

DUTCH JURY REPORT

Apples and pears

A jury's standard answer to the questions that follow their decision is that choosing a winner ultimately comes down to comparing apples with pears, for the deeper one goes into the entries, the greater the differences and the more difficult the choice.

What is remarkable about the Concrete Design Competition is that the jury is asked to do just that: To compare apples with pears. Unlike other contests, the Concrete Design Competition gives no specific brief in which participants must adhere, no site and no program. Instead designers are given one theme to investigate in relation to concrete. The result is an inspiring series of seemingly incomparable ideas.

The theme for the 5th Concrete Design Competition was 'Energy'. Energy takes many forms. In daily life, energy is often interpreted in terms of performance: energy consumption, waste of energy or simply energy efficiency. In a metaphorical sense energy is a source of 'vitality', and in the spiritual sense one could speak of good or bad energy.

Energy

Although the full meaning of energy could be explored in the entries of the Concrete Design Competition, after examination of material there appears to be a limited number of fundamentally different interpretations.

An obvious but effective interpretation of the theme, which is recognized and explored in a number of entries, is the ability of concrete to store heat. Several designers used this opportunity using special aggregates and piping to hold chemical or solar energy. To give an example, the Active Wall Modular System of Mi-Jung Gim and Minjung Kim (MJ567), convincingly shows how a simple concrete block with pipes create delicate patterns that are capable of heating water. The entry 'Catch the Sun' by Sandra Augustyniak, Mattias Svensson Lembke and Karl Jon Petter Tibell (CC666) is based on the same principle. In this case the striking feature of the design is the wide scope of options the design can be applied to. The proposed concrete bricks can work for blinds, as boundaries and as a building block for a bus shelter. Collectively, all these elements absorb solar heat and see it stored in a shared aquifer. This gives an energetic addition to the design and also a social component.

Proven technology well done

Another category of entries is committed to the further development of existing ideas. There is for instance the long cherished desire of designers to make concrete less massive. Some even dream of transparent concrete. With the introduction of optical fibers in concrete now it is possible to make concrete with light transmitting properties. Several submissions have tried taking this existing technology a step further. "Light Emitting Concrete" by Joep Rutgers (JR002) is a good example. The design shows that it is in fact possible to apply existing innovative techniques. In this case, by the use of optical fibres in the ground floor, a form of daylight is possible in a cellar. The entry 'Wonderwal' by Theo van Meijel (WW001) is also in the jury's category of 'proven technology well done.' In this case, it is not the combination of concrete and light, but the possibility for concrete construction blocks and pipes to be integrated in one system. Although none of these designs succeeds in transcending the level of the existing, the jury finds the aesthetic quality of these entries worth mentioning.

Objects

Another notable category of entries focuses on the scale that stretches between tool and furniture. Although concrete is not, for many people, the first material they associate with a sofa, a chair or a lamp, several designers sought precisely these possibilities. The combination of concrete, and various additives which provide better insulation, help make concrete more environmentally friendly or assist in processing waste in this category are frequently tested. In some cases, this approach results in unconventional objects like the 'Sound Enhancer' designed by Titus Wybenga (AR500). Although the jury is surprised by the translation of the theme of energy in terms of sound, they wonder whether concrete is the most appropriate material to make a portable amplifier for your smartphone with?

Memory

A special characteristic of concrete is that the material can express the abstract notion of memory in a very direct way. Concrete is, in principle, a liquid material. Once it solidifies, it takes the literal shape of the mould in which it was cast, thus expressing something that is no longer there.

In several entries, this property of the material is used. The jury finds only one entry portraying the concepts of memory in a convincing manner, using energy to connect it in an innovative way. The design 'Concrete Tornado' by Ruben Geutjens and Nick Noordam (GN123) is a monument to the natural strength of tornadoes. The designers want to build a concrete tornado in the centre of the

Tornado-stricken landscape of Tornado Alley in the U.S. Just like a real tornado great power and energy speaks from the design. Strikingly abstracted into a series of concrete piers, variable forms are created that realistically resemble a whirlwind. But Concrete Tornado is more than a striking image. The designers see their concrete tornado as a public vantage point for people who are looking for actual tornadoes. This gives the object, in addition to its role as a monument, a meaning as an attraction which is a remarkable combination. Finally the compelling choice for concrete that resists the forces of nature convince the jury to award 'Concrete Tornado' with an honorable mention and a cash prize of 250, - euro.

