

LIKE A WELL-SET GEMSTONE

About the Herzogin Anna Amalia Bibliothek in Weimar by Karl Heinz Schmitz

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CITY

When a precious stone is set in a valuable jewel, the goldsmith puts all his soul both for the value of the precious stone itself, and to put it in value in harmony with the rest of the jewel.

This is how Karl Heinz Schmitz has put together this wonderful new piece which, on the one hand, is a wonderful work of architecture and, on the other hand, has perfectly understood the work of an architect when he touches the fabric of the historic city of Weimar without giving an inch to the contemporaneity of its architecture, establishing the continuity of the city.

The attentive and meticulous analysis of the previous building, lost after a fire in 2004, led him to make a series of spatial decisions. The most important is to recover the courtyard that existed there as a protagonist, turning it into a cubic space where books and light are, of course, the protagonists. It would seem that all the texts on light in architecture and the meaning of Wisdom as a way to reach the light had been read and distilled here by our architect.

The face with which the Library faces the city, its new entrance façade is impeccable. The well-drawn openings in a perfect composition materialize in a façade made of a serene green stone that perfectly sews the new building with the existing or reconstructed adjacent parts of the previous building.

I think that, over and above the many spatial and architectural qualities, I would like to point out here the choice of Karl Heinz Schmitz who uses Mnemosine, memory, rather than Mimesis, which is the immediate temptation of many architects when acting on History. Memory is essential to act with a good knowledge of History as Karl Heinz Schmitz does, who, instead of falling into the temptation of Mimesis, makes a building ex novo of an extraordinary quality.

SCALE. PROPORTION

When a building, like this one, dominates scale and proportion, one doesn't quite know if it is small and seems big, grandiose, or if it is big and seems small, just right. I do know that both scale and proportion are mastered. As has always been the case with the best architecture throughout history. The end result is both fair and grand at the same time.

And I would also like to highlight how this new central space fits in the cone of our vision, which produces that effect of spatial control that only well-measured architecture is capable of producing. For this reason, it is a space capable of remaining in our memory and becomes the main image of this building.

UTILITAS

The Utilitas, the function is impeccably resolved. On the main floor, the cube performs the functions that the courtyard did in its day, organizing the circulations around it well. The building is as fluid as possible. With the utmost naturalness. The last day I was there, Karl Heinz was explaining the building to a large group of Japanese booksellers. We had an impeccable tour with them, with the Japanese people's complimentary comments.

The basement, which by its light and its layout does not seem so, also runs with perfect fluidity. Particularly interesting is the space around the great curve.

And, believe it or not, there are more than 1.2 million books in this library.

SIGNATURES

The few materials chosen are well agreed upon, and their construction is very careful.

The reinforced concrete, executed with absolute perfection, extends throughout the entire structure. The architect thus punctually complies with the idea that the structure not only supports the loads of gravity, but, more importantly, establishes the order of space. We can follow and see the structure throughout the work with great clarity.

The wood, light maple, is the perfect skin that adapts perfectly to the structure, whether on walls or floors. The light, off-white tone of the wood contributes effectively to the luminosity of the beautiful central space.

VENUSTAS

Sometimes we architects spend our lives on our buildings and, in the end, the result is not as beautiful as we would like it to be. As when parents have children and, having put the same means, some come out handsome and smart and others more dull and less bright. In this case, Karl Heinz Schmitz's son has turned out to be very handsome, very clever and very bright. It is a very beautiful building.

GRAVITY, SPACE

The structure is obvious and clear. I have already pointed out that the new structure, the new skeleton agrees well with the pre-existing structure and that, in addition, it not only transmits the loads well, but above all, it establishes the order of the space very well. The large cube of 12x12x12 meters is an exemplary structure.

LIGHT, TIME

Although throughout this text reference is made to the light of the building, I want to expressly praise the wonderful light of the central space. The proportion with which the materials have been used is matched by the architect's skill in working with light. Karl Heinz Schmitz is well aware that light is as much a material as the concrete and wood

he has used. One could say that he has worked with concrete, wood and light. Nothing more and nothing less.

It is a place where Time seems to have stopped. Perhaps because it has become entangled in books. It is a serene space full of light and time.

STAFF

I saw the newly completed Library some time ago on my first stay in Weimar. But, voluntarily I have been slow to write about it. And instead of my enthusiasm first waning, it has grown with a deeper admiration, tempered by time, for this architecture and its architect.

Karl Heinz Schmitz is a first-rate architect who is both a teacher and an architect in a balance that I defend as a privileged situation to make the best architecture. And Karl Heinz Schmitz does. Perhaps his deep humility leads him not to show too much of what comes out of his hands. From his own beautiful house in Weimar to this library, everything is first class.

I have had the privilege of teaching a few days with him, in some unforgettable critical sessions with his students. I can attest to the impeccable teaching quality of Karl Heinz Schmitz. He was a disciple, architecturally and as a teacher, of Karl Joseph Schatner, a good teacher. And he is one of the most prestigious teachers of this BAUHAUS of Weimar that is so important for all of us who are architects.

ARTIFICIO

Architecture is not part of nature, not even the best, the most exquisite, and even less is it its reflection, which would finally lead to a mockery of the law of identity. With a thrilling freedom, Architecture settles in a virgin field of action, out of space, not so much narrating as interpreting nature with the help of those instrumental resources that are commonly called images.

This text by the Warsaw-born Russian poet Osip Mandelstam, in which I have substituted the word Poetry for Architecture, fits perfectly here, when Karl Heinz Schmitz, instead of merging with nature, here History, interprets it and manages, with a new Architecture, proper to the third millennium, to dialogue effectively face to face with History.

Some architects confuse artificiality, characteristic of architecture, with unnatural operations. And they put impossible orthopedics to their unbridled forms. Or they plant surprising gardens on vertical walls. Or they cover their vulgar architectures with bizarre skins. And astonish the ignorant vulgar.

In this Library, the artifice is logical, with the logic of Architecture.

THE LAST LIBRARY

Louis H. Kahn asked himself: What is a library? And he answered: A Library is a man, a book in the shade of a tree. And this Library has a lot of that.

But I think the Herzogin Amalia is going to be the last library in the world. I think Libraries are going to change a lot. In fact, I think they will disappear. In the future, large, bare spaces will be presided over by a large CPU? where there will be all, all, all the books that have ever been in the world, in all languages and in all styles. As if it were an antithesis of the Tower of Babel. In the center of this space, as if it were the relic of the Lignum Crucis itself, will be the CPU from which will flow all the wisdom that has ever been in the world. The scene will seem to have been filmed by Stanley Kubrick, and will be more than credible. The crowds will flock there with deep devotion to load their IPADS with the sacred delicacy.

In the meantime, while this is already a reality, we will go to our Herzogin Amalia Bibliothek in Weimar, to enjoy the wonderful architecture erected there by Karl Heinz Schmitz.