

international concrete design competition for students 2003/04

ROBUSTNESS

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BRIEF

ROBUSTNESS: ro·bust \ adjective [Latin, robustus, oaken, hard, strong; French, robor, robur, oak, strength; perhaps akin to the Latin, ruber, red]. 1a: Having or exhibiting strength or vigorous health: powerful, muscular, vigorous; b: firm and assured in purpose, opinion, outlook; c: exceptionally sound, flourishing; d: strongly formed or constructed, sturdy; 2: Rough, rude; 3: requiring strength or vigor; 4: Full-bodied, strong, as in coffee or wine quotation from Webster's Third International Dictionary of the English Language

As indicated in the definition above, there are qualities associated with ROBUSTNESS, such as strength and solidity, which are also the qualities of concrete. Used to lay foundations, to build sturdy bridges and muscular, architectural monuments, concrete, even in its most conventional use, is an undeniably robust material. There are other qualities associated with ROBUSTNESS, however, not conventionally associated with the sturdiness of concrete. Due to the growing importance of complex, adaptive behaviour in all areas of scientific enquiry, ROBUSTNESS has also come to define the degree to which living things, whether single cell organisms, flocks of migratory birds, or complex social systems like ant colonies or metropolises like Tokyo or Mexico City, adapt to changing environmental conditions and evolve over time. ROBUSTNESS, in these contexts, defines a new kind of strength and solidity based on flexibility rather than inflexibility, on suppleness rather than stiffness, on resilience rather than rigidity, and it is this new strength that the competition seeks to explore in/with/through the use of concrete. Specifically, the competition seeks proposals that explore and exploit concrete's more conventionally robust qualities to create unconventionally robust designs whose flexibility, suppleness and resilience make them more adaptable, and therefore more durable, sustainable, hardy and long lasting.

In this inaugural competition students are asked to submit architectural proposals that engender ROBUSTNESS in/with/through concrete. In order to encourage the most diverse and original designs possible, no predetermined design criteria will be given or stipulated. Submissions are not limited to any scale and can range from small architectural detail, to interior, to free standing building to landscape proposals. It is expected, however, that all proposals rigorously examine and make use of the manifest and latent qualities of concrete often hidden from view by conventional thinking and normal application. Competition entries will not be judged by stylistic, programmatic, typological, formal or other architecture design criteria*, but rather according to the innovative use of concrete to achieve a high degree of design excellence.

**) Note, added November 4th 2003: We have received comments about the apparent exclusion of current architectural criteria. We want to emphasise that ideas about the innovative uses of concrete are of primary interest. In order to achieve design excellence and to present the ideas properly in architectural proposals, all usual criteria are to be considered and will receive appropriate attention of the juries.*