

Laudation Schelling Architecture Award 2018

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It is often said that the role of architects in the future will be to renovate and expand existing buildings, rather than construct new ones. Yet what exactly does this mean and what consequences will it have for the profession? No one has put this to the test as broadly and intensively over the last few years as Rotor. As its name implies, Rotor is a non-profit concerned with circular economy, more specifically the reuse of construction materials. Founded in 2005, the collective is working on changing the way materials are used in architecture and construction engineering. One way it's instigating this change is through its own designs and buildings, including a recent collaboration with Vplus at MAD Brussels which won the jury over with its concept of enhancing the pre-existing structure instead of demolishing it. The building that emerged exhibited an array of typologies more diverse than could be found in a new build, according to Rotor. Other projects, such as the Parodi book store or the Dekkara Bar, reused materials like historical basalt floors and luminous ceilings from a former bank which were salvaged from demolitions. This has the effect of adding value from an environmental perspective and improving the overall atmosphere of the final building. As compelling as the reuse of materials may be, in practice it involves a multitude of organisational, technical, economic and legal issues. This has led to Rotor's other prominent field of work: research, consultation and mediation. Together with a legal expert, it has compiled a comprehensive guide on the reuse of building materials. This guide combines a careful examination of the current legal requirements with the practical insights that Rotor has gained during many years of re-using building materials. As the next step, Rotor established a second company "Rotor Deconstruction" to provide all of the stages involved in reusing materials; from making an architectural and economic assessment of the materials, organizing professional demolition and temporary storage, generating ideas and designs for re-using materials to sourcing experienced craftsmen. For Rotor, the main concern isn't simply reducing waste: its work is centred around rediscovering the material and aesthetic value of otherwise neglected building materials, especially those sourced from post-war modernist buildings that are often the subject of scorn. Rotor intends to create a new framework for the discussion of sustainable architecture, extending beyond established sustainability debates on energy efficiency and insulation materials. Above all, it wants to create a future in which architects are able to exert their power against the construction industry and regain their capacity to act.