HISTORIC URBAN LANDSCAPE: DREAMING, DRAWING, DESIGN

Sophie Agisheva

Abstract

This exhibition review provides illustrative examples of the interconnectedness between art and architecture in the context of cultural heritage. The general concept of the International Exhibition on “Historic Urban Landscape: Dreaming, Drawing, Design” (2014) lies in interpretation of visions for perceptual transformations on conservation and sustainable development processes within historic urban landscapes and its identical historic & contemporary elements through traditional and futuristic design, modern art, research approaches and digital technologies.

Keywords: exhibition, art, design, historic urban landscape, cultural heritage, conservation, urban development, survey, documentation
The International Exhibition on “HISTORIC URBAN LANDSCAPE: DREAMING, DRAWING, DESIGN” was held as an integral part of the International Workshop on “Historic Urban Landscape: New Vision” and organized at (KSUAE) Kazan State University of Architecture and Engineering (Russia) on September 5-11, 2014 by curator Arch. Sophie Agisheva.

The exhibition collection focuses on the illustrative artefacts documenting the interconnectedness between art and architecture, cultural heritage and urban development. It is conceived as an anthology to showcase individually each artist’s influential contemporary attitude on understanding the historic urban landscapes. With the creation of a structural link from art to design, the general concept of the exhibition appears to be important in its interpretation of visions for perceptual transformations on conservation and development processes within historic urban landscapes. It shows a fundamental and constant relationship between a polyphony of various sceneries for representing of dreaming, drawing and design metamorphoses in the context of an integrated approach on the historic urban landscape. In particular, the collection proposes that heritage, architecture and art are allied and interdependent arts, and this is the founding premise of the exhibition.

Considering contemporary issues, the ten architects and artists from Italy, The Netherlands, The UK, Mexico, Hungary and Russia featured here contemplate their exhibited drawings & paintings, photographic series and architectural projects addressed to the major themes of each part of the exhibition as “dreaming”, “drawing” and “design” sections. Including 44 individual and collaborative works ranging from photography, drawing & painting to works on building survey and design, the collection considers all three sections as integral parts of the creative process in architectural design in historic urban landscapes. There is no doubt whatsoever that each project
generally starts from an initial idea and passing thoughts – “dreaming” – and then passes a phase of understanding the genius loci – “drawing” – till the final phase as a “design” process. Thus, each project demonstrates a subject that may be taken as independent and self-sufficient issue or concerned in complex processes of cultural heritate conservation and sustainable urban development by using traditional and futurist design, modern art, research approaches and digital technologies.

Starting with “DREAMING”, the first exhibition section demonstrates the visual poetics of architectural photography and nature of photographic representations of historic urban landscapes and its identical historic & modern elements (see Figure 1). While it is invested in exploring the visual perception, urban environment is ranged from the cultural and historical significance of photographers to the personal associations of a new urban vision. As early as in 1970s, any sense of ideal or real image was explained in her collection of essays “On Photography” (1973-1977) as “preferential interpretation” which makes a deal with “truth” and “art”.

The photographic collection provides an opportunity to observe artists’ personal reflections on the perceptive reality of nowadays, ideal or utopian visions for historic urban landscape’s existence, including cultural and modern heritage, or its further development.

The image of the city Rotterdam (NL) – as an informal capital for modern architecture in Europe – is presented twice as a mix of natural & artificial landscapes with modern architecture and authentic structures by Peter Heavens (UK/NL) and by Arch. Sima Agisheva (RU/NL/MEX) with photographic materialization on nature of feelings and emotions for a newly arrived person to Holland, where historic urban landscapes meets citizens’ daily life and rapid urbanization. The theme of human perception in the city is also considered in photographic series on “Human Landscape” (2011/2013), where author Arch. Sophie Agisheva (RU) draws attention to the scales and relationships between the rapid modern life of the Florentine citizens and the almost static fundamental historic city centre under the protection of UNESCO. Other links to the city, nature, World Cultural Heritage and collective human memory are observed by Arch. Dante Borgo (NL/MEX), showing so-called “Artefacts” (2013/2014) on the integration of new architectural structures with historic environment in Plaza de las Tres Culturas (Mexico) as a monument of new cultural intervention into original environment and the post-colonial period. Also underlined is how modern Mexican architecture becomes a relevant & authentic part of the historic urban landscape as modern urban heritage, taking a colorful example – the private house of Luis Barragan.

