

Jury Comments and Reasoning of Ranking¹

General Note

Although the competition was looking for concepts, it goes without saying that these concepts should always be presented in satisfactory level of graphics. The Jury feels that a good number of projects presented high level of complexity in conceptual development that was not well matched with graphic explanation of the real notational abilities of the students to show their tectonic abilities to get their ideas up to the level whereby rendered convincing to a jury, albeit a hint, of the ability of the design to get actually built, at least theoretically. This seems a universal problem amongst architectural students after the introduction of the computer into the design studio.

Students Category

Winners

First Place: Thomas Elliot Reynolds, University College London, England

This entry was unanimously selected for the first prize because it presents a vision, blending a sense of history and an awareness of the local culture, all successfully translated into architecture. The entrant seemed to have understood and captured the spirit and message of Deir Mar Musa, therefore presenting an interesting narrative both graphically and in his elegant text. Further, it presents a mature awareness of how people would practically use the Oasis. The jury felt that the project was conceived, and presented graphically in the drawings, as if real local people were already present in it, not anonymous people that would occupy it later. This awareness is rarely found amongst students and is an evidence of early maturity. The jury was especially appreciative of the beauty of how people were rendered in the drawings as if ghosts or spirits running in a dream-like imaginary landscape gathered from different times, albeit extremely vivid. The jury felt that this is an exemplary promising designer in

¹ The judging procedure for participating entries in Sham Spiritual Oasis Competition and exhibition was performed in Deir Mar Musa al-Habashi, Nebek, Syria on 23-24 July 2008.

Judges were Mrs. Dima Akkad Tourekmani, Dr. Irene Labeyrie, Ms. Lenka Vasickova, Mr. Mustafa Ali, Mr. Paolo Comoglio, Father Paolo Dall'Oglio, Dr. Rafee Hakky and Dr. Wael Samhour.

35 qualified entries were assessed (20 student, 15 professional). Only qualified students were able to compete on the first three places. The remaining 15 were debated to receive an Honorable Mention, a Citation, or just get exhibited. At the end of the judging process, the jury quickly examined the 13 student entries that were administratively unqualified to enter competition. Few of those got awarded an Honorable Mention or a Citation.

This document was composed by the jury containing only ID numbers of participants. Names were added at the final stage before printing. The original document was written in English language and other versions are translations.

his /her approach and design process, in a world that students are running breathless to blindly copy all what is presented in periodicals and journals.

Joint Second Place: Géraldine Durieux, Université catholique de Louvain, Belgium (with Benjamin Henrion, Benoît Ollevier, Youssef Bousiane and Annalisa Greco)

This project has been selected for the second prize for its sensitivity both to culture and the environment. It is almost the only project that combines eco awareness on a global scale, on the one hand and the mythological/religious content (presented through using the concept of Adam and Eve) on the other, thus resembling an *Oasis* much more than other entries. The scenario presented is very delicate and important. It could be seen in the consecutive drawings moving from desert to oasis to contemplation and back to desert. With the former points appreciated, the presented drawings are very partial and the excessive greenery does not seem realistic or connect well to the site.

Joint Second Place: Zuzana Hebronová, Academy of Art, Architecture and Design in Prague, Czech Republic

This entry was selected for the second prize for its bold, yet very strong concept, mainly exemplified by sacrificing the introduction of an imposing form into the landscape in favor of embedding the whole design of the Visitor Center into the underground terrain. The architecture not only does not interrupt the natural landscape, but also does not compete with the architecture of the Monastery of Deir Mar Musa above. The other equally strong point about this entry is the way the main animating opening and the architectural order have been derived from the geometry of the cracks resulting from the natural process of the land drying up and giving up its water.

What was debatable about this entry was that it does not transmit a feeling of liveliness, but that of stillness. Had this project been more developed and elaborate in its architectural articulation, it would have been selected for first prize. Nevertheless the entrant is to be complemented for his/her humbleness and creativity.

