

Press Release

WHAT IF Unbuilt Architecture in Switzerland

From November 25, 2023 until April 7, 2024, the S AM Swiss Architecture Museum presents the exhibition 'What If - Unbuilt Architecture in Switzerland'

THE MAIN CONCEPT AT A GLANCE

Very few countries give their population such a far-reaching democratic right of co-determination in the realisation of architecture and urbanism as does Switzerland. While this has produced a democratically approved architecture that is unique in the world, it has also prevented numerous projects from becoming part of the country's built history.

Whether lost, rejected, stalled or changed ... there is a multitude of architectural designs that continue to be talked about to this day in Switzerland, even though they have never been executed. Those longed for, but not realised works are not single episodes but part of the everyday life of any architecture office, no matter how spoilt with success it may be.

In dialogue with almost two dozen architectural institutions from all parts of the country, the exhibition 'What If' attempts to make a representative selection from an almost infinite pool of projects. These projects combined draw a picture of an alternative Switzerland, in which the courage to embrace utopia is greater than the fear of making mistakes.

Curator, Andreas Kofler, S AM

THE EXHIBITION

Our lives are defined by a multitude of conscious and unconscious, rational and irrational decisions that either we ourselves make, or that others take. Much like us, architectural projects also proceed along a non-linear path: They advance, branch off, turn around or come to a standstill. In fact, much more architecture is designed than is ultimately built.

Thus, even in a country like Switzerland, with its intense construction activity, the built represents only the tip of the iceberg. The exhibition 'What If' draws attention to the sleeping giant beneath the surface - because this may embody the essence of architecture even more than what takes on material form.

Room 1

As a prologue to the exhibition proper, this space assumes the form of a salon des refusés, where projects that were not approved for realisation are displayed and then reshaped into new designs in the S AM mediation programme. A homage to the passionate idealism with which architects untiringly generate new projects time and again.

Architect Farshid Moussavi compares competitions in architecture to competitions in high-performance sport: "Competitive sports break existing human boundaries and set records for bodily capacities. Similarly, architectural competitions are invitations to make conceptual leaps [...]." In her analogy, this architect does not conceal the fact that in architecture, just like in sports, competing takes its toll.

The sleepless 'charrette' in the run-up to submission deadlines and the nerve-wracking workload associated with such competitions seem pre-programmed and have become part of a very distinct type of myth-making. The documentary film The Competition captures the

tense developments in architectural competitions. It tells an uncomfortable narrative, which ends (spoiler alert) in failure for everyone involved.

Film contribution (projection):

The documentary film *The Competition* is a tense account, in which some of the world's most famous architects compete for the contract pertaining to the future National Museum of Art of Andorra. It is the first architectural competition to be documented so unrelentingly and in such detail.

During the three months of design work for the various projects, a power struggle took place behind the scenes between the architects and the client. This also affected the level of transparency granted by each firm to the documentary crew on site, and consequently had an influence on the footage shown in the film.

The Competition (2013)

Frank Gehry, Jean Nouvel, Zaha Hadid, Dominique Perrault, ~~Norman Foster~~*

Director: Angel Borrego Cubero

Technical director and editor: Simon Lund

Musical arrangement and production: César Bartolomé

Production: Office for Strategic Spaces (OSS)

*Norman Foster dropped out of the competition after a change in the rules that allowed the film to be made in the first place

Re-Modell (Model shelf):

It is not only lost competitions that engender alternative scenarios; normal project development also entails a multitude of discarded designs from which important insights are gained that flow into subsequent planning phases. Seen in this light, what gets built grows essentially out of the humus of the unbuilt.

Knowledge of this is perhaps what makes it possible to compensate for the grief of losing a possible building with the anticipation of a new project. In this 'therapeutic' space, rejected models from architectural firms (we thank Salathé Architekten Basel, among others) and universities (we thank the FHNW Architecture Institute, among others) have been brought together to be transformed into new beacons of hope over the course of the exhibition.

Room 2-4

Few countries give their population such a far-reaching right of co-determination in the implementation of architecture and urban development as Switzerland. On one hand, this has produced a democratically ratified building culture that is unique worldwide, but on the other hand, it has also thwarted numerous projects from a possible architectural history of the country.

In competitions, the chances of victory are naturally low, as there can only be one winner. But even an awarded competition project can still be blocked. In Switzerland, this can indeed be a result of direct democracy's far-reaching decision-making possibilities, for instance in the form of a referendum. However, even an accepted project can stagnate in the planning or approval phase and end up lying in a drawer, hoping to be revived.

