ARCHITECTURAL URBANISM: MELBOURNE/SEOUL

An Exhibition at K-ARTS Gallery, Korea National University of Arts, Seoul
28 March - 6 April 2013

muir mendes
Baracco + Wright
iredale pedersen hook
NMBW Architecture Studio
Kerstin Thompson Architecture
Architectural Urbanism: Melbourne / Seoul

Part One of an Exhibition and Cultural Exchange Project conceived by Associate Professor Melanie Dodd, RMIT University School of Architecture + Design.

This Exhibition is supported by the Australian Government through the Australia International Cultural Council: an initiative of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade.

It is also jointly supported by RMIT University School of Architecture and Design, and the Korean National University of the Arts, School of Visual Arts Department of Architecture.

Curator:
Melanie Dodd

Assistant Curator and Curatorial Producer:
Helen Walter

Publication and Exhibition Design
Melanie Dodd and Helen Walter

Poster Design and Exhibition Assistant:
Jenny Jaeyeon Kim

Project Partner (Korea)
Professor Jong Kyu Kim, Department of Architecture K-ARTS

Exhibition Assistant (Korea)
Sungmin Lee, RIBA Office, Department of Architecture K-ARTS
Architectural Urbanism is an ambition and sensibility for propositions that address the context of the city within the operative scale of the small architectural project. Architectural urbanism represents a tailoring of projects to the local; to the materiality and specificity of the everyday; and to the grain and substance of the location above all else. Architectural urbanism is less about erasure and more about insertion; infill; the weaving of old and new and the dynamics that evolve from subtle and careful manipulation of the city in detail.

Exhibitors

muir mendes
Baracco + Wright
iredale pedersen hook
NMBW Architecture Studio
Kerstin Thompson Architecture
Curatorial Introduction
Melanie Dodd

The Exhibition Architectural Urbanism: Seoul/Melbourne-Melbourne/Seoul is a project in two parts, beginning in March 2013 as an Exhibition at the K-ARTS/KNUA Gallery in Seokgwang, Seoul (KNUA is the Korean National University of the Arts), and concluding with an Exhibition in the RMIT Design Hub, Melbourne in March 2014 (RMIT is the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology).

Collecting together a selection of projects from ten young architectural practitioners across both Melbourne and Seoul, the intention is explore the conditions of commonality in the apparently different contexts of both cities — speculating on these as forms of 'architectural urbanism' in the contemporary city of the Asia-Pacific at its northern and southern extremes.

The Thematic
What do we mean by architectural urbanism, and how do these projects bear any relationship to each other given their disjunctions in distance, social and cultural history and physical environment?

Both Melbourne and Seoul are cities with a profound sense of physical place, enshrined in an urban grain and fabric peculiar to their separate sites. Although both are sited on waterways, with river to the south; and mountains behind, their built fabric is fundamentally connected to the specificity of each place: to the successive waves of local colonization and development; to the regimes of property division and land ownership tradition, and to the traditions of cultural life and vernacular built form. Despite waves of redevelopment in the twentieth century each city has retained a powerful urban grain that defines its quality and atmosphere, and which often resists the regenerative erasure of large-scale redevelopment.

To value these particularities and specificities lies at the heart of an architectural approach that works within the city rather than upon it — that intervenes and inserts, rather than overlays and eradicates. In such a way, architectural urbanism can be defined as an ambition and sensibility for propositions that address the context of the city within the operative scale of the small architectural project.

An architectural approach to the urban condition is one that acknowledges the fragmentary scale and approach that restricts most architectural projects. And rather than seeing this as a problem, finds merit in the mechanisms of the small scale, the partial, and the incomplete. These are strategies of a subtle urban reinforcement, which intervene in, and augment existing urban and landscape grains.

Across both Melbourne and Seoul, architectural urbanism represents a tailoring of projects to the local; to the materiality and specificity of the everyday; and to the grain and substance of the location above all else. As a form of practice, it often finds delight in the particular and odd palimpsests that have given rise to the city as a place of detail experience, rather than a place of top-down abstraction. These include a sensitivity to the ownership line of residual urban blocks and plots; and to the remnants of built fabric and residual form as crucial pieces of context to be enjoyed and valued. So architectural urbanism is less about erasure, and the overlay, and more about insertion, infill, the weaving of old and new and the dynamics that evolve from subtle and careful manipulation of the city in detail.
The Practices

In the first Exhibition in Seoul, we see a selection of projects from five architectural practices from Melbourne, deliberately curated across a range of scales but focused on a body of work represented by public interiors, housing, and small to medium public buildings.

