

XX

MODELS

YOUNG

BELGIAN

ARCHITECTURE

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A+editions / Bozar Books

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Foreword

Marie-Cécile Guyaux, Iwan Strauven

XX Models. Young Belgian Architecture presents 20 recent projects by 20 young Belgian architectural firms through 20 architectural models.

In an aim to offer young talent a stage, A+ Belgian Architectural Review and Bozar Architecture invited, every two months from September 2008 onwards, a young architectural firm to take part in the Niche series. Each firm was to present one of their early large-scale projects during a talk, and the relevant model would then be displayed, for the rest of the season, at the Centre for Fine Arts in Brussels. The exhibition *XX Models. Young Belgian Architecture*, which provides the occasion for this publication, gathers all 20 models one last time as a way to bring Niche to a close.

The scale models were initially shown in a somewhat concealed though strategic corner of the building which Victor Horta designed in 1928: in five alcoves measuring roughly 10 m² in the corridors of the Henry Le Boeuf hall, right opposite the entrance to the boxes of the first stage-left balcony. This specific location not only brought a music-loving audience in contact with young architectural talent, but also gave architecture lovers an excuse to explore Horta's labyrinthine construction. A model was added to the series after each Niche talk. It led to one of the few long-lasting, but also permanently changing exhibitions in Bozar. The idea of a collection was never far away.

Niche only featured recent constructions, and ones which often included a public or at least a collective dimension. Private houses and renovations were avoided, while public commissions were privileged. The project had to be one of the firm's early and large-scale undertakings, and in order to cover the entire territory, a balance was sought between Flemish and French-speaking firms. Varying in size from a chapel in Ghent to a neighbourhood of Copenhagen, the projects gathered in the exhibition are set in Belgium and beyond. They include tertiary buildings, collective

housing projects and cultural and educational institutions, and were designed by architects who either already enjoy an international reputation or whose firms are less well known. The series' programme thus aimed for topicality and a choice of architectural approaches and types. The proposed overview is far from exhaustive, however. It is a sample of what young Belgian architecture has to offer, not a detailed enumeration.

How is one to characterise this generation? How do these young practitioners consider the discipline and the profession? What is the place of young architecture? Over the course of the seasons at the Centre for Fine Arts, these various practices and constructions were examined in 20 essays published on the occasion of each new addition to the series, all of which are now gathered in this volume. Geert Bekaert's essay attempts to provide a comprehensive overview of them all. In 1989 already he performed a similar exercise on the occasion of an exhibition devoted at the time to young architects, the 'young gods' as he then called them. Today however, at a time when young architecture holds a very different role from the one it held in the past, Bekaert believes that this label has become obsolete to describe this very diverse *new class*.

The scope of architectural approaches to be discovered in the series is also reflected in the diversity of models which the firms created for Niche and in the variety of issues they raise. By concentrating on the models produced by the firms, the exhibition *XX Models* also turns the spotlight on this singular architectural medium and the questions it brings up. How did the architects set about creating their model of a built project intended for a 1-m³ plinth? What was its relation to the actual building, to the process as a whole, to their own method? What status did they give it in the context of the exhibition?

Whether an autonomous work that only refers to itself or a faithful representation, an original (re)production or a study model, an object in miniature or in real size, a complete or partial representation, the models in the series illustrate, as Marie-Ange Brayer explains, numerous ways of tackling and representing architectural projects. Her essay shows how this fascinating object enables one to question the project's mediation and the notion of authorship, the history of architecture and its relation with other artistic disciplines. In this wide-ranging analysis, she succeeds in categorising these 20 objects, which present themselves, *beyond architecture*, as so many tools, compositions and components of the grammar of architecture.

Instead of a panorama or a classification, the exhibition and publication *XX Models* offers, through these 20 models of 20 projects by 20 firms, a snapshot of the scope and richness of young Belgian architecture. It is an album that remains to be completed, however, so that, as Geert Bekaert writes, architecture remains *sensitive to society*.

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