In order to make a selection of such projects that is as representative as possible, we contacted a large number of Swiss institutions that exhibit and, most importantly, discuss architecture. We asked them to tell us about unrealised structures in their region (regardless of whether these have positive or negative connotations) that keep coming up in regular exchanges with their visitors and event participants.

| Project | Architect | Location | Year | Project proposal |
|------------------------------------|--|--------------------------|---------------|---|
| Palace of the League of Nations | Le Corbusier, Pierre Jeanneret | Genf | 1927- 1929 | Fondation Pavillon Sicli |
| Swiss Central Airport | Kantonsingenieur, Kanton Zug | Zug | 1942- 1943 | BauForumZug |
| Kunsthaus Glarus | Hans Leuzinger | Glarus | 1942- 1952 | Glarner Architekturforum |
| Tour de Lausanne | Jean Tschumi | Lausanne | 1961- 1962 | F'AR, Forum d'Architectures |
| New Schauspielhaus | Jørn Utzon | Zurich | 1963- 1973 | gta Exhibitions |
| 1968 Cantonal Spatial Planning Act | Consiglio di Stato della Repubblica e Cantone Ticino | Kanton Tessin | 1964- 1969 | Istituto Internazionale di Architettura |
| BIS Tower | Martin H. Burckhardt | Basel | 1969- 1970 | S AM |
| Super Grimentz | Godfrey und George Grima, André Bornet, Peter Rice | Saint-Jean (Anniviers) | 1970- 1976 | S AM |
| Zurich Forest City | Werner Stücheli | Zurich | 1971 | ZAZ Bellerive |
| Mühleplatz Library/Hall | Luigi Snozzi, Bruno Jenni | Thun | 1982 | Architekturforum Thun |
| bolo'bolo | P.M. | Earth/Zürich | 1983- 1987 | Architekturforum Zürich |
| Strickmaschinen Site | Luigi Snozzi, Bruno Jenni | Schaffhausen | 1984 | Schaffhauser Architektur Forum |
| Bridge City | Bernard Tschumi, Luca Merlini | Lausanne | 1988- 2001 | Archives de la construction moderne & Archizoom |
| Lugano Lakefront | Mario Botta | Lugano | 1989- 1993 | Teatro dell'architettura |
| Federal Palace Extension | Mario Botta | Bern | 1991- 1993 | ArchitekturForumBern |
| Lago Bianco Dam Walls | Aurelio Galfetti, Jachen Könz | Poschiavo, Pontresina | 1991- 1995 | Archivio del Moderno |
| Megalou (Sulzer Site) | Jean Nouvel, Emmanuel Cattani | Winterthur | 1992- 2001 | Forum Architektur Winterthur |
| Wasserstadt Solothurn | Herzog & de Meuron | Solothurn | 2006- 2022 | Architekturforum im Touringhaus Solothurn |
| Nagelhaus | Caruso St John, Thomas Demand | Zurich | 2007- 2010 | S AM |
| Stadtkrone | Caruso St John | St. Gallen | 2012 | Architektur Forum Ostschweiz |
| West Branch | Kanton Bern, Stadt Biel | Biel/Bienne | 2014- 2020 | Architekturforum Biel |
| 7132 Hotel & Arrival | Morphosis | Vals | 2014- 2017 | Das Gelbe Haus |
| Stadtbogen | Architekturforum Obersee | Rapperswil-Jona | 2021 | Architekturforum Obersee |

Each project in the exhibition has its own table, on which plans, sketches, models and other presentation material can be seen. S AM thus becomes a kind of open-plan office, in which one can stroll from project to project in chronological order. This format allows not only an informative level to be conveyed, but also an emotional one, as can be imagined to have been present during the work on the projects: a crumpled piece of paper, souvenirs from the project's region, reference books, newspaper articles, objects that reflect the zeitgeist etc. On the basis of this evidence, the visitors are invited to picture what happened (or did not happen) - just like the curator of the exhibition.

OBSERVATIONS ON THE EXHIBITION

Unbuilt projects make an unexpectedly strong contribution to spatial culture. With such projects, architects explore the limits of what is feasible, tolerable and realisable, among other things. Many designs have become enlightening experiments, with courage that has proved to be quite contagious. This exhibition generates an alternative image of a Switzerland that never was: an image that is of great value when it comes to considering today's built Switzerland and its decision-making processes. It shows the familiarly unfamiliar and examines the emotionally traumatic moment of an interrupted storyline.