Innovation

As mentioned, there are various designs attempting to develop existing ideas and technologies. In most cases, however, it is difficult to find a truly innovative contribution. Thus the jury was positively surprised by the entry 'Practice Moisture School' by Irene Boertien (IB612). Building on existing technologies, this design found an innovating solution to a real and global issue: clean drinking water. The designer of this submission used the heat-accumulating capacity of a thin shell concrete linked to the inertia (read cold) of a very thick concrete wall. In the intermediate space between the two, rainwater can evaporate and condense to form clean water. Applied on the southern wall of schools in Africa, the two things work together. They offer shelter to education and yield clean drinking water. Although the jury doubts whether the system really works, they are enthusiastic about the ingenuity which sought a direction to a new solution for a global problem. At the level of architectural design, the jury is less enthusiastic. Nevertheless, the jury has decided to reward 'Practice Moisture School', the innovation award. This prize is awarded this year for the first time, consists of a sum of 250, - euros and an expert meeting in which the winner is brought into contact with experts on the issue to stimulate and develop the idea into reality.

Beyond categories

So far entries that represent recognizable categories and entries that reveal striking use of materials or innovative capacity have been appreciated by the jury. Yet there are also entries that transcend these classifications. The first example is 'Changing Perception' by Olaf Burlage and Muriz Djurdjevic (OM023). The designers behind this exhibit reflect a world-view that is almost schizophrenic. The design that they proposed knows two very different sides. The first is a refined form

study of concrete reliefs with qualities reminiscent of the work of Jan Schoonhoven, one of the most famous representatives of the Nul movement in the visual arts. The reliefs however are only the surface of the design. Below lies a deeper search into the possibility of adding phosphorescent powder to develop concrete that can emit light at night. Translated to the public space of the street, the designers created a totally new perception of concrete. A material that generally is regarded cold and hard in this new experience will absorb solar energy during the day and broadcast a mysterious glow during the night. It sounds like a poetic new world could occur. However the processed images of Nicolas Moulin that the designers use to illustrate their idea suggests something totally different. This image reveals an almost dark side of the design that the jury thinks is intriguing. Good design in the end indeed often has something disturbing.

The entry of Meander Drain by Vera Konietschke and Mariet Sauerwein (MD325) for totally different reasons transcends the above-mentioned categorization. The designers have a simple but evocative solution, sought for an everyday problem of designers: the drainpipe.

While no one denies the usefulness of the drainpipe, few designers recognize this object as a design brief. Meander Drain proves that this assumption is wrong. Instead of the standard pipe that always seems to have been added at the last moment, the designers take the winding course of a river as an inspiration. This meandering pattern is applied vertically in a series of openwork concrete building blocks. Cemented in the plane of the façade it creates a swirling path for the rainwater to bridge the distance between gutter and ground. With this design, the energy is visible from something as mundane as rainwater. Furthermore this design offers a useful alternative for the ugly, but necessary drainpipe. Also Meander Drain eliminates the inconvenience of an ordinary pipe that can block easel, instead it offers a visual spectacle in its place.

The last entry that has surprised the jury is 'A concrete organ at the shore' by Marijn Abelman, Robert van Middendorp and Thierry van Til (AA123). The designers of this submission are not only different due to the presentation - black and white hand sketches and texts typed on a typewriter – the content of this exhibit also differs significantly from all previous ones.

Unlike the other designs, 'A specific organ at the shore' interprets the theme of energy in a very abstract yet very tangible way. The design involves the creation of a monument for all the energy invested in the Netherlands for the built environment to survive. Although most people do not realize, an important part of investment in

the built environment in the Netherlands is spent underground, in concrete piles to be exact. In the heroic battle of the Dutch against the water this investment plays no role. As a tribute to the invisible energy that we require to build in marshy grounds, the designers propose a series of concrete piles in the dunes of the Dutch coast. Besides the visual power of this concrete forest in the transition zone between land and water the designers use the piles of the design as organ pipes. Besides a powerful image the design thus also offers a powerful sound. In an inspiring way it is also transforms a force of nature that often is regarded as unpleasant – strong winds – into a feast for the eye and ear. In other words, a design that makes a contribution at the highest possible achievement for designers: to contribute to the wellbeing of people.

The jury decided these three entries were all with an exceptional price to value. 'Changing Perception', is awarded the third prize and a cash prize of 500, - euro won. The second prize and EUR 1000, - euro goes to 'Meander Drain' and the first prize and EUR 1500, - is awarded to 'A specific organ at the shore'. Besides money and winning praise, the designers of these three awards also won participation in the International Concrete Design Competition Workshop in Den Bosch, in the last week of August 2012, where all international winners meet.