go astray then if we define the limits of the problem, if we do not create designs on the basis of given needs but examine the applicability of actually possible designs.

The symmetry doctrine offers a rich field to the inventor of designs. Symmetries have been made available to the designer by the work of Andreas Speiser and Hermann Weyl. Symmetries lead to linear alignments, scatter effects, blanket arrangements and pyramidal developments. Roland Gross restricts himself in this article to another possibility, rotation symmetry. The shape of the rotating windmill wheel has indeed many different possibilities of application; they are not restricted to schoolhouse construction, but are found in housing and office buildings, in the work of Scharoun and Frank Lloyd Wright and many others. However, there are also symmetries which are not built up on the basis of four elements, on three and on higher numbers. Such symmetries need not be carried out to the extent of the total number of their possible elements; often they are applied only to a limited extent. The realization need not be identical with the basic shape; architecture is not mere geometry; law and deviation, rule and exception are what go into the making of a work of art. Nevertheless, it is no waste of time to proceed for once from our stock of geometrical shapes when approaching a given assignment.

Riedhof Schoolhouse in Zurich-Höngg

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1961-63. Architect: Prof. Alfred Roth BSA/SIA, Zurich

The site slopes pleasantly towards the southwest and commands a broad view. In order to take full advantage of these features, the architect disposed the buildings parallel to the slope and cut terraces into the site. On the uppermost terrace is the kindergarden secluded from the main school; on the third terrace are the two two-storey classroom tracts with the intermediate recess hall. On the fifth and lowermost terrace is the gymnasium. In a second construction phase there is to be erected at the level of the uppermost terrace a secondary school building. This classroom tract will be four stories high and perpendicular to the slope in contrast to the long two-storey structures of the finished primary school. Only after the erection of these buildings will the idea of the over-all complex achieve full expression.

Scheibenschachen School in Aarau

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1961-63. Architects: Alfons Barth BSA/SIA, Hans Zaugg BSA/SIA, Hans Schenker SIA, Aarau

Three narrow classroom tracts were aligned along the banks of the river Aare. Each houses four classrooms, a cloakroom hall and an open-air class area. The classrooms are equipped with a hobby nook. The recess courts among the classroom tracts are elevated 1.9 m above the level of the wooded site. A long open recess hall connects the classroom tracts with the general area. The latter contains the rooms reserved for evening activities: music auditorium, handicrafts and gymnasium.

Secondary School and Kindergarden in Amriswil

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1960-1962. Team of Architects: Guhl + Lechner + Philipp SIA, Paul R. Kollbrunner SIA, Zurich

The building site was an exhausted gravel pit. The ground-water level reached nearly to the surface of the site. The basement was for this reason placed above grade level and considerably levelled up on all sides. This creates a grouping of hillocks raising the complex above the level of the surrounding flat terrain.

Schoolhouse Complex in Weggis

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1960-1962. Architect: Dr. Justus Dahinden SIA, Zurich

The site in the centre of the village is very restricted. The classrooms had to be shielded from the noise of the village and from excessive sunlight by an adroit disposition of the buildings. There resulted an east-west orientation of the work and lounge rooms; the larger windows look down the slope into the green environs; the continuous counter-illumination is turned towards the morning sun. A low-silhouette and horizontally staggered slope lay-out had to be employed in the interests of integration of the relatively large buildings into the village skyline. The surroundings likewise dictated the selection of the building materials, which are visible from outside.

French Primary School of Geneva

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Architects: Georges Candilis, Paris; Arthur Bugna FAS, Geneva

This school is situated in the centre of Geneva. It is built in a square with a pronounced slope by a wooded public park. The school comprises six classrooms (possible extension: two rooms), teachers' premises, principal's office and sanitary facilities. Some of the excavated material has been used to create a system of stepped terraces, with the recess court adjoining the park below the main entrance. Each classroom is prolonged onto a terrace intended for use as an open-air class area. On the first floor these terraces constitute the roofs of the rooms on the ground floor. All classrooms enjoy bilateral daylight illumination. The rough structure is a concrete skeleton. The glazed faces are held by a steel skeleton structure with wooden window frames and parapets of enamelled eternit.

The New Secondary School of St-Imier

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Architect: Frédéric Brugger FAS/SIA, Lausanne

The disposition and the equipment of the classrooms can facilitate the introduction of flexibility into the teaching programme. They also permit work in groups and the possibility of adequate supervision. A school needs a central focus, a meeting-place. The installation of this common facility ought again to be flexible and capable of being adapted to many different functions. Only a high degree of spatial differentiation will render possible such a programme. The spirit of a school ought to be gay and natural, and the construction materials, the woodwork and the colour scheme all contribute to the creation of this atmosphere.

Cuno Amiet's Designs for the Review "Jugend"

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by André Kamber

Starting in January 1896, the Munich publisher Georg Hirth began to put out the review "Jugend", which exerted on German graphic design and interior decoration such a powerful influence that in the German-speaking countries the Modern Style movement took on the designation "Jugendstil." Hirth organized a competition to obtain designs for title pages and bindings for "Jugend" In the material left by Cuno Amiet there were designs from the year 1896 connected with such a competition. Amiet was not one of the prize winners of 1896, and no executed works by him are known. Nevertheless, these 13 sheets show an interesting confrontation of the artist, then aged 26, with the prevailing trends of contemporary graphic art.

The Glass Paintings of Louis Moilliet

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by Jean-Christophe Ammann

The painter and water-colour artist Louis Moilliet (1880-1962) created in the course of his life one stained-glass window and four sequences of glass paintings which show a fundamental development from the narrative-illustrative style to the figure as emblem and constitute in his work an impressive unity. In 1924 there was created a glass painting with Arabian boys fishing for the home of the collector Hermann Ruf in Berne. In 1925 Moilliet created for the tracery window of the little church of Bremgarten near Berne two lifesize angel figures and four scenes each of hate and suffering, peace and mercy. The monumental choir window of the Lukas Church in Lucerne (1934-1936) is dominated by the central figure of the resurrected Christ. In contrast to the emphatically plastic figures in Bremgarten, Moilliet in this case went on to a flat design of symmetricized colours. The fourteen lateral windows are furnished with an ornamental motif. The glass paintings of the Winterthur Zwingli Church (1940-1945) continue in this direction. A spare drawing evokes the figures of Christ teaching and of the angels of the Annunciation (1948-1959). For around ten years Moilliet worked on the windows of the Burgerspital Chapel in Berne with the themes of earthly and divine mercy. Here even more markedly, narrative representational elements like the cloak of St. Martin are transposed into abstract shapes.