Reflections on the Exhibition of Contemporary Architecture

THE NOT SO CATCHY, BUT HIGHLY accurate title Architectural Trends in Egypt in The Last Decade Of The 20th-Century alerted practicing architects, academics, undergraduate architectural students and the interested public to the dilemmas and questions of architecture now. Held last February in the Hamagen Gallery on the Opera House Grounds, the event drew a large and diverse crowd.

Seminars were used as a gathering period to elicit and respond to critical questions evoked by the boards presented by more than 30 architectural firms - pertaining to the credibility of the profession in particular, and its impacts on the overall built environment in general.

Directed by Yehia El-Zeiny, president of the Architectural Committee of the Supreme Council of Culture, an organising team was constituted from an eclectic mix of academics. From Misr International University there was Ashraf Salama, the head of the Department of Architecture, together with architects Enjie Talaat, Taher Said and Heba Safey El-deen and a few dedicated senior students. And Haby Hosny from the Faculty of Fine Arts, Cairo contributed valuable insights. Others like Samir Rabie and Ess El-Din El-Din, two members of the committee, provided significant support.

In his opening remarks, Yehia El-Zeiny shed light on the importance of such events in enhancing communication and interaction between practicing architects, future architects, academics and the public. Following El-Zeiny's introduction were two presentations: delivered by Ashraf Salama and Khaled Asfour. To close the exhibition was a panel discussion - weighed down by some, but elevated by intellectuals like Ibrahim Serageldin and El Sayed Yasin - and then a question period.

Salama who has worked on a typology of local contemporary architecture took the opportunity to present some of his findings about the current status of architecture and urbanism in relation to the socioeconomic context. This academic has dissected late 20th century architecture into these categories: post-modernism, including historical revivalism, neo-classicism and surface treatment architecture. And he stressed the relevance of the different actors involved in the developmental process.

Salama's experimental analysis of the process of stripping architecture from its position in real societies to its bare bones helps identify where certain trends lose their relevance. On the other hand, he traced, for example, an emergent trend that places emphasis on cultural and environmental demands. Salama has classified this as an "architecture of resistance", which represents a conscious attempt towards the development of a contemporary Egyptian cultural identity via architecture.

Aiming to define the pluralistic architectural approaches in Egypt and evaluate them, Asfour's presentation "Thoughts on the Exhibition" classified the projects exhibited in four groups: historical revivalism, eco-friendly or green architecture, form-dominant
1. Ali Radaf, Adaptive re-use, Ceramic Museum, Gezira
2. Gohary, Aswan Airport
3. Morad, Gemini Shopping Mall, Nasr City
4. Ramy Dehan & Soheir Fahd, El Gouna resort town
5. Gamal Bokry, Hegazy Building
6. Integration, Melia Hotel
7. Ali Radaf, Adaptive re-use, Mahmoud Khalil Museum, Giza
8. Ali Radaf, Hilton Hotel, Red Sea
architecture and transparent architecture. He pointed out some of the strengths and weaknesses underlying each category, and went on to argue, and rightly so, that several projects dismiss basic principles of architecture.

Asfour’s presentation advocated the need for critical analysis and post-occupancy evaluations of architectural and urban development projects. These presentations did manage to inject some energy into the crowd, and inspired more critical viewings of the exhibitions prepared by local architects—that in most cases demonstrate many of the problems outlined by Salama and Asfour. One week later, at the closing symposium, the usual suspect (active students primarily) had digested much of what they heard and concocted real questions for the panel of “big names” before them.

General questions about architecture revealed an anxiety over exploring and analysing visions and concerns. The overwhelming and pervasive acceptance that the country is a cultural mess, according to El Zeiny, is having devastating affects apparent in the quickly deteriorating built environment and is leading many to distrust the architectural profession.

On the last night when architects could pontificate, and the architectural community could voice their concerns, architect Abdel Haim Ibrahim asked several questions related to what the exhibition presents. Does it present current architectural trends? Are those trends mature enough to define a contemporary architectural identity? Is there a frame of reference for those trends?