The main paradox is that the photography’s metaphysics resides in its non-interference in the domestic affairs of the historic urban landscapes. Thus, photography can be understood as an interpretation of objective reality as well as painting and drawing.

Considering the drawing as a way of understanding reality, the "DRAWING" collection consists of paintings, freehand drawings, sketches and survey drawings on the documentation of the general and specific characteristics with fixation of the authors’ personal impressions on Historic Urban Landscapes including Cultural Heritage Monuments and Sites (see Figure 2). In modern times, when our story takes place, drawing is becoming a way of communicating with other people through the use of semantics. Like a filmmaker you have to decide a story that you want to tell, making an idea and a way of representation without an empty mind. It is a way of thinking and essential element in the practice, culture and qualitative progress of architecture.
Drawings describe expression and feelings that help to fix “genius loci” – perception, emotions, the image of the city and landscape – and put it on paper.

Historic urban landscape interpreted through drawing, is a collection of individual perceptions through greater visual complexity, riddles and interpretations with different types of elements as land, human, air, greenery, architecture are included in space-time system. Thus, the graphic collection includes noteworthy examples of sketches, drawings and paintings. Watercolors work in combination with ink in a series of graphics entitled “This is also Italy” (2014) and “The importance of being small” (2014), produced by independent artist Margherita Cambi (IT), and tells us about her deep impressions of natural and artificial landscapes developed while traveling in her homeland – Italy. An alternative Italian perspective, with observations established while travelling outside Italy, are exhibited by researcher Arch. Francesca Piccio (IT) in painting series dedicated to understanding the image of a small village in Panama and relations between old historic constructions and new buildings. Another graphics series, presented by Arch. Sima Agisheva (RU/NL/MEX), opens a subject on the continuity of urban renewal processes and regular visible changes in architecture and historic urban landscapes everywhere in Europe from north to south without reference to number of heritage monuments and sites.

Special attention to historic landscapes, visual integrity as well as the relationship between cultural heritage and contemporary architecture is considered in the last part of the exhibition called “DESIGN”. This collection is dedicated to everything from contemporary practice to urban, architectural and conceptual projects, and research in design, documentation, conservation, renovation, reconstruction and redevelopment of historic urban landscapes and cultural heritage sites under the protection of UNESCO or the local authorities.

Remembering the inevitability of urban changes dealing with human perception and needs expressed by cultural, social and economic factors, the major issue lies in definition of acceptable actions within historic urban landscapes and World Heritage sites. Considering the “historic urban landscape” approach based on the 2005 Vienna Memorandum on World Heritage and Contemporary Architecture – Managing the Historic Urban Landscape and the 2011 UNESCO Recommendation on the Historic Urban Landscape, international experts underline how cities accumulate a large amount of diversity in interactions generating new initiatives and activities with the purposes of conservation, heritage modernization and adaptation to urban development conditions including cultural heritage and urban management. Tadao
Ando has called architects for a rethink on methods for design in historic urban context and advised to absorb what we see around us, what exists on the land, and then use that knowledge along with contemporary thinking to interpret what we see.

The “DESIGN” collection shows a range of examples for understanding the heritage significance and representing how cultural heritage and historic urban landscapes can be well-preserved and developed by teams of researchers and professional groups of architects with international experience (see Figure 3).

