

towards increasing realism), Rohark already assumes that after the 1530s the downfall sets in. In this context, he cites a textual source as confirming his view. In 1591, Francesco Bocchi wrote in his guide to Florence on the choir stalls of S. Maria Novella, that „these decorations of the choir stalls were made after a design of Giovanni Gargioli, and they are still appreciated today, and they show in their use the great knowledge of this rare art.“⁴ Just how this citation and the use of the word ‚rare‘ prove that in 1591 the technique of wood intarsia was forgotten remains unclear; and in the rest of this chapter, the assumptions made in the introduction of the book are referred to as further proof that there was indeed a definite decrease in the art of intarsia. It becomes even more ludicrous when a general economic depression at the end of the sixteenth century is cited as the reason for the loss of this form of art. In contrast, the simple and elegant proposal made by Peiresca in his chapter in Italian intarsia work still seems more convincing than Rohark’s contextual approach. According to Peiresca, it was the increasing use of curved surfaces in Baroque furniture that prohibited the decoration by means of wood inlay.⁵

While methodologically this book suffers from serious flaws and hardly provides new insights – especially when understood in Rohark’s concept of art history as consisting of objective facts – it first and foremost fails to live up to its own standards. None of the many interesting issues addressed in the introduction is satisfactorily solved at the end of the book. The reader is also hampered by the lack of good images in the book itself, and the insufficient quality of the images provided on the CD-rom. These almost invariably show choir stalls in their entirety, and in such a low resolution that it is impossible to zoom in and study the intarsia panels that are the main theme of the book. The better alternative to Rohark’s attempt at reintroducing a ‚forgotten‘ form of art therefore still remains the old introduction to the field as provided by Helmut Flade and others in 1986. This might be more general in scope, but shows markedly less disdain for complex historical issues, more respect for other scholar’s work, and really pays attention to the detail.⁶

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4 Cited after ROHARK, 142.

5 GIUSEPPE PEIRESCA: Die Intarsia in Italien, in: HELMUT FLADE ET. AL.: Intarsia. Europäische Einlegekunst aus sechs Jahrhunderten; Dresden 1986, 55–115, esp. 64.

6 See note 5.

Peter Gössel (Ed.): The A-Z of Modern Architecture, 2 vols.; Köln: Taschen 2007, 1072 pp, numerous colour and black and white illustrations; ISBN 978-3-8228-6313-8, € 200,00

Everybody who has spent some time among architects will have had the opportunity to observe that more than any other skill and characteristic a big ego is what makes the successful architect. Without such ego, it is almost impossible to survive the global

business of modern architecture. *The A-Z of Modern Architecture*, the latest book that Peter Gössel has edited for Taschen publishing house, will feed the vanity and ego of those architects who are included. It will also, one almost fears, confirm the aspirations of many architecture student who may have been attracted to the profession exactly because of the fame that awaits „Starchitects“ as Michael Lewis has called the species of globally successful architects in the December 2007 issue of *The New Criterion*. *The A-Z of Modern Architecture* reinforces the impression that the personality cult that surrounds architects is more important than the by now almost tangential task of designing buildings and spaces that fulfil, ideally, human needs and grace the earth in a manner comparable to the beauty of nature.

566 entries constitute *The A-Z of Modern Architecture* that ranges from Alvar Aalto to René van Zuuk. The vast majority of entries is dedicated to architects both of the twentieth and the twenty-first centuries, but some entries like, for example, those on Robert Adam, Philip Hardwick, and Karl Friedrich Schinkel, reach back both to the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. A third, smaller group covers periods and movements like, for example, the British MARS group, Archigram, Art Nouveau, Expressionism, and Gothic Revival.

The biographical entries are standardized. Each comprises a short text that offers a basic biographical outline, information on key buildings, and tentative interpretative thoughts. The entries are rounded off with images of major buildings, a quote by the architects or firm about the philosophy of their work, and a black and white portrait photograph.

These portraits constitute a deeply fascinating physiognomy of the modern architect. Some of the portraits almost scare the reader like, for example, that of Architectonica. Others will make one wonder what *nirvana* the architects are gazing at like, for example, the stilted double portrait of Agrest and Gandelonas. The images are a dissertation that awaits to be written, ideally by an art historian and a psychologist with the later offering possible answers to the question why the younger the architect the fiercer the look in the portrait?

While the title page lists various contributing authors, the individual entries do not identify them. Instead, the introductory essay by the editor explains that it was his choice to edit all entries and, accordingly, to take sole responsibility. In this introduction, Gössel wrestles with the question „What is modern architecture?“

Unfortunately, his answer remains opaque; an impression that is exaggerated, if not caused, by an at times nearly incomprehensible text, presumably a translation from the German language. Still, one can gather from the essay that modern architecture emerged in the eighteenth century in connection with „a situation driven by the contradictions of a productive sphere geared towards profit“ (10). Gössel continues by defining modernism as not being „an epoch nor a tide of events that points a way forward from any particular historical point in time.“ Instead, it is two things in one, viz. „technological progress and rationalization“ and „the loss of traditional values and aesthetics.“ Accordingly, „modernism must be regarded as a never-finished pro-

ject concerned with harmonizing Enlightenment hopes for self-determined individuals with social and technological changes." (10)

The book sets out to offer a path through the maze of modernism in architecture. The editor tells the reader that the publication is a „survey based on subjective criteria“ (12), but he does not specify what these criteria are. He does, however, complain that the contents was determined to some extent by archives that did not grant permission to reproduce items in their possession (12) and by the fact that „the systematic preservation of contemporary documentation such as plans and photographs is obviously peculiar to a particular cultural circle.“ (12)

The clumsy phrase of a „cultural circle“ denotes primarily the industrialized nations in Europe, Asia, and the Americas from which the majority of both architects and built examples in the book are drawn. Whereas the „supposed omission of architectural examples from what is known as the Third World“ (12) is due to the fact that „the writing of the history of modern architecture essentially demands the recognition of the modernism project itself, which requires the determined application of individuals who are able to prevail against social traditions and constraints.“ (12) Translated into plain language, this seems to suggest that the almost complete absence of projects from countries of the so-called „third world“ is apparently the latter’s own fault because plans and photographs were not preserved as the modernist project had not been accepted.