In an attempt to answer those questions, the contemporary Egyptian visionary and thinker El-Sayed Yasin related the loss of a contemporary Egyptian architectural identity to the absence of a paradigm that expresses the broader cultural shifts that have come as a result of worldwide socioeconomic change, not only within the architectural community, but in the overall value system.

To reformulate an Egyptian architectural paradigmatic model, Yasin identified three required components; metaphysical beliefs, the set of implied mythical beliefs, standards and regulations, organising and ordering principles, certain sociocultural paradigms, shared models, symbolic generalisations and values, and lastly shared constructs, representational apparatus and dominant aspects of performance.

Ismail Seraegeldin, however, asserts that architecture is unfortunately an isolated domain, at least based on the various corrupted architectural and urban practices he saw presented in the exhibition.

He argues that there is an absence of analytical architectural criticism, and that there are several aspects that reveal the lack of a methodology whose existence would enable architecture as a profession to be regarded and dealt with as the meeting point between concepts, ideologies, culture, heritage and the material world.

While stressing the importance of the belief that architecture should be regarded as a social service, Seraegeldin questioned the role of the professional organisations, the Supreme Council for Culture and the architectural media in awareness-raising towards architecture as a social force. He added that the only way for the formulation of a globally respected cultural identity in architecture is the complete immersion in investigating traditions in search for originality and innovation, and a resistance to repeating imported Western models.

The second half of the symposium involved an open discussion where Abdel Haim Ibrahim acted as moderator. Several questions were proposed by a number of architecture students and graduate students. The questions were centred on four major themes: categorising contemporary architectural trends, questioning the credibility of architectural criticism, evaluating the architectural educational system and predicting the future of architectural practice.

Intervening in this tendency to classify contemporary trends, Aly Raafat explained that the current pluralism within the schools of thought in architecture could be considered a healthy phenomenon, and regarded as the third phase of a developmental cycle that, conceptually, started in the 1940s. Then, it was followed by the practice of duality, where some professionals followed the modernist attitude, while others advocated post-modernism as practice. Now we are in the third phase of the cycle that involves a pluralism of thoughts and thus the architectural product. Then, the curve will continue to evolve towards a new paradigm. But reading architectural developments in Egypt is not enough, questioning their validity is paramount.

The negative implications of a complete absence of objective architectural criticism were highlighted by both Seraegeldin and Aly Abdul Raafat. They both agreed there is a need for developing rational criteria and ideologies through analysis and evaluation in order to improve the relationship between architects and other professions and society at large. This vacuum, that these thinkers so rightly identified, has contributed to superficial reactions to the built environment. Criticism, however, is not embedded in our culture. In fact, it is not offered as a
theory course in architecture schools anywhere in the country. Indeed, criticism and critical visions about architecture are clearly in high demand. There is an urge to shift our attitude as professionals and academics from taste to judgement based on objective multiple criteria.

Architectural education as a topic brought forth numerous practical concerns. For example, Ghazaly Kessiba and Mohamed Tawfik Abdel Gawad asserted that the current educational system suffers a lot of problems and shortcomings from the increasing number of students who are automatically enrolled in architectural schools according to their grades, regardless of their skills, competency or even interest. They mentioned that the problems vary, and range from lack of studio space to poor-level communications between faculty and students.

Kessiba and Abdel Gawad's concerns fall under what can be labelled "The Hidden Curriculum." This concept has many teachers and learners reconsidering the everyday experiences and practices of the classroom, routines of students and teachers, and different modes of producing and reproducing knowledge.

At the professional level, Samir Rabie voiced concerns about an architectural illiteracy and the incompetence of upcoming professionals. He pointed out the importance of knowledge and capacity building via communication and real interaction with the outside world. Rabie is optimistic, but fails to recognize the reality of the standard of Egyptian architects. With international treaties like GAT and GATT, Egyptian architects will soon be unable to cope with the capacity of international professionals and expatriate consultants. So before the country opens completely there needs to be a mechanism installed for communication enhancement.

