

Asmara

Africa's Secret Capital of Modern Architecture

at the XXIII UIA World Congress of Architecture in Turin

Invitation

* to the Exhibition
"Asmara, Africa's Secret Modernist City"

Lingotto - Pavilion 3

June 30 – July 2, 2008:
9:00 am to 6:00 pm
July 3, 2008: 9:00 am – 1:00 pm

* to the Workshop "Modernist Architecture
in Global Context - Urban Examples of
Modernist Architecture in Relation to
Contemporary Politics and Culture"

Lingotto - Pavilion 5, Room Parigi

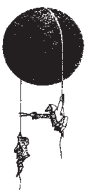
June 30, 2008: 1:00 pm – 5:00 pm

The exhibition and the workshop have
been organized with the collaboration of
UIA Region 1



Fiat Tagliero Service station, Engineer Giuseppe Pettazzi, 1938, Photographer Edward Denison

"4 Asmara – Arbate Asmera" –
"Association to Promote
Education and Media
on Environment and Development"



WORKSHOP

Modernist Architecture in Global Context - Urban Examples of Modernist Architecture in Relation to Contemporary Politics and Culture

Lingotto - Pavilion 5, Room Parigi; June 30, 2008: 1:00 pm – 5:00 pm

The workshop's goal is to compare the urban modernist architecture of Asmara with prominent cases of urban classical modernism in Tel Aviv, Israel, Miami South Beach, USA, Moscow, Russia, and architectural examples, such as the Bauhaus in Dessau and the Weissenhof in Germany. The modernist movement in architecture was formalized in the "Athens Charter" 1933. Architectural Modernism is generally seen as an emancipatory development, a move toward social equality in an industrial society. Asmara is a contradiction to the progressive ideas of the "Athens Charter", it offers the opportunity for a discourse on Modernism. In general, how can urban concepts and architecture, originally used as an instrument to establish a certain political and social order, be accepted and transformed into another political system and social order? Thus, the workshop's goal is also to discuss the impact of politics and culture on architecture.

- Welcoming Gaetan Siew, UIA-President
- Overview Dr. Naigzy Gebremedhin, Nairobi / Washington, DC
- Italian Colonial Architecture in Africa Prof. Stefano Zagnoni, Università di Udine
- Knowing and valorising Italian Architecture in Eritrea and presentation of her new book: "Italian Architecture in Eritrea" Anna Godio, Turin
- An Urban Project for Asmara. Guido Ferrazza and the Redevelopment of the Market Area of the City, 1935-38: from design principles to restoration criteria Filippo Amara PhD, Palermo
- The white City of Tel Aviv - From a suburban community to a city of communities Pe'era Goldman, Tel Aviv
- Cultural Heritage as an Economic Resource - South Beach Miami Pe'era Goldman, Tel Aviv
- Avant-garde – Slander – World Heritage? - On the preservation of modern architecture in Russia and Germany Dr. Anke Zalivako, TU-Berlin

- coffee break -

Panel Discussion: Asmara Architecture in comparison to other heritages of modernist architecture with the above speakers. Moderator: Christoph Melchers, "4 Asmara - Arbate Asmera", Tübingen

Asmara's Architecture

Among urban ensembles of early modernist architecture, such as Tel Aviv, Israel, Miami South Beach, Florida, or Napier in New Zealand, Weissenhof in Stuttgart, Germany and others, the rich collection and urban comprehensiveness of early modernist styles in Asmara, the capital of Eritrea, is unique in the world. Asmara's city centre was largely built in the 1930s under Italian colonial rule, most of it in the architectural language of *architettura razionale*, the Italian modernism of the 1920s and 30s. However, there are also numerous examples of *novecento*, *futurismo*, *neoclassicism*, *neo-baroque*, *monumentalism*, as well as buildings with links to local Eritrean architecture. Until Naigzy Gebremedhin, Edward Denison and Guang Yu Ren published their standard work "Asmara – Africa's Secret Modernist City" in 2003, this architectural world heritage was unknown or unrecognized by most historians of architecture.

The Exhibition

The exhibition wants to draw international attention to this cultural heritage and it aims to contribute to the discourse and evaluation of classical modernism, the globalization of modern architecture, its historic value, and its impact on urban planning. Furthermore, the exhibition is intended as support for Eritrea's endeavors to have Asmara classified as a World Heritage Site by UNESCO, which would thus support the maintenance of this unique architectural ensemble.

The exhibition was first shown with much acclaim at the German Centre of Architecture in Berlin from October to December 2006 and thereafter has traveled to Frankfurt (German Museum of Architecture), Kassel, Stuttgart, London (Royal Institute of British Architects), Tel Aviv (Bauhaus Center), Cairo, Lomé and Lagos.

In Turin, the exhibition will not only be exposed to the largest gathering of architectural expertise, it will also bring back Asmara's architecture to its Italian roots. From Turin it will continue its journey to various Italian cities.

Curators of the exhibition are: Naigzy Gebremedhin, Eritrean architect and former Director of the Eritrean Cultural Assets and Rehabilitation Project (CARP) and Prof. Omar Akbar, President and Director of the Foundation Bauhaus, Dessau.