Third Place: Muhammad Somar Taifour with Ayham Dalal, University of Baath, Syria

This entrant seems to have studied the history behind the site; using local/historical typologies like arcades and courtyards. The jury appreciated the entry for its poetic projections and design rational, as well as its conceptual inquiry for incorporating metaphors and symbolism, most appreciated among which was the 360 degrees niche. However, there were points in the design the jury found missing or not well treated, such as site topography consideration. The conceptual strengths exemplified in the text seemed to the jury stronger and much more mature than the visual (architectural) part of the presentation.

Special Honorable Mention

Amir Ramadan, International University for Science and Technology, Syria

This entry was highly appreciated, especially by Deir Mar Musa representatives, as it captures the spirit of the place, for although it is composed of very simple design elements, it still manages to define a real architectural enclosure in terms of space and scale; a space in which the activities of the service center could take place in a protected and sheltered environment. However, the jury found that the entry still

needs further development, maturity and articulation on the architectural level. Further, it does not present a viable text to accompany and explain the design.

Honorable Mentions

Jan Ricny, Czech Republic

There is something unique in the monumentality of the architecture and the way it sits on the site. There is also something unique about the arrangement of the facilities in this large complex. But, what is truly interesting is this full of meaning and simple concept of having two parallel undedicated halves through which visitors can experience the site and its spirituality. The weak glass connections, the monumentality of the buildings, the symbolic competition, yet possible communication between the two religions of the area, and the long tunnel leading to spiritual views are all working together to create a powerful image. Is the building overpowering, and is the relationship between the two religions in Syria as the designer thought it is, is the strong linearity supporting the objectives of the design? These are some of the questions which were addressed during the jurors' deliberations.

Jan Senkyr, Czech Republic

There is this unique pastel kind of presentation that is not just a graphical exercise, but more importantly a representation of a character, an atmosphere, or a spirit. The use of local as suggested by the author of this proposal was beautifully illustrated in the different sketches of the building within the landscape. There is also a touch of Le Corbusier in the treatment of the outer surface of the "object" as it is called by the designer. This touch is not an attempt of copying a master; rather, it is a sensitive experimentation in the creation of a sublime environment that can evoke spirituality and willingness to communicate. The main plan is, however, not as satisfactory as the ideas or the three dimensional views.

Maxence Horvath, France

Jury members were very appreciative of the thought put into the production of this scheme. They were also appreciative of the daring quality this project exhibits, especially the highly philosophical text. The designer undoubtedly knew the risks of presenting such a mathematical/universal idea; however, s/he opted to take the risk for the sake of presenting an idea, and this is most commendable, it contributed towards enriching the discussions and deliberations of the jury.

The fact that the project does not relate to the site physically and culturally was the main concern of the jurors. Another concern at a theoretical level was whether the whole approach of presenting such a meta-narrative is actually appropriate to the creation of true architecture for a specific place, to the people of Mar Musa it is a specific place. Thus the design could be seen as a gross generalization, a meta-narrative, not only on the theoretical level but also on the level of the geometry adopted (so aptly for the purpose): *fractal geometry* with a 3D *Sierpinski carpet*-like configuration, using a cascade of never ending *self-similar* motifs (unfortunately the entrant did not discuss this point in the text).

To take the discussion a little further, (as the intellectual rigor of this scheme would deserve) the jury would point out that it is debatable if the desert could be viewed as a "no-place", a homogenous "u-

topos", as the entrant has suggested. Inhabitants of the desert(s) could clearly distinguish the rich subtleties of the different places in the wide desert; their vocabulary is only one evidence of this.

Michela Rossi with Fabio Dell'Isola, Carlo Dotti, Marta Giangreco, Omar Valentino and Clara Vite, Italy

The project carries a number of unique and impressive qualities: Firstly, the trip along the main spine towards a more spiritual setting is carefully articulated and seems promising in terms of its relation with the site. Secondly, the text part of the project is concise and very effective in explaining the experience the designer is aiming to create. Moreover, the means by which the design addresses the issue of cultural connectivity through for instance the food and cooking is appreciated. Although the architectural solutions seem simple and straight forward, the careful composition of openings to frame particular views for the sake of contemplation is very thoughtful.

