Anne Lacaton

MI BAŠ NE VJERUJEMO U FORMU
WE DON'T MUCH BELIEVE IN FORM

2001 by Ana Šakić iD, Ines Brnjac, Vera Grimmer
 fotografije / photo by Dani Križanec

otišli. Donos se u Beču otvora vaša izložba i
Architektonski Zavodi, izložena se u Beču odživa
izložba Zahe Hadid, koja je berečna, gotova
manifesticka svekovina oblika. Važno je pokazati
polako no drugogoca magičnog arhitekture
dozad. Što misli o važnosti oblika?

Lacaton: Mi baš ne vjerujem u formu,
Naravno da oblik postoji, jer stvarala
naša traži da bude izgadana, baš ima
dimenzije, ali to nam u početku
projektiranja nije osobito važno. Za nas je
arhitektonosravnanje prostora u kojima se
živi, u kojima svakako može dobro živjeti i
roditi, bilo da se radi o zgradama, kućama ili
nekim drugim namjenama. To je naš glavni cilj, a
nakon toga postavljamo primjene okoliša
Nikako nista ne razstavlja u svobodnom
prostoru, projektira se u polje jezička ili u
diva geometrijske strukture. Za nas je problem
situisan vrlo važan. Primjene oblika
pojavljuju se tek kad odlučimo što čemo
graditi, koje će biti dimenzije zgrade, nije
oblik i konstrukcija.
Oris: Today there is the opening of your exhibition in Vienna at the Architektur Zentrum, and at the same time there is another exhibition in Vienna by Zaha Hadid, which is a celebration of forms in a Baroque, Manneristic way. Your exhibition will show and present some good and different ways of architecture today. A completely different way.

What do you think about the importance of form?

Location: We don’t believe in form as a strong device: Form exists, of course, because you produce something, that is built, which has dimensions but this is really nothing very important for us at the beginning. What is architecture for us—what is really producing spaces to live in, and to live well for everybody, to work, whether that is a school, a house, or something else. This is the first aim for us and then there is also the question of the environment. You are never doing something in a free space, you work in a situation—this is the landscape, or it is a part of the city. The situation is also very important for us.

The question of the form always comes in the moment we decide what to build, the dimensions of the building, the shape, the structure.

Oris: Maybe to understand this concept of form or no form, could you tell us about your experience of living and working in Africa. I think living in those different social and cultural conditions influenced your work. You had been living there with Jean-Philippe Vassal. What are your experiences in connection to your architectural work?

Location: It was a major experience at a major moment of our life because we went to Africa just after finishing our studies in the school in Bordeaux. Like all students, we learnt architecture in school, so we had learnt how to do architecture, how to do buildings, what style is, how to do building, the facades, etc. We believed that we knew how to do architecture. When we arrived in Africa, in a very poor country, south of the Sahara, there was no architecture in the sense we had learned it. There were very simple and basic houses with straw roofs and earth construction, and it was like an earthquake in the mind because you look at something that is so different. After some months you begin to be completely free of what you have learnt, begin to observe and analyse very small things: for example, the shops are on the streets, a lot of people just stand around in the street, in the afternoon when it is too hot, the sun is very high, they make sort of tree with branches and they put their clothes on it and it makes a sort of shade. It is very basic. It is not a gesture of architecture, but just because they need to have a shade and they need to be able to do it. For example, there is a very interesting school for nomadic children in the desert. They have nothing, they move every week, there is just sort of a roof made of branches, very simple, with nine or twelve piles depending on the number of children. There is a television running on solar energy and they receive the school’s programme from the capital. There is no teacher, but they learn how to write, how to read, the geography. When you see it, it is architecture, but it is also very contemporary. What you need to do, you do it very carefully, you do it very
well. From these examples we completely changed our mind about architecture.