The projects exhibited have been selected to exemplify an approach that takes as its starting point the everyday urban context of the site, as the place from which to generate form, materiality and arrangement (rather than an internal or esoteric idea). These urban contexts are pockets of Melbourne characterized by a particular grain – from the tight adjacency of inner urban blocks of factory and workers cottages; to the regime of the quarter acre block of the inner suburbs; to the looser and more blurred landscapes of the outer urban settlement and townships. Each project has reacted to its context using a toolkit of approaches responsive to the ordinary and everyday nature of their site, adopting techniques more akin to camouflage, with a sensitivity to the boundaries and thresholds of the new and the old; landscape and building; infrastructure and physical skin.

Yet within these techniques, lies innovation and invention that reinterprets and represents the existing context; presenting the ordinary as other.

As an emerging small practice Muir Mendes have used their own house as a site upon which to practice their practice – literally as do-it-yourself exercise in crafting. Their Law Street House reconstructs a Victorian workers cottage in inner Melbourne, using family labor and their own craft expertise in the tradition of the Australian self-build. Tightly slotted between neighbors, it represents the cottage’s façade as a simplified plate steel composition, obedient in scale and typology to its context, but completely other in materiality. As a reinterpretation of domesticity, and a reconfiguration of its traditional site, it relies on (and respects) its neighbor’s ordinary built form as a compositional piece of urbanism.

Baracco+Wright’s projects in both the inner urban context of Thornbury (a small community school), the suburb of Kew (a house extension), and the coastal suburb of Merricks (a house) are all quite different formally as a result of their careful adjustments to local sites, but all share common ground which transcends these formal differences because of the way that they play with the thresholds and boundaries of urban site conditions as a means to reinterpret the ordinary. In Thornbury their School (completed with Richard Stampion Architects) replicates a generic shed form redolent of the factories and represents the existing context; presenting the ordinary as other. In Kew, their clever and innovative suburban house extension provides accommodation through a front extension to a ubiquitous brick veneer house, this time camouflaged as a sloping garden landscape and buffer, complete with embedded carport, mediating the relationship of house to street. Alternately in Merricks, their outer Melbourne beach house, with blurred boundary conditions, replays local typologies of the timber home and deck, but floating across the site as a form of landscape intervention.

For NMBW the augmentation of the existing urban condition provides the language for each of their careful and subtle projects. This plays out in small-scale renovations and interiors, like Building 45 (a twentieth century inner factory used as architecture studios for RMIT University) and the Elwood House through both a stripping back to reveal historic fabric, as well as a new layering with everyday contemporary skins exploring the edges and boundaries of the block. Their architectural languages take delight in the ordinary materials of urban grittiness, often transforming these for decorative potential. At larger scale, their Kerr Street residential and mixed-use project in Fitzroy draws further upon inner laneway typologies to makeambiguous and semi-public spaces within the block, carving out new lines of site and penetrations, which benefit the city grain.

In their diverse Melbourne projects, Iredale Pederson Hook have also worked with the alternate contexts of inner city, suburb and outer urban grains, in each making resolutely modern propositions, which respond to the typological standards and urban reality of their sites. Their Urban Box family house in Port Melbourne is materially responsive to the utilitarian and banal concrete and profiled steel structures of light industrial, inner-Melbourne work uses, slotting in slivers of domesticity where required. At an alternate end of the programmatic and built scale, but in similar operative vein, the Innocent Bystander Winery in the small town of Healesville also experiments with pared back aesthetic and form, modulating it with timber screening to create a public face to the productive functions of what is essentially a factory; providing a city edge and scale.

The most established practice of the five, KTA (Kerstin Thompson Architects) are represented through a range of public projects that provide the opportunity for a series of examinations of the relationship between building and street; and between formal and material contexts and typologies, all within the idiom of the ordinary. Exploring interstitial and contextual complexity, and sited at the heart of inner Melbourne suburbs, the Napier Street Apartments in South Fitzroy take lessons from the adjacent scales, focusing on inner workers cottages and industrial fabric, but innovating to represent them as collective housing with greater density. In a different and looser suburban grain, Carrum Downs Police Station is a radical reconsideration of an unloved suburban typology, and its street relations; the materials of the police station are transformed through a range of colored, perforated and formal screens presenting public areas both on the exterior and the interior. In public projects like the MUMA Gallery at Monash University, and the Cranbourne Botanic Gardens the use of space as a sequence of interiors and thresholds allows the respective context of site to be part of a careful continuum between the existing and the new.

