

**TERRIBILIS EST LOCUS ISTE**

**The Kairos Scale by Joao Quintela and Tim Simon**

**PUBLISHED IN**

**Poetica Architectonica. Ed. Mairea. Madrid. 2014**

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"How awesome is this place! Truly this is the house of God and the gate of heaven." Thus exclaimed Jacob when in the Genesis account (Gen. 28:17), after awakening from the dream in which he "saw a ladder starting from the earth and at the end touching heaven, and the angels of God ascending and descending on it."

When I first saw an image of Joao Quintela and Tim Simon's Kairos project, I thought of Jacob's ladder that Genesis tells us about in such strong words. The images that Ribera and Murillo, Franken and Blake, and Alan Falk painted on this subject came to mind. So everything and so nothing is this Portuguese Kairos.

When we read in Latin this *Terribilis est locus iste*, the expression can be a bit frightening. And when you listen to the Gregorian chant of the Introit of the liturgy of the consecration of a church, it sounds like divine glory. I turned to my old Latin Spanish Etymological Dictionary by Raimundo de Miguel and confirmed that *terribilis* means awesome. As *terrific* in English, according to my thick Collins Dictionary, means stupendous. And so, *terrific* and *impressive*, is this place, this Jacob's staircase created by the two young architects. A staircase between two walls that with a quadrangular crown plan ascends from the earth to the sky.

I must also confess that the exterior image of the building surrounded by trees evoked in me the mystery and light of the chapel in the forest of Asplund, another beautiful *locus terribilis*. Because something, or a lot of that Nordic mystery has that small piece with its vibrant facade and its tightly girded staircase full of shadow to lead us to the light.

The piece is small in its size, but large, universal, in its scale.

Everything is done here with an implacable mathematics, but with an impeccable, beautiful result. And mathematics has always been at the base of architecture.

An architect must always be as close to the dream as to the number. "The word agreed with the number", said María Zambrano to define poetry. The matter agreed with the number, Quintela and Simon seem to tell us. And for this they have created an ingenious piece of concrete with which they are able to constructively solve everything in this wonderful box.

The project smells of Greek mathematics, of Pythagoras. And to French geometry, to Descartes. It smells of well-agreed numbers and sounds like well-tuned music.

But this Kairos also complies well with the perceptive aspects of architecture. In a beautiful text that accompanies the presentation of the project, Miguel Ciria tells us that "it is necessary to have a concrete experience of architecture, that is, to touch, see, feel, listen and smell its body". He is right, and I believe that this Kairos built by Quintela and Simon can be touched, seen, felt, heard and smelled. And that sensory perception of that space is absolutely positive. The reason and the perception are there well agreed.

The Jacob's ladder, the Kairos ladder, will it be possible to reach heaven by climbing it?