There is a wonderful straw house at our Vienna exhibition, it is so simple, but so wonderful, the plan of the house is just a circle of 3 m. It is made of rice straw all round and there is a roof with straw, the floor is sand. In this part you have what they keep very carefully like a bed to sleep on, the water. It is very important here, it must be kept in a very clean place, and they keep in the box the few things they have, their belongings.

Outside there is a second circle of 12.15 m, just a fence with straw, with just one door and no road, and this is for domestic functions: cooking, showering etc. and outside there is a little construction which is just a place to receive friends, a sort of living room. This is very simple, but so delicious.

We spent five years there, five years is long time, we had time to consider our work. John Philip didn't work in architecture, because there is no work for architects there but in urbanism. To organize a new quarter or a part of the city or the suburbs, you do not make plans but go there with important people, like the mayor of the city, the authorities and the minister. There is always an old man there who knows the place, when it is raining, from where it is coming. Sometimes we have a big river that appears for maybe just 2 weeks, and so he knows.

architecte ne sait où ou de voir à quelle manière on peut apprécier la vrai et non l'artificielle. Toutefois, voici comment voir ce qui est visible et non ce qui est caché.

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Very well where it is possible to build or not, they draw on the floor the areas, different plans for every family. It is made really with the kind of situational intelligence. After that we completely changed the sense of our work. We are sure that the work of an architect is not to demonstrate that he knows how to do very beautiful buildings, but to be intelligent with the question asked. Very often it is complex but you work on it and try to find a very simple solution.

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extended room, so to say, like the example of these circle houses in Africa you mention before. On the other hand the use of material, very basic, very cheap, foreexample corrugated polycarbonate, and the use of industrial materials in a new way, is me kind of deep dirty surrealism, with dirty detailing. Making a new-value, I think, is very important element in your work. Maybe you can tell us about Latvia House, the first big project that made you famous.

Location: The Latvia House was the first project we worked on, after coming back from Africa. For us it was important to try to do something else for dwellings. When you look at the projects of the fifties and sixties they were much better than now. The problems with houses is that the people can buy a very small house, Latvia is a very ordinary family, with enough money to buy a standardised house of 80 sqm. From the beginning our aim, our intention was to try to make a larger house, not 10 sqm, maybe twice as big. It possible, because we were completely convinced that you live better in a large house, and it is also
de bude vro transparentno, vro otvoren. Bilo je nemoguće zamijeniti stolku, ali bi stolak bilo preteko i presuplik. Zato smo se odustali od plastičnog materijala, jer omogućuje izvedbu vro velikih površina transparentnih krsta i zidora sa vro malo konstruktivnog materijala. U stvari je potrebno veoma logično i ekonomično, omogućuje zanimljive prostore ispunjene svjetlom. Toko se jekli materijali može upotrijebiti u skupim projektima, jer se uopće ne radi o tome da nje materijal jekli ili skup. Materijal je zanimljiv ili ne.

Location: It's an opportunity to have a different kind of spaces and ambiances in the house. For us it is very important, to have insulation everywhere, it is very important to have different possibilities to live and to move depending on the season, so the work on the Latvia House was really trying to do the maximum within a budget, so we took care to respect that budget. By the time of the Latvia House we knew that it was impossible to build such house in traditional solid materials. So the first project was made with the prefabricated green house. But because of the situation in the city it was not possible to use it, so we looked into other field than architecture, what kind of construction is very cheap and interesting, and in industry and agriculture we found this kind of construction. Because for the materials we did not try at the beginning to find just a cheap material but the material that would completely allow us to go along with our intentions. In the Latvia House there is this big transparent room, a very high volume, which is kind of between inside and outside. It had to be very transparent and very open. It was impossible to imagine doing it in glass, because it would be very heavy and very expensive. That is the reason why we worked with plastic material, because it gives you the ability to have very large transparent roofs and walls, with very few structures, because it is very light and at the same time it is also very economical. But it also gives you very interesting spaces with lots of light. But
we could use this kind of material in very expensive projects too. For us it is not a matter of cheap and expensive material; material is interesting or not.