The essay offers such little scholarly value that it does not make sense to discuss it with regard to authorship, the role of the architect in the production of the built environment, and similar issues that have been debated among architectural historians for at least the last twenty to thirty years.

The A-Z of Modern Architecture continues the tradition of Taschen to brilliantly reproduce images in large formats rather than in stamp size. Unfortunately, some of the captions that accompany the images have to be taken with a pinch of salt. For example, Edinburgh is not in England (29), but in Scotland. London’s Passmore Edwards settlement (1895–7) by A. Dunbar Smith and C. Brewer was not a residential home (73), but a philanthropic settlement that offered spaces for social and recreational services. And, Pruitt-Igoe was not the location (11) but the name of a social housing scheme in St. Louis, Missouri, that was designed and built by Minoru Yamasaki between 1950–6 and famously demolished in 1972. But such errors are to be expected in a book of this size.

While other Taschen books are characterized by their affordability, this book comes with a hefty price tag of US Dollar 300 or Euro 200. Format and weight are equally supersized and prevent in conjunction with the relatively meagre contents (other than the images), that the two volumes can be used as handy reference works. Nor are they useful as an encyclopaedia, mostly because of the absence of a bibliography that would offer both the sources of the information gathered and pointers towards further reading and alternative opinions.

Instead, the book appears to have been a labour of love of the editor Peter Gössel whose firm *Gössel und Partner*, Bremen, was also responsible for the design of the book

(8). Anybody who has US Dollar 300 to spare is advised to purchase as many titles as possible of, for example, Taschen's Basic Architecture series that offer for less money good images and concise information on individual architects and art movements. *The A-Z of Modern Architecture* is a dinosaur of book whose size may match the ego of the profession. Otherwise it is as useless as, to paraphrase Prince Charles, the carbuncle in the face of a beloved friend, or ornaments on the facades of many of the beautiful building it illustrates. And to those young architecture students who will mistake inclusion in such a book with success, please calculate the carbon output of the production and the shipping of the volumes.

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Raphael Rosenberg, Max Hollein (Hg.): Turner – Hugo – Moreau. Entdeckung der Abstraktion; München: Hirmer 2007; 359 S., 213 Farbabb., 87 farbig-Vergleichsabb.; ISBN 978-3-7774-3755-2, € 39,90 (vergriffen)

Der Katalog, der die Ausstellung der Schirn Kunsthalle Frankfurt begleitete, versammelt die Ergebnisse langjähriger Forschungen Raphael Rosenbergs, Kurator der Ausstellung. Es handelt sich um der Öffentlichkeit gewidmete künstlerische Nachlässe bislang wenig beachteter und weitgehend unpublizierter Werke des Landschaftsmalers J. M. William Turner (1775–1851), des Schriftstellers Victor Hugo (1802–1885) und des Symbolisten Gustave Moreau (1826–1898). Unabhängig voneinander befassten sie sich mit dem „nicht erkennbar Gegenständlichen“ und dem zufällig Hervorgebrachten. Reine Farbwirkung, Atmosphäre und Stimmung, aus Farbspritzern gezogene, imaginär reale Szenen bei William Turner; Tintenleck oder Klecks, aus dem szenische, phantastische Einfälle zu gewinnen waren, bei Victor Hugo; Aquarell und Ölstudien, die zur Überarbeitung anregten und der Komposition von Gemälden dienten, bei Gustave Moreau.

Der Band ist mit großzügigen Farbtafeln, auch zur Präsentation der Abstraktion in Künstlerschriften, sehr gut ausgestattet (Redaktion: Cornelia Tschosch, Assistenz: Ariane Hellinger; beide betreuten auch die Ausstellung maßgeblich mit). Die Vergleichsabbildungen sind in einem Kapitel flüchtig mit Katalognummern zu verwechseln, die teils ebenfalls in den Text – eine bewährt ausgeruhte, balancierte und leserfreundliche Darstellung, die auf weitere Forschungen hoffen lässt – eingebunden sind. Ergänzt wird der Katalog im Anhang, mit grauem Buchschnitt dezent abgesetzt, durch drei Künstlerbiografien, Anmerkungen, Abbildungs- und Literaturverzeichnis sowie ein übersichtliches Personenregister.

Seit im 18. Jahrhundert die Beziehung von Werk und Betrachter den Vergleich von Natur und Gemälde ersetzte, fand die Reflexion über formale Eigenschaften (Linie, Komposition, Farbe) in der „Wirkungsästhetik“ statt. William Hogarth (*The Analysis of Beauty*, 1753) entwarf eine Linie als die „unabdingbare Ursache für Schönheit“ (22); die Linie auch des Tanzes. Die abstrakte Linie ließ sich mit den natürlichen