Clear examples of urban and architectural projects are presented by two international design offices. A world famous Dutch practice (Designed by) Erick van Egeraat (NL) calls for recovery of “beauty” concepts in architecture that were damaged by the twentieth century’s modernists, and states that architecture has to meet the requirements and styles of the era. Erick van Egeraat believes that “all architecture of historic significance was modern at the time it was built, emerging from its time and culture”. Rephrasing a well-known manifesto on “Think Local, Act Global” into a philosophic statement on “Think Global, Act Local”, his ideology for a definition of sustainable urban development, married “beauty with quality” in architecture, opens to the full extent in twelve exhibited national and international design projects in Hungary, The Netherlands, Russia, Germany and Denmark on reconstructions of historic buildings and monuments; new development of public, administrative buildings and housing within historic urban landscapes in context of integrated urban fabric, designed since 1995: Popstage Mezz (Breda, NL), Oosterdokseiland (Amsterdam, NL), Offices ING & NNH, Budapest (Budapest, HU), Main Building & Auditorium University (Leipzig, DE), Krøyers Plads (Copenhagen, DK), Udarnik Contemporary Art Centre (Moscow, RU) and etc. At the same time, a Budapest-based studio LAB5 Architects (HU) demonstrates a vision on design strategy for projects on renovation of the old industrial areas “Revitalization of the sewing factory” (2010) and preservation with survey & documentation of the housing area “OTI Settlement” (2012) in Hungary.

Figure 3. Design and conceptual projects, researches and documentation on historic urban landscapes, including historic buildings and World Cultural Heritage sites (photos by S. Agisheva).

The research projects under the supervision by Prof. Stefano Bertocci, University of Florence (IT) and Prof. Sandro Parrinello, University of Pavia (IT), identify a methodology for critical survey of the urban landscape and cultural heritage in twenty-one exhibited international and national research and restoration projects on surveying historical urban landscapes, monuments and sites through different methods and technological equipments (3D laser scanning, measuring, databasing), representing a wide experience of research framework for the documentation and
preservation of the cultural and archaeological heritage, UNESCO World Heritage sites and historic urban landscapes in Europe, the Near West and Latin America.

Another approach to architectural design in the context of the historic city centre is reflected in the theoretical design project – “The Bureaucratic Arcadia” (2012) – designed by Arch. Dante Borgo (NL/MEX), dedicated to a conceptual vision on urban changing and new development in the context of utopian relations between “government” and “church”. A strong link between bureaucratic power practiced by the European Union and theological practice of the Roman Catholic Church is reflected in the utopian project of offices and symbolic archive in the governmental center of the EU in Brussels.

Thus, connecting with world trends and paradigms developed in art and design, theory and practice, the exhibition on “Historic Urban Landscape: Dreaming, Drawing, Design” covers the relationship between movements and contemporary issues on cultural heritage and historic urban landscapes. Like a “manifesto”, it shows the metamorphoses and interconnectedness in visual riddles and perceptions through photographs, hand drawings and paintings, based on architectural approaches to design, research and conceptual projects in the context of heritage protection and urban development.

Notes:

(1) Peter Heavens, a photographer, participant in photography exhibitions in the Netherlands, (UK/NL).
(2) Sima Agisheva, an architect, founder of SAGHI architectural visualization office, (RU/NL/MEX).
(3) Dante Borgo, an architect, founder of design bureau MAIN OFFICE, participant in the 14th International Architecture Biennale in Venice (2014) as a team member for “Planta” project, (NL/MEX).
(4) Sophie Agisheva, an architect & researcher, lecturer and participant in architectural exhibitions in Russia and photography exhibitions in Russia and Italy, (RU).
(5) Francesca Piccio, an architect, researcher at University of Florence, (IT).
(6) Margherita Cambi, an independent artist, (IT).
(7) Stefano Bertocci, an architect, Full Professor at University of Florence, director of Lab. LS&D, researcher, author, (IT).
(8) Sandro Parinello, an architect, Associate Professor at University of Pavia, researcher, author, (IT).
(9) LAB5 Architects, an office in urban design, architecture and 3D visualization, (HU).
(10) (Designed by) Erick van Egeraat, an innovative Dutch design practice in international architecture and urbanism, (NL).

Sophie Agisheva is a lecturer and PhD candidate in Theory and History of Architecture, Restoration and Reconstruction of Cultural Heritage at (KSUAЕ) Kazan State University of Architecture and Engineering, Russia.

Contact email: agisheva@mail.ru