Ortiz: So it is not the problem of the low budget but of optimisation of this reality of the ideas you want to make. You are an architect very responsible towards the client and towards society. I like the examples of your work on the Iaton Aucoc square in Bordeaux. Any other architect would use this opportunity to express himself, but it is very seldom that an architect says there is no need to change anything. I think it is very responsible and it has to do with this life, the way of living, the way you experienced in Africa. It is an act of courage of an architect as well.

Location: No, courage is when you are in a very difficult and stinging situation. Architecture is not so important in life. We cannot have a life without architecture. In Bordeaux they worked for an image just after the appointment of the new mayor of the city of Bordeaux, after forty years of the same mayor, the first act of the politicians was to build something. The mayor wanted us to do a project of a beautiful facade for all the squares in the city. When we came to Place Aucoc there I first impression was that it was already beautiful, so what can an architect say when he sees something that is already very beautiful. For example, if you go to Chateau Versailles, you don't have any idea about changing anything, it is another scale. The feeling is the same. It was not beautiful only because of the architecture but it was beautiful because of the atmosphere, and these small houses, very cheap, but very well designed and there was good feeling among people. At the beginning there was this feeling that there was nothing to do, but it was impossible to say this without any argumentation. During last months we went there every week, and after four months we got an answer, we developed a very clear argumentation.

Ortiz: A typical Viennese architect Herman Czech said once "Architecture is not life, architecture is background". Location: It is not about refusing to do something, but we can consider that the work of an architect is not only to build, the first to do is to think, and only after that are you able to say whether you should build or not. Why often you have to build, but sometimes not.

Ortiz: Maybe this is one way you decided in this situation to stay as it is — it is a respect for the place, for the ambiance. Other projects are important in the same very way — very reasonable dealing with the landscape: the house in Corsica and the house in Cap Ferrat. I think these two examples are very important as well, because of
way of putting the house on the contours, to enable the free view to the sea, on one hand and on the other hand to let the landscape, the nature be as it is.

Location: Yes, these two projects have nearly the same situation as the hotel in Tigjano, because it is an example of a project where the site, the landscape is so beautiful, so as an architect there, you are afraid to change it and to damage the situation you found. In the Cap Ferrat project, it was our effort to build something very light, just to put it on the site and maybe to consider that the landscape was there to stay, but that construction could in 20 or 30 years disappear without damage to the ground. It is an attitude of respect but also it is an attitude of taking pleasure, of taking the
The house is 25 percent of the cost of the plot. With a house or without if the plot is expensive. It gives you a lot of liberty to think the project.

Location: It is true that we do not have it in mind to leave marks but at the same time we do not build something ephemeral because building materials – aluminum or steel – can stay a long time. I do not think this is a question of the heaviness of architecture, because some buildings that are very compact, very strong, built with stone, they give an image of eternity. But they are not built for eternity because, of course, every 20-30 years buildings must be changed, adapted. I think it is always a question of image. In France all the houses, even if they are very bad quality, look like castles. It is not because they are solid, but it is an image of the patrimony, the heritage from parents to children. For us this question is not important, we consider that architecture is like any other product in life, for you to live in it in your lifetime, and maybe to sell it to transform it. Maybe a lot of architecture has no more
Zvonim tlovo, mogućnost da vas se ponesne u neku drugu zemlju, mogućnost otvoarenog uma, bez predlausa. To je neki prigov arhitekta za koji nemamo obratnićenja. Smatramo, zato, da se sami nevrstan posao i takvim
poštenim elementima ako dobro redimo
svi posao na planu, funkcijska
unutarnjih prostora.

ortis. U vašem je radu zanimljiva bićem i
elementima kojih dolaze iz drugih područja — kod
vas, na primjer, stakleni posao ili pored
za stanovanje ili ši sad rukotvorina, uključuju svoje tradicionalne
i urobđene funkcije, nade iz važnih
goroda zemlje. U
aspire ženčica, dozore im prirodnih
s obzirom iz drugog konstruktivnog, te one postaju novi elementi
konseptacije.

