Jury report Euregional Prize for Architecture 2017
by Sereh Mandias

Every year the Euregional Prize for Architecture allows the professional world a comparative view of the graduation projects sent in by the five architectural schools of the Euregion. The schools – UHasselt, RWTH Aachen, ULg Liège, MAA Maastricht, FH Aachen – selected for this edition of the Euregional Prize for Architecture a broad variety of graduation projects.

Out of over 400 master graduation projects, 29 were presented to the jury. The number of students in a school was normative for the number of projects the schools could send in. Yesterday the jury studied all projects and received a brief explanation about each project, given by a lecturer of the school. After a productive discussion – fuelled with intense debate – nine projects made it to the second round and after more discussions seven made it to the third round. From these seven projects a first, second and third prize were chosen and four honourable mentions.

Although there is a big difference between schools in the way the graduation process is set out – some students have only three months to complete their project, while other students can take almost as much time as they want, for example - the jury didn't take this into account. A small three-month project can be as well developed as a large scale, six-month project.

Before announcing the prize winners, the jury would like to make some general remarks.

1. As an architect you very seldom choose your own projects, your own location, your own programme and your own budget. You respond to a client, to a competition, to a brief. Within the 29 projects the jury examined, some projects were the result of a given assignment; others were the result of the very personal choice of a student; and still others were a combination of both. The jury wants to stress the interest of those projects, and those students that were able to deeply engage with the assignment. Some did this in a very personal way, others in relation to a specific programme, still others in relation to the city and/or society. The jury applauds the clear way in which several students were able to position themselves at the end of their education and at the beginning of their professional career.

2. In the overall selection of projects, the jury noticed that there were two kinds of approaches towards what makes the architectural project. On the one hand, the jury saw projects in search of a certain autonomy sometimes leading to too hermetic projects, sometimes to projects in which questions of space, materiality and scale were tackled with precision and care. On the other hand, the jury noticed projects that proposed architecture that is so contextual that it seemed to disappear entirely in order to make room for society. Within the split between autonomy and absence, the jury found the most interesting approaches.

3. What the members of the jury sometimes missed in the projects is the vocational repertoire of the architect; the conventions architects have to deal with, that get absorbed by the project and can bring the quality of the project to another level. Furthermore, in some of the projects, the jury sees an absence of historical research and therefore a lack of understanding of the place of the building within its historical context, not in the least in a range of very promising projects that started from an existing building. However, several projects testify of a return to interesting approaches within architectural history : a return of Kenneth Frampton's "Critical Regionalism" : an interest in locality, in local materials, in tectonics, in haptic architecture. But also explorations of new ways of making town, be it through a master-plan or small scale interventions.

4. Finally, the jury applauds the wide variety of manners of architectural representation that the projects testify to. Students have clearly moved beyond the classical renderings towards the exploration of different ways of representing a project. They are not afraid to invest in personal techniques, be it model making with

clay, painting, aquarelle, drawing by hand. These explorations result in very precise, surprising and beautiful presentations. Often, in-depth research was at the basis of the projects, documented in impressive and beautifully crafted books.

Four projects have been awarded an honourable mention. These four projects touch upon questions of architectural history, urban archaeology, everyday life and landscape. They provoked an intense debate amongst the members of the jury, and as such we praise them for their capacity to engage us in a discussion about the nature of architecture and the role of the architect.

In alphabetical order, the honourable mentions are:

Kijong Lim – Antiquarium Milan (RWTH Aachen)

The project by Kijong Lim proposes an elliptical shell around an archaeological park. While doing so, it takes up the external geometry of the former amphitheatre and exemplifies its absence. The jury appreciates the maturity of the urban project and the position it takes towards both the urban context as well as the architectural challenge. Within the overall selection of projects, between autonomy and contextually, this project is perfectly suspended between the two, offering a form of autonomous contextuality.


Li Lin – Eternity and a day (RWTH Aachen)

The project of Li Lin is a highly personal, autobiographical project: it is a proposal for the house in which she lives. The jury appreciated the poetic study at its basis: a simple programme is treated with great maturity. Li Lin proposes a very rich and precise study into the vocabulary and grammar of architecture. The jury greatly values the depth and precision of the research, and the manner in which the architectural elements are brought together within the design. The booklet accompanying the panels and models testifies to this richness.