Patrons of the exhibition are: UNESCO, UIA, the Association of German Architects (BDA), H.E. Petros Tseggai Asghedom, Ambassador of Eritrea in Germany, and Dr. Uschi Eid, Member of German Parliament.

The organizer of the exhibition is "4 Asmara – Arbate Asmera", an initiative of Eritreans and friends of Eritrea within the German "Association to Promote Education and Media on Environment and Development".

History of Asmara

Arbate Asmara means in Tigrinya, one of the Eritrean languages, "the four unified". 500 years ago, Asmara was formed by the unification of four villages. Its development into a modern city began in 1889 with the occupation by Italy.

Asmara boomed in the 1930s as a colonial metropolis. The reason for this boom was Italy's expansionist policies toward Ethiopia and the ensuing war using lethal gas weapons. Thus, the fascination of Asmara's architecture and urban planning was confronted with the contradictions of the fascist era, race divisions, and the avant-garde claims of modernism. Eritrea was annexed by Ethiopia in 1961, which again caused a bloody 30 years liberation war resulting in the independence of Eritrea in 1991.

Despite the history of colonialist oppression, the Eritrean population has accepted the city of Asmara over time. Thus, a unique modernist city has evolved, a mix of European-Italian and African-Eritrean cultures. In this atmosphere of tolerance the various cultures, religions, and ethnic groups live together.

In the same spirit, UIA-President Gaetan Siew, himself an African, in supporting this exhibition has written: " I see in (the colonial architecture of Asmara) an object of cultural reconciliation – reconciliation between past and future – reconciliation between people."

In 2001, CARP, the Centre for the Preservation of the Eritrean Cultural Heritage, managed to convince the Eritrean government to protect the entire city centre of Asmara as a national monument.

The five Elements of the Exhibition

- 24 exhibition panels designed and produced by Rainer Weissbach, Foundation Bauhaus Dessau, on the basis of texts by Naigzy Gebremedhin and texts from the book "Asmara, Africa's Secret Modernist City" by the authors Edward Denison, Guang Yu Ren and Naigzy Gebremedhin,

and with pictures from the photographer Edward Denison,

- One exhibition panel with competition entries, submitted by school children in Eritrea with drawings and a collection of poems and stories
- 7 reconstruction models built by Prof. Wolfgang Knoll, Stuttgart.
- The film "City of Dreams" by Ruby Ofori and Edward Scott, Eye Level, Washington D.C., USA

- The book "Asmara, Africa's Secret Modernist City" by Edward Denison, Guang Yu Ren and Naigzy Gebremedhin, published by Merrell Publishers Limited, instead of a catalogue

Contact:
Christoph Melchers,
Corrensstr. 45,
D 72076 Tübingen,
Tel. +49(0)7071-610221
email: christophmelchers@gmx.de



Anna Godio:
Architettura italiana in Eritrea – Italian Architecture in Eritrea
La Rosa, Turin, 2008

This book presents the architectural developments that marked the history of the Italian colonial administration in Eritrea from 1882 to 1941. Architects, town planners, engineers and other professionals working in the African colony seized the opportunity to experiment with new concepts, erecting modern architectural forms that they would not have been able to propose with the same degree of freedom in Italy itself, especially from the twenties onwards. Supported by a wealth of documentation,

much of which had never before been compiled and published in one volume, this book makes a decisive contribution to the awareness of this neglected treasure and it furnishes conceptual material for improving restoration work for many buildings.

Anna Godio graduated in architecture from Turin Polytechnic in 1990. She has lectured at the Turin Polytechnic Faculty of Architecture, conducted research into the wooden structures of historical buildings at the Polytechnic University of Catalonia in Barcelona and taken part in the European Socrates project "Living in the mountains, living in the countryside", at the Grenoble School of Architecture. A consultant with International Labour Office, the United Nations System Staff College, Turin and the World Bank, she has conducted projects to upgrade buildings of historical and environmental interest. From 2001 to 2005, she worked with the Cultural Assets Rehabilitation Project in Asmara, drawing up restoration and upgrading plans for Eritrea's cultural and architectural heritage. Anna Godio currently lives and works in Turin and New York. (agodio@libero.it)



Asmara
Africa's Secret Modernist City
Edward Denison, Guang Yu Ren and Naigzy Gebremedhin

240 pages, 490 illustrations, £ 24.95 (paperback)
Merrell Publishers, 81 Southwark Street, London SE1 0HX
kc@merrellpublishers.com

A fascinating and important book ARCHITECTS' JOURNAL
Excellent and absorbing ... this book is a must-have BUILDING DESIGN
An excellent over view of Asmara's colonial past, the ambitious building program of its Italian occupants, and its present condition MODERNISM MAGAZINE



Asmara
The Frozen City
With photographs from Stefan Boness
Edited by Jochen Visscher

Hardcover, 96 pages, Eur (D) 18,00
Jovis Architektur Verlag, Kurfürstenstr. 15/16, 10785 Berlin
E-mail: info@jovis.de

City of Dreams
Asmara Architecture Film produced by Edward Scott and Ruby Ofori, Eye Level,
1020 7th Street N.E., Washington, D.C. 20002, Email: info@eyelevelproductions.com



Architect: Günter Behnisch



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