location. I think, it is the first questions about
love because in the project you have
different kinds of questions and problems.
You have the problem of the site and
situation. Concerning this question you have
to take a position about your building in the
situation, where you put it, how you put it on
the ground, what the dimension are etc. The
first part is a larger scale — it can be very
large — the mountains, and the second scale

is the scale of the people who are living
inside your building. When we do the
project we try to imagine how they move
inside, how they live in the house, the
school. This is the reason why we began to
let the building grow from the inside
outwards. At one moment you come into
contact with the outside question and you
answer the question who relationships you
want to establish between the inside and the
outside: if you want to see or not, if you want
to be seen or not, and it gives you all the
facades and their reasons. You do not
design the facade at the beginning, it comes
often at the very end. You define the
materials, if you want transparently, it can be
glass or polycarbonate, if you want
protection against the sun there are screens
outside. At Grenoble University "All Arts and
Human Sciences it was interesting to give a
poetic image and not the one of
major technology. This led to the idea of the
bouqetière, because Grenoble is

kao arhitekt i mi želimo biti takvi.
Smatramo da je danas suvremeno to tro,
pa nematic mišljenja, ne postoje granice, što
se može uočiti nešto iz Japana, iz Australije
ili iz vlastelina, koje se uključuje vrlo
slobodno. Smatramo da gradnja
tradicionalnim materijalima ne se
dovoljno naglašava razvoj. Ako
pogledate što se dogodilo 50-ih ili 60-ih
godina, viđete da je bilo bilo mnogo
vesti

na zanimljivo, mi to upotrijebimo,

nemamo nikakvih ograničenja, sve je

moždane.

ortis: Vaša dva stjedera projekta stječu se izvornog

upotreba prostora kao osnovnog prostora i

praktičnog prostora. Palais de Tokyo i novi

projekti za Beč sarajevu u Montevru, na kome uprav

radoš. Vidi se da radi o vrlo atentnom projektu. U

slučaju Palais de Tokyo bili su smanjeni do espase

projekti. Najprije je to bio projekt za limo s

budžetom od 50 milijuna. Zauzvačen je i ima su
surrounded with mountains, it is not an exotic country. Exotic plants make a contrast. When you are inside you see the mountains across these exotic flowers. We think maybe it is a way of bringing you to another lifestyle, bringing you to another country, being open-minded. It is really our contribution to architecture, we have no explanation to give to that because we consider that if we do our work about technique, the functioning of internal spaces, very well we can have this kind of element without maybe having to give any explanation.

Location: What is interesting in your work is your handling of elements which come from another field, like handling the construction of greenhouse which became a dwelling for you, or the corridor which you put on the outside of the facade instead of its conventional or traditional function. So you just turn up these meanings, and you find them a new value. They become, taken from another context, new elements in the composition.

Location: We think that we are really contemporary. Architects and everybody actually live in 2003, you always live in your time and sometimes in the future like artists. As architects, strangely, we have to be like that. What is contemporary for us today is that we think that there are no frontiers, you can take something from Japan, from Australia, or from your country, and add that in a very great

that was project of the cinema complex with 50 million budget. It was stoped and you were asked to make a new design. You mentioned this parallel with the square in Marakesh, which is changing through the times of today and the years to be just a frame for actions that are changing through time. Palais de Tokyo is a very good example. We can talk about the way museums are built today. For example Frank Gehry - just expression, sensation, and on the other hand, architecture just as a basic framework, architecture as intelligent structure where art can be presented. The other one is the project for the architecture school, you are working on...

