

Local architecture - that is the topic of this year's Schelling Architectural Award, and this specific understanding of architecture is embodied by Anna Heringer so holistically and truthfully in the entirety of her work, like no other. From the outset of her architectural studies she has dedicated herself to the development of sustainable architecture, which addresses the needs of people, even involving them in the building process and thus giving them a tool that will allow them to improve their own living conditions.

This holistic architectural approach goes beyond the drafting, designing and building phases, towards a new economic model, which aims to strengthen local initiatives and counteract the negative effects of globalisation. Such an approach sees Anna Heringer bridge the gap between artistic design, practical application, social commitment and the appeal of bringing together some of the brightest and best within architecture, in order to declare and implement a Manifesto for a better world.

Anna Heringer's roots lie in the municipality of Laufen in Bavaria, not too far from the border with Salzburg; she even happily describes her as Austrian. She did, of course, graduate in Architecture which she studied at the University of Arts and Industrial Design in Linz. She later made her return both to the Technical University (TU) in Vienna and, at present, to the ETH Zürich to take up teaching positions. She is thus a learned architect. What makes her work so unique is her comprehensive approach. "Architecture is there to make life better" asserts Anna Heringer. And with this, she has thrown herself into life's exciting challenges and has gone out into the world. She has even gotten hands-on and delivered architectural solutions which do not aspire to glossy magazine images, but which rather aim at delivering aesthetically pleasing and sustainable housing for people. This is why the images of her architectural work include unusually large numbers of people, and sometimes even buffalo and many bare feet pounding into the clay.

How did Anna Heringer arrive at such ideas? Even as a very young woman she made it her business to build for others, and to enable them to enjoy a better future. At the age of 19 she took the incredibly brave step of emigrating to Bangladesh for one year. This subsequently led to the clay-based construction of the now world-famous METI Handmade School - a self-help pilot project involving communal work. This was not just her first autonomous design, but also the first example of her postulated "Handmade Architecture", which later became the focus topic of her undergraduate thesis. The approach she developed was and is now being implemented in numerous locations, and for the most diverse range of uses. From an educational centre in Bangladesh through to kindergartens in Zimbabwe, a youth hostel and ceramics museum in China and even the staff facilities of a company in Vorarlberg... This has already earned her numerous awards, including the Aga Khan Award, several emerging architects awards and awards for sustainable architecture, a fellowship to Harvard and even an appointment to the position of Honorary Professor for a UNESCO Professorship. Her works are exhibited throughout Europe, in New York and China.

Anna Heringer's focus is on utilising existing potential. An attitude which, in times of globalisation, has drifted out of focus. Heringer's architecture promotes trust in an authentic culture, supports the local economy and advances an ecological balance. Sustainability for her is a synonym for beauty and has many components. Harmony between design, construction, technology and material. Harmony with the location, the surrounding area, the users and the socio-cultural context.

For which reason she utilises a clay building technique, which possesses numerous structural and climatic qualities, and which represents a centuries-old tradition. Her actions honour the words of Gustav Mahler: "Tradition is the passing on of fire, not the adoration of its ashes." The clay building technique has been given a new lease of life by Anna Heringer and Martin Rauch, which has seen it make its mark on Harvard and even on the Berlin Wall. The use of traditional techniques for modern buildings in developing nations is a great source of sustainability, and provides people with access to architecture which otherwise would have remained out of reach, given their economic circumstances.

Anna Heringer's architectural understanding has a radiating effect on society's development, in which women are playing a role, which is becoming increasingly significant within the scope of the Schelling Architectural Award. Female award winners were in a significant minority in recent years, and even Erich Schelling's wife Trude, who made a major contribution to his work, is still awaiting recognition. In any case, Anna Heringer has, through her social and cultural engagement, established an economic project specifically for women, aimed at generating work and fair remuneration with textile products. Capacity building, self empowerment and bottom-up are not empty buzzwords, but rather applied alternatives to a globalisation of exploitation.

After all, Anna Heringer has also gone in search of a textual and programmatic basis for these practised bottom-up activities and has initiated the Laufen Manifesto, a programme for a humane design culture, which brings together the stakeholders of socially committed architecture on a global scale.

On balance, a great source of potential for viable local architecture. We wait with fervent anticipation to see what effects Anna Heringer's work will bring in future.