The Exhibition Design

The exhibition design presents the projects using the device of both ordinari- ness, and extra-ordinariness. Large-scale photographs of the completed projects are deliberately selected to contextualize them within their city site, including street and urban context. The drawings are presented as simple construction drawing sets, which reveal the pragmatics and materiality in the language of the everyday architecture studio. These visual representa- tions are the simplest translation of built form requiring minimal interpretative input, suitable for a foreign audience and a traveling show.

Yet at life-size scale, and with the tray of urban site lines across the gal- lery floor the project images also invite one to be ‘inside’ Melbourne, to have traveled from Seoul temporarily to an alternate but parallel urban condition, in which one can sense both the similarities, and the differences, of place – to experience someone else’s local.

In the simultaneous representation of the ordinary, and the other, the first exhibition of Melbourne practitioners presents a possibility for a definition of architectural urbanism. Such an approach accommodates and supports the city’s two faces rather than competing with it. With this mindset, these projects may engage with contemporary and global interpretations of urbanism as practiced by urban designers, instead representing the value of architectural thinking to cities, which are ever more in need of local solutions and incremental change.
Muir Mendes are a young practice established have written about the house or that I can write about the house. Other blurb that they have written about the house or that I can write about the house. Other blurb that they have written about the house or that I can write about the house. Other blurb that they have written about the house or that I can write about the house.
Mauro Baracco and Louise Wright are Architects and Directors of Baracco + Wright as well as teaching at RMIT School of Architecture. Working over a diverse range of locations from inner urban areas to sensitive rural and coastal environments, they explore how to make architecture that is generous, opportunistic and connected to a local physical environment as well as the local non-physical mixed conditions of each context. Their projects have won State Awards including for Fitzroy Community School Creative Spaces.

Baracco + Wright
65 Simpson Street
Northcote, 3070 Melbourne

Baraccowright.com
iredale pedersen hook is a progressive, young architecture practice with studios in Perth and Melbourne and a rapidly expanding diverse body of work throughout Australia. From the wine region of Victoria’s Yarra Valley, to the desert of the North Kimberly region, the projects are as individual and eclectic as the landscape they occupy. The works can be gathered in relation to their geographical location demonstrating an embrace of their context and closer examination reveals a collection of thematic concerns that evolve and develop. The studio is dedicated to the pursuit of appropriate design of effective sustainable buildings with a responsible environmental and social agenda. Their projects have won multiple awards including two honourable mentions in the Architectural Review (UK) Awards for Emerging Architecture.
NMBW Architecture Studio is a design practice established in Melbourne in 1997, with an emphasis on urban engagement and culturally-specific design. Their working process is a lively collaboration between the three directors, clients, particular site conditions and various local traditions. NMBW’s projects have been published in national and international journals, including Architecture Australia, Architectural Review Australia, Casabella, Backlogue and Transition. They have received a number of awards from the Australian Institute of Architects, including Residential Awards in 2005 and 2008, a Public Architecture Award in 2009 for RMIT Building 45, the Regional Prize and the Melbourne Prize for contribution to the public realm.
Kerstin Thompson Architects is an architecture, landscape and urban design practice established in 1994 with extensive experience in public and private projects of various scales typically with stringent time and cost constraints. Their clients include Victoria Police, Royal Botanic Gardens Cranbourne, Monash University and numerous schools throughout Victoria. Projects have been recognised nationally and internationally through awards, publications and exhibitions most recently Monash University Museum of Art Gallery and Carrum Downs Police Station.

Kerstin Thompson Architects
277 Queensberry Street
Melbourne 3000     kerstinthompson.com
Architectural Urbanism: Melbourne / Seoul

Part One of an Exhibition and Cultural Exchange Project developed by Associate Professor Melanie Dodd, RMIT University School of Architecture + Design.

This Exhibition is supported by the Australian Government through the Australia International Cultural Council: an initiative of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade.

It is also jointly supported by RMIT University School of Architecture and Design, and the Korean National University of the Arts, School of Visual Arts Department of Architecture.

Curator:
Melanie Dodd

Exhibitors:
muir mendes
Baracco+Wright
iredale pedersen hook
NMBW Architecture Studio
Kerstin Thompson Architects

Assistant Curator and Curatorial Producer:
Helen Walter

Publication and Exhibition Design
Melanie Dodd and Helen Walter

Poster Design and Exhibition Assistant:
Jenny Jaeyeon Kim

Project Partner (Korea)
Professor Jong-Kyu Kim, Department of Architecture, K-ARTS

Exhibition Assistant (Korea)
Sungmin Lee, RIBA Office, Department of Architecture K-ARTS

Thank you to all Funding Partners, Exhibitors and Supporting Partners.

LOGOS