Location: You mentioned these two projects which are very recent projects. In fact if you look at the Isotype House it is already the same concept. It is the same and where to stop, not to go too far, make a possibility for people to appropriate the building. For example in the Isotype House we have the maximum of the project, they wanted to paint some elements of the furniture, it is very important that the people could finish the project. For the Palais de Tokyo it is another scale because it is a very big building in the centre of Paris. It was built for a museum and then it was changed into a centre for photography and cinema. In the 90s there was a very big project to refurbish it and to make it into a cinema. They began the works, they demolished all the inside, and then the project was stopped by the Ministry of Culture because at that time the opinion of the Ministry was that this building was really built to exhibit works of art, and it was pity to close it. They stopped it, but it's in a very bad situation, because there were holes in the floor, there were no more partitions, no more networks in the floor. They decided to transfer the budget they had for a centre for contemporary creation in another part of Paris here to this place and to do something to try to open it again for public but with a very low budget. It was 3 million euros and we entered a competition for it. We had very short time, the project was a competition, just a week and our answer was not a project. It was just a meeting to say what our intentions were, and we said that for us the architecture was still there, and it was really interesting, so we did not have the intention to add any architecture. And second we said that the budget was very low but we knew that it was not only a sort of temporary project, so we would have a very pragmatic methodology. We would begin with very important work on structure, visibility, fire security etc, and then do the performance networks, and then we would stop when there was no more budget. We knew that if we managed to do these main elements it would be enough to open it again and to have a very interesting space. And also it is really like the flowers in the Grenoble project. If you talk about efficiency, you need to have something parallel which is poetic, something which brings you over the technique. We are talking about this plaza in Marakesh, which is a very large space without any decorations, no limits on the floor, all around there are some buildings. In fact Jean Philippe knows this place very well because he was born in Morocco. The idea we had of this plaza is that it is not designed by the facades all round. Sometimes it is completely empty in the night and in the morning, very early there are some groups that are coming
here to sing, some artists, it seems not to be very organized, in fact there is organization but you don’t feel it. There are different groups acting on the place, all round people watching what they are doing, and it makes some circles of people, and the cars go round these groups of people. It completely changes the function. For us it was a very interesting example because the directors of the Palais de Tokyo explained to us that they wanted to get out of this type of museum with white walls and they explained that they wanted a place that could change all the time. For us it was a very interesting example, an experiment, it is possible to organise the place without closing it and without making partitions. The space is also like a sort organized by different functions and you don’t need to close it. In fact artists are not ready to work like that; a lot of them ask to have their artwork closed up in small rooms. As for the school of architecture it is a new project. It is a competition won 2 months ago for a School in Nantes. They explained to us that they wanted a school where they could experiment, in the space and the evolution. So we proposed to build a sort of site and this site is made with big structures in concrete, very, very stable with capacities for very high loads on the floors. There is a ramp linking all the levels. This structure is the beginning of the project. Then we tried to design an we look into industrial catalogues of structures and materials that you are able to build very easily into the big structure. And of course you can change things very easily.

It would be interesting to see your opinion on the education, both of students and the clients. We met each other at the Modernism seminar last year and I saw that you have very close contact with the students. You are able to transport your ideas and concepts very directly. On the other hand you and Jean-Philippe as architects have to transmit your ideas to the client as well. This is an ambivalent situation, architecture work being conveyed to other people, so what are your expectations from the teaching in the architectural school?
that you have to listen to them. When you work with the client, you have to listen what they have to say, to understand what they say. I do not think you are doing education with the client, it would be very presumptuous to say that. You have to come with your adventure and you have to go into his adventure, it is a sort of common adventure.

Locaton: There is no mystification, but only demystification. In fact, architecture is important when you do it, but it is not life. You have no necessity to mystify architecture, because we are not in times when people are completely in the power of religion, or politics, actually we live in free countries. Most of us do, it is very important to be very direct in the way you come to the building, we try to do the buildings on the same level as outside, we don’t like buildings with steps when you go up to the building because it gives it too much importance. For us architecture has to be very readable and very accessible, it is the opposite of the monument. It is a difficult question – mystification, something a bit intellectual. We do architecture which is more sensitive. It is hard work but we think that doesn’t have to be like psychotherapy, it should be something easy.