"However, this fascinating sequence of projects constitutes neither a city longed for by Italo Calvino nor a possible blueprint for our challenging future," explains exhibition curator Andreas Kofler. "Even in this parallel world, there is deforestation, demolition, concreting, consumption, urban sprawl. This is a nation planned and built primarily by men - who, up to a certain point, even had exclusive access to direct democracy. Thus, our alternative Switzerland amplifies not only the desires, ambitions and courage, but also the unawareness and shortcomings associated with each respective era."

It would be unfair to universally condemn it though, because broadly speaking, one is always wiser in hindsight. Instead, this journey through time is intended to make us ponder how our decisions and actions today will be looked back upon in the future. Our era of knowledge demands action based on this knowledge - whereby architecture should focus on transformation of the existing, rather than on the new. We are therefore also aware that the projects in this exhibition are paradoxically the most climate-neutral ones we have ever presented at S AM, because they were never built.

PROJECT COOPERATION

Switzerland-wide networking

In order to produce exhibition and publication, S AM sought the co-operation of a wide network of institutions that exhibit and discuss architecture—and made them co-curators, so as to conduct this debate on the relationship between the conceived and the built in architecture as broadly as possible. To this end, the main curator of the exhibition, Andreas Kofler, inventoried Switzerland's architectural landscape and was ultimately able to persuade more than twenty institutions (the S AM included) to collaborate. We asked them to tell us about unrealised works in their region, regardless of whether they are positively or negatively connotated and that regularly come up in exchanges with their visitors and event participants—almost as if they were in fact built, as weightless memorials in people's minds. The resulting selection provides insight into the diversity of construction projects in Switzerland, be it in terms of their scale, their purpose or their challenges.

This is the first time that such Switzerland-wide cooperation between institutions that convey and exhibit architecture has taken place in this form, and it has also given rise to several on-site events that are part of the supporting programme. The establishment of a nationwide network of architecture-mediation institutions, as driven by S AM, is also manifesting itself in various projects beyond this

cooperation. The aim is for the network to bring together protagonists from all over Switzerland, so that they can bundle their synergies, thus enabling and stimulating cross-regional discourse. As an institution that operates Switzerland-wide, S AM plays a key role here, and is building a bridge between experts and the general public in conveying topics related to a sustainable building culture. To the institutions represented here by their many passionately active representatives, we offer our sincere thanks – and ask: What if we were soon to be on the road again throughout Switzerland with another project?

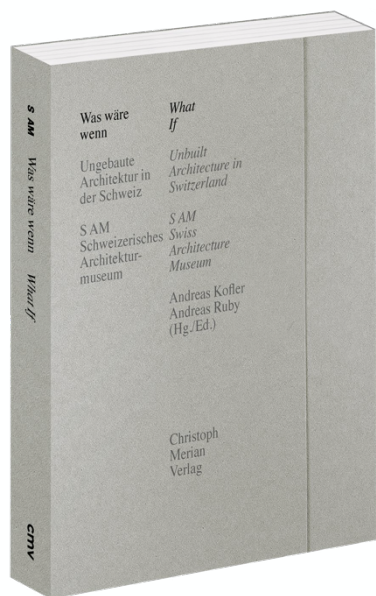
The exhibition is conceived in dialogue with:

Architektur Forum Ostschweiz, Architekturforum Biel / Forum de l'architecture Bienne, Architekturforum im Touringhaus Solothurn, Architekturforum Obersee, Architekturforum Thun, Architekturforum Zürich, ArchitekturForumBern, Archives de la construction moderne (Acm) and Archizoom, Archivio del Moderno, BauForumZug, Das Gelbe Haus, FAR Forum d'Architectures, Forum Architektur Winterthur, Glarner Architekturforum, gta Exhibitions, Istituto Internazionale di Architettura (i2a), Fondation Pavillon Sicli, Schaffhauser Architektur Forum, Teatro dell'architettura, ZAZ Bellerive – Zentrum Architektur Zürich.

PUBLICATION

To coincide with the exhibition 'What If – Unbuilt Architecture in Switzerland', Christoph Merian Verlag (CMV) is releasing a bilingual (German/English) publication with the same name. It contains descriptions and pictures of the 23 projects, which in contrast to the exhibition, are not arranged chronologically, but chrono-thematically: as lost, denied, failed or changed.

Each section begins with an introductory and in-depth essay on the respective theme. The authors are: the association Le Concours Suisse (lost), Marc Frochaux (denied), Katinka Corts (failed) and Sibylle Wälty (changed). A foreword by Andreas Ruby and an introduction by Andreas Kofler encapsulate the publication. A concluding essay by Anneke Abhelakh looks at the institutions involved in curating the selection of projects and analyses the potential of this network.