Ayse Nil Sensu with Tuna Sensu, Turkey

The jury was appreciative of the simplicity of the design that shows coherence and strength. These qualities come from the simple but powerful arrangement of the two walls which create the main space of the project and direct the visitor to the meditation area and the monastery. The jury also valued the environmental sensitivity as well as the visual experience that the project exhibits. The jury would have liked to see more architectural details to support the idea, especially in relation to the space that is created between the two walls. It seems that such a space would have been much more in tune with the idea if it were left as natural as possible.

Citations

Anthony Wan with Shireen Talhouni, England

The three circular forms, although may not always be suitable for the functions, and the way the project was meshed with the site were two of the main points that made this project stand.

Danny Deeb with Alaa Shahin, Syria

There is a good environmental treatment that dictated the design and helped arrange the functions in a logical way. The site is wisely and fully utilized to create a complete experience although it seems a bit over built.

Katerina Frejlichova, Czech Republic (with the help of Ing. Arch. Ales Lang)

The jury appreciated the simplicity of the design, its minimum effect on the site, and the linearity of the composition that establishes hierarchy in the trip. The egg-like shaped meditation area was also noted.

Marek Kundrata, Czech Republic

The project with its simple form and the court in its center brings the idea of oasis alive. The variety of treatments of the court at the different levels added to the quality of the project. The soft connection between the proposed project and the movement towards the monastery is also appreciated.

Ouaees Hommous with Bashar Ereqsoui, Ahmad Mahayree and Hani Fakhani, Syria

The full and careful use of the whole site for the sake of creating different visual and spiritual experiences gave this project its uniqueness. This is especially noted for the realistic attempt to deal

with the existing topography. The small sketches presenting the different possibilities of experiencing nature were commended.

Pernilla Hagbert with Ulrika Blom, Sweden

The project exhibited refined geometry which generated the whole composition in its three dimensions. The roof idea and the poetic writing describing the project were also appreciated.

Žofie Raimanová, Czech Republic

The power of the form because of its simplicity, purity, scale, and way of resting on the site was commendable and yet debatable. The way the functions were arranged and the study of levels were also positive points. A stronger celebration of the point where the visual connection with the monastery was presented could have strengthened the whole experience.

Professionals Category

Honorable Mentions

Gabriele Falconi, Italy (with the help of Ben Ayed; Cultural Interpreter, and Camilla Falconi; Graphic Consultant)

The development of the project from the idea of the nomadic tent that is a sign of long history and rich culture to a modern tensile structure that carries symbolic as well as functional dimensions is commendable. The arrangement of the functions and the visual corridors created add to the quality of the project. Further appreciated was the use of computer generated pattern for the tent (a 3D like voronoi structure).

José Tomás Videla Labayru with Jorge Olivos and Carlos Medina, Spain

The flow of design from architecture to graphics is highly commendable. The simple and meaningful concept of using the pentagon as a base for the composition is also appreciated; especially that it shows diversion from the rigid form to a flexible arrangement that corresponds to the site and the function.

Ka Eul Chae, Korea

Although the technical side of the main wall was debatable, the concept and its application in the design were much appreciated. The wall works beautifully with the site in terms of its form and it shows exciting contrast in terms of its material. The simplicity of the form and its beautiful interaction with the site made this project very symbolic and attractive. In its use of solar energy panels, the scheme further introduces another dimension of an awareness and respect for the technical/ecological problems of our time. In that it could be felt that the scheme exhibits a view that is at once contemporary and timeless. This is an extraordinary beautiful vision. Most congratulated.

Maria Beatrice Servi with Ruth Bernasconi and Rasha Ghazy, Italy and Egypt

One particular quality in this project makes it worthy of true and sincere appreciation. It is the sensitive approach to the issue of bringing religions together. The author of this project was brilliantly and beautifully able to create a space that can touch every person who believes in the three main religions

of the area; namely, the Tower of Writing. This space obtains unique symbolic and historic qualities that elevate to become a master piece.

Citations

Aditya Naik, India

The effort to bring together physical and metaphysical ideas from different backgrounds was admired by the Jury. The effort to present a comprehensive and complete study for the whole site was also noted. Moreover, the project was able to give the feeling of an oasis in its own way.

