

SEVEN TOWERS - ABOUT THE POWER AND VULNERABILITY OF ARCHITECTURE

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Anselm Kiefer, I Sette Palazzi Celesti/ Seven Celestial Palaces
Hangar Bicocca, Milano, october 2004- february 2005

What will look like, an architecture without function? Without users and not governed by any needs or restrictions? An architecture strong enough to create its own world, and that cancels the border between interior and exterior? Can such an architecture exist? Can it transmit us something with potentially fundamental implications for the regular architecture, which has a function and users, is governed by needs and restrictions and usually does define a border between interior and exterior?

Normally one doesn't really expect regular doors to lead to other worlds. There is such a door however, on the side of an undulated tin hangar, in a former industrial periphery of Milan. The world it leads to is not familiar. It has no limits in sight: it is an ocean of darkness inhabited only by strange, tall, sick, timid beings. Each seats motionless under a spot of crude light; because each has its own, personal cold sun above. They are a group of building-like people; kind of clumsy towers. One has trouble trying to understand if they are ruined or just unfinished. They suggest the same kind of incomprehensible force that emanates from remnants of ancient civilizations. Their myths are forgotten and their gods are gone but they are still here talking about them to no one. The message of the towers is both tremendously grave and amazingly tranquil. They are talking about lost worlds and about how they are no lost worlds. About apocalyptic alarms and peaceful eternity.



Not often a work of art becomes architecture. The towers do. Their scale and materiality obviously suggest buildings. The repetition of similar forms create a rhythm typical to architecture. Most importantly, they define, clarify, give meaning to the space around them. They are not some objects in a space. They *create* the space. A space which is a concentrated universe - like any respectable cathedral.

But with much less solid certitudes.

The towers may transform space into architecture but they are nevertheless icons of a dysfunctional architecture. They remind ruins because they are an architecture which lost its meaning. They are the harsh reality of what all buildings will be one day: just walls waiting to crumble. The towers are architecture on the brink of death.

This is what one sees when entering the world of Anselm Kiefer's "Seven Celestial Towers".

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The essence of the artistic act is that it explains itself without supplementary means. An art work touches a profound area in the viewer's conscience. It is certainly the case with Kiefer's work in Milan. Its force is such that words and explanations seem superfluous. But knowing more about its background can bring to light more layers of understanding.

The lead sheets squashed under the weight of one of the towers are Books. Kiefer has made in the past a series of Lead Books, real books, done for a Golem-like people as the towers themselves. Every one of their pages is different and unique. They seem delicate only next to the crushing mass of the towers - but they are strong and complex beings themselves.

The glass broken on the floor next to another tower is not glass. It is fallen stars.

The towers are not seven just because they finished the concrete for the next one: but because they reflect the upper part of the Heavens, as seen by the Cabala. The same inspiration font is the origin of the names of the towers, of the Hebrew words written on the first of them.



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With no voice the towers gravely talk about architecture.

They say that architecture as an art form is not necessarily dependent from its function - which time or will may make simply irrelevant.

That architecture changes and gives shape to its whole environment much more than we normally perceive.

That deep symbols embedded into the architecture can charge it with an emotion immediately and clearly perceptible, even if one is not familiar with their meaning.

That one can't afford to forget that architecture is art even despite itself. That the means of expression of architecture as an art are amazingly simple and incredibly strong. That architecture can talk about the most essential fear of any human being; death. That buildings are our reflections and our brothers because they also die.

Are they right? Are they even saying exactly what their creator intended them to?

Don't know. But they certainly say it in a disturbing and profoundly touching way.

Images of the Hangar Bicocca exhibition. Photo Irina Suteu.