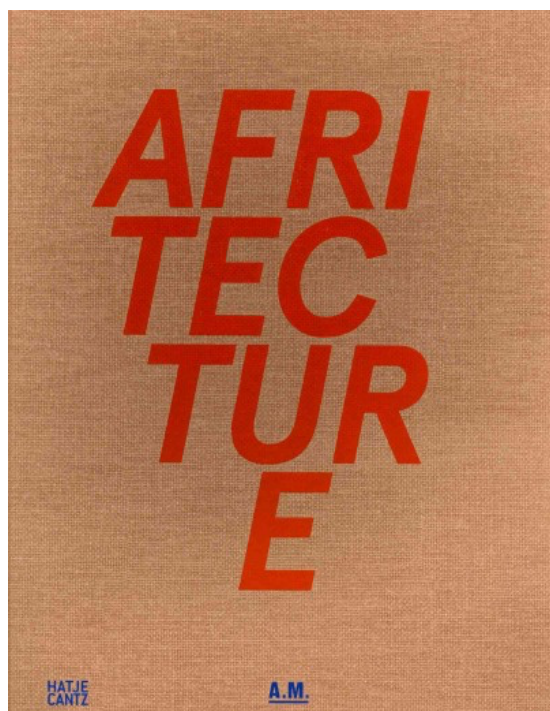


Afritecture: Building in Africa

ed. by Andres Lepik. Hatje Cantz, January 2014. 272 p. ill. ISBN 9783775736619 (pbk.), \$60.00.

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A welcome addition to a small but burgeoning field, *Afritecture: Building in Africa* explores a variety of recent architectural solutions for the many challenges facing the inhabitants of sub-Saharan Africa, a region in the midst of explosive growth, especially in urban centers. This compelling work is the companion piece for the *Afritecture: Building Social Change* exhibition, held at Pinakothek der Moderne in Munich, and curated by Andres Lepik, who also edited the catalog. Lepik and a strong assemblage of writers explore several key themes, including the struggle to cast off the long shadow of colonial influence, aesthetic choices, sustainability, and collaborative approaches in design. Add to this mix a general backdrop of endemic poverty, political upheaval, and stark environmental challenges such as overcrowding, draught, and energy shortages, and there is ample room for the reinvention of building techniques and

intentions alike, and the catalog covers this material in an engaging manner.

Rather than attempt a comprehensive survey, the essays, interviews, project summaries, and examinations of architectural education in Ethiopia, Rwanda, Uganda and South Africa form a carefully selected pastiche, providing an outline of large-scale issues while affording the opportunity to view a variety of site-specific projects. Collaboration between Western builders and Africans is often highlighted, especially in coverage of intercultural design/build projects, which have a problematic history, as discussed in one of the most interesting sections entitled “Pro and Contra: Design-Build Projects as a Form of Knowledge Transfer.” This dialogue between a panel of experts, along with Lepik’s earlier interview with Okwui Enwezor, director of Haus der Kunst in Munich, do a fine job of contextualizing the difficulties of implementing

foreign solutions to African problems, despite the tremendous need for improvements in techniques, design vocabularies, and material usage, in a time of rapid population growth and concomitant demand for all types of shelter.

Despite the exclusionary history of architectural education in sub-Saharan Africa, Post-colonial architectural practices are certainly evolving, and the catalog provides plenty of depictions that begin to show the formation of a new aesthetic, one that weds the clean lines and functional directives of Modernism and the vernacular tradition of using organic forms and available materials such as straw, clay and stone. Standout projects include the Makoko Floating School, The Education Facility and Women's Center in Gando, and the Primary School and Multi-Purpose Center in Wesbank.

The book is elegantly designed and includes useful features such as a map of projects, subsection bibliographies, and project index. This is a wonderful choice for libraries supporting the study of architecture, urban planning, and sociology.