Ahmad Sukkar, Syria

This was a debatable project. Some jurors felt that the text was much more developed than the visual materials. Although the text exceeds the allowed limits, it seems necessary to explain a sensitive, elaborate, well studied, and deeply philosophical compassionate design. The story that was created by the four buildings is also impressive both conceptually and architecturally. Further, the jury truly wished that the architectural aspect of this entry was further elaborated and developed in order to convey more the richness already portrayed in the "architecture of the text". Still, this is a unique project, worth further elaboration and worth displaying for the richness it gives for the sacred architecture discourse. A project deeply appreciated.

Marc Krusin, United Kingdom

The Jury appreciates the careful study of some of the architectural details and how they will behave in different times. It also notes the simplicity and functionality of the design. However most of the jury members were not convinced that this terrace-like architectural solution was appropriate visually for such an area and for such a program, as it gave this visual impression of a ski or sea resort (especially the scattered umbrellas throughout the site). Also debated was the inner circulation system that seemed too long and rather complicated and disorientating for the potential visitor. The configuration of the meditation hall presented questions as to the way the people meditating were sitting close to one another or back to back in a theater-like or seating. Still, this does not take from the design its respectable architectural articulation.

Neil.T. Holdsworth with Richard Ip, United Kingdom

The poster is a piece of art the way the designer intended for it. Spirituality, sustainability, and functionality at a conceptual level come together impressively. However, from a practical point of view, the entrant did not provide sufficient architectural articulation of the program and topography for the jury to fully be able to give a more elaborate judgment. Furthermore, the entrant did not provide evidence that the building blocks of the composition could satisfactorily accommodate the program with its different components. There was a fear also of the repetition of the building module giving a rather monotonous feeling with no hierarchy. Still the jury looked at this scheme with all due respect for its artistic worth.

Omnia Kamal Khalil Khalil Ebrahim, Egypt

The jury feels that a lot of effort was put into understanding local architecture. This understanding was reflected on the design in a direct way. The jury was also impressed by the manual graphic presentation

that revealed good amount of architectural details. The Jury, however, feels that the project was not successful in working with this rural and mountainous site.

Sergio Giovanazzi, Italy

The careful study of the project to fit with the existing topography and the effort to blend the project or yet to almost hide it within the site are very commendable. The free geometry used in the design of the buildings gave flexibility and lightness to the project. It also brought the project architecturally closer to the Monastery.

Students Administratively Unqualified to Enter Competition

Honorable Mentions

Mhd. Tayssir Takieddine with Salah Al-Din Hrieb, Syria

What was most appreciated by the jury about this entry is the elegance of its imagery. Although a cubical meditation space might seem boring and unworkable when first thought of; the relationship between the presented cube and the surrounding environment is sophisticated enough to make it simple. Using a purely abstract geometric form for the buildings in contrast to the surrounding mountain cracks adds to the aesthetic impact of the design. Some jury members even saw a metaphor in the lighting system adopted inside the meditation hall of how Divine light permeates into the human soul. Also, the presentation and questions posed were appreciated.

Raymond Altoun, Syria

Jury members appreciated the exceptional image resulting from merging and submerging elements of the program with the landscape, as well as using the same local building materials and vocabulary used in building the monastery and its new expansion (Al-Hayek). The entrant managed to present an organic form that followed the fluid curvilinear shape of the surrounding hills. Although the scenario of the building's interior did not match the level of maturity and creativity exhibited in exterior treatment, this entry still deserved an Honorable Mention.

Citations

Kristyna Silhanova, Czech Republic

The design is simple, small and does not intrude the site. It somehow also captures the spirit of an oasis, both in the design and in the nice ideas presented in the text. However, the jury thought that the idea of an oasis should have been taken care of more vigorously and not have been stopped with the free-standing object (mass) in the desert. Having said this, it should be noted that the arcade, water elements and shaded area present a pleasant micro-climate, microcosm of a virtually successful Oasis.

Moaz Bitar, Syria

The jury has found in this project a nice analogy with both Tibet monasteries and fortress- bunkers! The imagery presented in this respect is not fully resolved to make a final judgment. Still, the scheme presents a viable protected area in the desert. The ground level of the buildings makes them balanced

with the site and not annoying to the viewers' eyes or to surrounding nature. However, the participant does not present a valid text, and the functions are placed besides each other without a clear link and remain without an interesting narration.