The creative aspect of design could be encouraged, as proposed by Essam Safey Elddeen, by suggesting art education be part of the architectural curriculum. And that from an early age, through schooling, people need to be made aware about aesthetics, and how they reflect societal needs and architectural backgrounds. Safey Elddeen did not stop there but insisted that educators must be offered courses on how to convey ideas and how to be able to explore the creative abilities of their students. Educators should move beyond textbook teaching to more interactive methods like site visits, internships - experiential learning should be introduced as an educational paradigm. Moreover, educators should be subject to periodic reviews.

Salama's concluding comments summarized the obstacles challenging the future of the architectural profession. He focused on: the disgrace of architecture and architects compared to other professions, the persistent isolation of egocentric architects, misconception and fully immersed in exploring visual aspects with less concern for the role of architecture in enhancing cultural behavior and attitudes, and the failure of the educational system in introducing undergraduates to successful architects and their works, and finally the need to 'educate the architectural educators' as a means to better manage and improve the educational system.

Summing up, Salama reiterated the importance of supporting the emergence of sincere architectural reactions to prevailing cultural and environmental demands, in order to evolve his concept—the "architecture of resistance." The surge of participation by academics, professionals and future architects indicates these segments of the community are desperate to get involved in architecture's evolution. This was the most successful aspect of the exhibition. The two symposia together with discussions identified aspects of the cultural mess that was depicted visually in the exhibition of architectural projects in the Managem Gallery. The aesthetic and conceptual vacancy in contemporary Egyptian architecture is as a consequence of a paradigm loss.

Stepping back a few steps, we could stop all building until there is a conceptual frame of reference that inspires and directs our architecture according to common codes. Only when this "paradigm model" is established and then practiced, will the overall cultural mess be sorted out, by inspiring schools of thought that lead Egyptian architecture and the built environment to stand up against its fast, ongoing corruption and deterioration.

What needs to be considered, in retrospect, is: was this exhibition a one-off event or an activity that can be sustained via collaboration and dedication?
لا يمكنني قراءة النصوص العربية من الصورة. إذا كنت بحاجة إلى مساعدة أخرى، يرجى تقديم نصوص أخرى في لغة يمكنني قراءتها.
العظام

إذا تحلل سلامة الاعتقاد الحاضر في محاولة لتصور الإعلانات التجارية عن نموها المرجوة، فإننا نحن جميعاً في حاجة إلى تحديد هذه الإعلانات وتشجيعها، وتوجيه التوجهات الفنية المعاصرة لتصميمها. ونحتاج إلى إيجاد أداة جديدة للإعلان، أو زوايا تعلق، لتغطية هذه الإعلانات، وتوجيهاتها، وتشجيعها، وتوجيهاتها، وتوجيهاتها، وتوجيهاتها، وتوجيهاتها، وتوجيهاتها، وتوجيهاتها، وتوجيهاتها، وتوجيهاتها، وتوجيهاتها، وتوجيهاتها، وتوجيهاتها، وتوجيهاتها، وتوجيهاتها، وتوجيهاتها، وتوجيهاتها، وتوجيهاتها، وتوجي...
تاملات حول معرض
العمارة المصرية المعاصرة

على الرغم من أهم جاذبيته، إلا أن ذلك المعرض "العمارة المصرية المعاصرة" في إعداد الأثير من المعارض التي جمعتها البعثة المصرية في مجال العمارة. فقد جمعت المعارض من المعارضين من المتخصصين في الحوالى 50 معرضًا، وعددًا من المعارضين على مستوى العالم، وعددًا من المعارضين على مستوى العالم، وعددًا من المعارضين على مستوى العالم، وعددًا من المعارضين على مستوى العالم.

وقد كان المعارضات التي أقيمت فيها دورًا في معرض الآثار الحالية في زيارة مبتكرة للمعارض، حيث جمعت المعارض من المتخصصين في الحوالى 50 معرضًا، وعددًا من المعارضين على مستوى العالم، وعددًا من المعارضين على مستوى العالم، وعددًا من المعارضين على مستوى العالم.

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هناك، أشرف سلامة، من معارضى الآثار الحالية في زيارة مبتكرة للمعارض، حيث جمعت المعارض من المتخصصين في الحوالى 50 معرضًا، وعددًا من المعارضين على مستوى العالم، وعددًا من المعارضين على مستوى العالم، وعددًا من المعارضين على مستوى العالم.

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