

## Laudation Kaye Geipel

How much scope is there for a young architecture firm to achieve manoeuvrability and a critical position in design in a metropolis such as Paris, a city that has long since given up the goal of being a "residential city for everyone" in light of exploding housing prices? As in many other large cities, young families, immigrants and students are increasingly being pushed further out into the suburbs. This is not solely attributable to the lack of affordable housing, but also to the shortfalls in public spending. City councils are struggling to fund the public services that were prevalent in the 1950's and 60's: sports facilities, swimming pools, open spaces in residential neighbourhoods and small parks.

"Bruther", established in Paris in 2007 by Stephanie Bru and Alexandre Thériot, has been doing exemplary work and represents a new approach amongst young architects in Europe to reigniting the legacy of the post-war European "welfare state". With their projects, many of which are designs for affordable housing with few minimum requirements, the two French designers have conquered new territory in the field of architectural design and redefined the notion of architecture as a collective good. Over the last ten years they have exhibited an impressive body of work, featuring completed buildings and impressive competition entries.

The specified space allocation programme forms the starting point for translating the connections between areas with a defined function and open and well-designed "interspaces". The benefits of their projects for the wider community lie in their determination to go a step further with the infrastructure design of their projects and their use of simple materials - reinforced concrete and glass, together with semi-transparent building materials with their respective transparencies.

This broad programmatic approach is evident particularly in their design for the Sports and Culture Centre Saint-Blaise in the 20th Arrondissement (2015). The client, the City Council wanted a flat and open building that was as affordable and flexible as possible to house a range of facilities. Instead, the architects suggested vertically-stacking each function of the building in a transparent tower made of reinforced concrete. In this way, each function is visible and the building has become a striking symbol of the new social centre inside a dense block development. The architects have used their design to create a new socio-cultural context for the area; reflecting the loss of its former neighbourhood function in the light of increasing gentrification.

Shared outdoor areas with open, interconnected ground floor zones are also a key element of the 50 rental apartments in Limeil-Brevannes (2013) and the 25 subsidized housing units in Rue Pelleport in Paris (2017). The jury praised the deliberate design of semi-public and public spaces at a time when the quality of urban housing is in steady decline.

This is also a key aspect of the architect's quest to develop architecturally convincing designs to serve productive functions within the city, such as the culture centre in Caen (2015), which was built for a private organisation and features an integrated fab lab. Interior design and furniture play a key role of the architect's overall concept design for new functions.

With their poetic design vocabulary, transparent layers and the use of concrete to create a physical, muscular structure, the Bruther designs ironically reference the tradition of public buildings in the post-war brutalist style. The architects wanted to use the structural components of their buildings to represent the simple, everyday features of city life as, for Stephanie Bru and Alexandre Thériot, "architecture is not a metalanguage. We have to settle the social question of uses in it." This has once again become the decisive responsibility of the architect.