S AM Swiss Architecture Museum
Andreas Kofler, Andreas Ruby (Hg.)

Was wäre wenn / What If
Ungebaute Architektur in der Schweiz / Unbuilt Architecture in Switzerland

November 2023, 358 pages, with open thread stitching,
22 x 28 cm, German/English, ISBN 978-3-85616-997-8

EVENTS AND EDUCATION PROGRAM

The S AM places particular importance on communicating exhibition content through events and aims to foster exchange with the general public.

24/11/2023, 7 PM

Public opening with representatives of the participating institutions and the book authors

28/11/2023, 4.30-5.30 PM

Introduction for teachers, Registration: education@sam-basel.org

7/12/2023 (DE) & 11/1/(EN), 1/2/(FR), 29/2/ (IT), 21/3/2024 (DE), 6 PM

Guided tours through the exhibition

19/1/2024, 6 PM-02 AM

Museum Night 2024 'Open Archive'

24/1/2024, 6 PM

Roundtable Discussion 'Unbuilt Matter' with F.A.T. (Forum for Architecture Theory) & Emmanuelle Chiappone-Piriou

7/2/2024, 10 AM-12PM

Wednesday-Matinée in the S AM

8/2/2024, 6 PM

Short presentations and panel 'Basel Unbuilt', in cooperation with Christoph Merian Verlag
Moderation: Tilo Richter, Andreas Kofler
Venue: Historisches Museum Basel

12/-16/2/2024, 9 AM-5 PM

Kids-Holiday Workshop 'Become a Culture Expert', in cooperation with Theater Basel a.o.

2/3/2024, 9.30-11.30 AM

Guided tour external 'The image of the city in constant change over time'
Focus on the Strickmaschinen Site with the Schaffhauser Architecture Forum
Meeting point: Schiffflände Schaffhausen

3/3/2024, 2-4 PM

Drop-In-Model-Workshop, for adults and children

14/3/2024, 6 PM

Dialogue tour with the Basler Heimatschutz
As part of the Basler Geschichtstage

21/3/2024, 7.30 PM

Lecture external 'Visionary and adversary - The struggle for the Kunsthaus Glarus'
by Reto Fuchs, Venue: Kunsthaus Glarus

7/4/2024, 3 PM

Tandem-Tour, S AM & Kunsthalle Basel

School Education

Program for kindergartens, schools, universities, and daycare centers
Dialogue-based guided tours and workshops in the museum, tailored to different age groups

Guided tours: 60 min. / workshops: 90-120 min.

Times: Mon-Fri: 8 AM-12 PM / 2-4 PM. Tours and workshops can also be booked outside official opening hours, making it possible to have the unique experience of being alone in the museum.

COSTS:

Elementary schools/Sec II: Free of charge
Costs universities/private schools: CHF 200.-

Tours ON FOOT or BY BIKE: discoveries outdoors

COSTS:

Elementary schools/Sec II: Free of charge
Costs universities/private schools: CHF 200.-

EXHIBITION PARTNERS

Numerous private and institutional archives contributed to the research work for the exhibition and publication, and provided extensive material. In particular, these include: the gta Archives at ETH Zurich, Archives de la construction moderne at EPF Lausanne and Archivio del Moderno dell'Accademia di Architettura at Università della Svizzera italiana.

RESPONSIBLE FOR THE PROJECT

Andreas Kofler (*1978, Meran) is an architect, urbanist, freelance writer and, since March 2018, curator and deputy artistic director at the S AM Swiss Architecture Museum. Originally from Merano, he studied architecture in Madrid and Vienna. He then worked for numerous offices, such as Rem Koolhaas's OMA/AMO, l'AUC and Dominique Perrault, before cofounding Weltgebras in 2013 in Paris. He writes regularly for the magazine L'Architecture d'Aujourd'hui and teaches at the National School of Architecture in Versailles (ÉNSAV).

Andreas Ruby (*1966, Dresden) is a German architecture critic, book publisher and exhibition curator. After studying art history, philosophy, and media studies in Berlin, Trier, Bonn, Düsseldorf, and Cologne, he worked as an editor at the architecture magazine Daidalos in Berlin. He has taught architectural theory at Cornell University in Ithaca, New York, the University of Kassel, TU Graz, and ENSAPM in Paris. Together with Ilka Ruby he founded the agency for architectural communication Textbild in 2001 and the award-winning architectural book publisher Ruby Press in 2008, whose catalog now includes 50 titles. Since 2016 he is director of the Swiss Architecture Museum S AM in Basel

THIS EXHIBITION IS SUPPORTED BY

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