Marie Moors – The Citadel of Tides (UHasselt)

This project by Marie Moors was judged by the jury as the most radical. Based on an analysis of the architecture of the Belgian coast, the project proposes a mega-structure in Oostende that beholds a double function: it constitutes both a buffer against the rising tides as well as an empty shell that can be appropriated by refugees. On a larger scale, it suggests a new type of landscape for the Belgian coast. The jury values the radicalism of the gesture, the clear statement the project makes and the engagement of the student with important and complex challenges that make up the framework in which we – as European architects – work today.
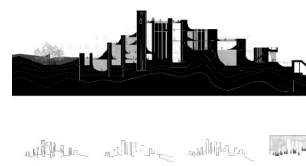
Jan Strelzig – Aarhus University (RWTH Aachen)

The project of Jan Strelzig proposes an addition to the campus of the Aarhus University. The jury praises the precision of the project and the attention of the student for the history and architecture of the surrounding university campus designed by Fisker, Moller and Stegmann. While this project sparked an intense debate amongst the members of jury about how far a project can go into taking on the architectural language of its reference, the project testifies of a careful, well thought-out and logical implementation for the new entrance, resulting in a new dynamic of landmarks and squares.

And now for the winning projects. After two days of heated discussion the jury awarded one project with the third prize, one with the second prize and one with the first prize.
These projects distinguish themselves through the personal engagement of each student, the in-depth research that lies at the basis of each project, the way the research has materialized into complete, elaborate projects often conceived up to the smallest detail, and finally these three projects are characterised by extraordinary and sometimes surprising ways of architectural representation.

The third prize goes to a project that takes on an important societal challenge and shows a profound joy in making space. In showing a critical approach towards modern architecture, the project aims equally to rethink our present architectural vocabulary. And it does so, in a way that it raises intense debate, also amongst the members of the jury. Starting from an important analysis, the project investigates the interaction of architecture and memory reminding us of something we sometimes seem to have forgotten: that architecture can be a carrier of meaning.
The third prize goes to "A Small World of Memories" by Hanna Fokken (RWTH Aachen).

The second prize goes to a very personal project. It is motivated by a quest for materiality and has an extraordinary research at its basis. It impressed the jury because of the symbiosis it enables between materiality on the one hand and spatial qualities on the other. While reaching an important autonomy, the student was able to avoid the project becoming too hermetic by dealing with local materials and ecological aspects. This resulted in a very tectonic and haptic project, questioning the sense of touch, perception and manipulation ; a project in which every detail is known by its designer - a project that wants to be built.
**The second prize goes to "The Workshop" by Jeroen Brosky (MMA+ Maastricht)**.
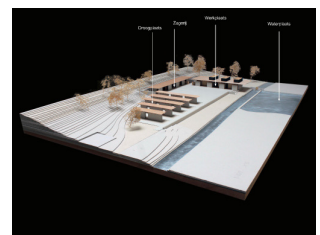
And now for the first prize …

The jury had an intense discussion about this project, but quite rapidly came to the mutual understanding that this project was, without doubt, standing out on several levels. The winning project starts from a careful analysis of what already exists and looks for dynamics hidden within the city in order to inform the programme and the proposal. It is the work of someone who sees spatial potentials, rather than permanent structures. Instead of making a big gesture, it proposes an alternative strategy: a form of urban acupuncture or to formulate it otherwise small interventions that can make a difference. One could say this is a proposal for an "architecture without architects", where it is not so much the architectural form that is important but the spatial sensibility of the interventions. It is a modest project, that proposes a city of anecdotes, where one can find both roughness and softness, humour and seriousness. In addressing the city from the biggest to the smallest scale, the jury finds this project to be the most complete, and furthermore exceptionally represented.
The first prize goes to "London. Hand and Head" by Julia Cramer (RWTH Aachen).
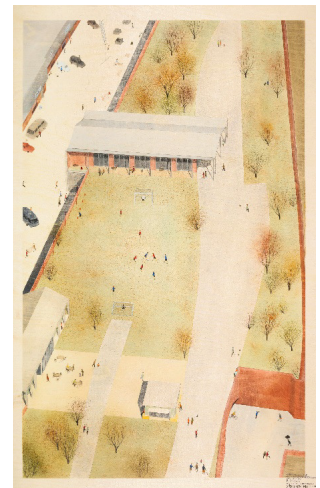
Jury: Véronique Patteeuw (BE, jury chairwoman), Koen Van Bockstal (BE), Floris Cornelisse (NL), Christian Heuchel (DE) and Roel Beneens (BE)

Jury secretary: Sereh Mandias
Maastricht, 4 November 2017