

Kaye Geipel - Sophie Delhay

The French architect Sophie Delhay, who founded her own office in Paris in 2008, has become a leading figure in the renewal of urban housing in just a few years. As an important source of inspiration for her work, Delhay cites the Brazilian architect Lina Bo Bardi and her idea of an “Espace de liberté”, a space of freedom for the residents, which is no longer talked about today.

In her search for a socially relevant architecture, Delhay is almost exclusively concerned with all possible forms of multi-storey housing – an area of construction that seems to offer only minimal freedom across Europe because it is bogged down in the constraints of global real estate financing and land speculation.

Sophie Delhay realizes her projects in particularly close cooperation with the public housing associations and with the future residents. The regulatory and financial straitjacket, which is often used as a pretext for standardized construction, can be broken through such cooperation. This is proven by her buildings in Dijon, Lille, Paris and Nantes, which are exemplary far beyond the French context and have meanwhile won many awards.

The starting point for her designs is always specific research into the way of life of future residents. Corona has shown the additional requirements that housing construction is now being confronted with, and how inflexibly the standard apartments that have been built all over the country are prepared for them.

Delhay designs her homes from the inside out. At the same time, she ensures a creative activation of the urban outdoor space by providing access for each project that supports this activation. Her systematic design methodology, developed over years, first relates each room to its possible uses, translates these into diagrams and drawings and only then asks about the appropriate design. In this context, her office's website, structured according to projects and housing topics, reads as an exemplary guide to design. Delhay understands her preoccupation with the grievances of today's housing construction as a very personal, socio-political choice. For her, making suggestions as an architect as to how housing construction can be brought out of its impasse means changing society. Sophie Delhay is convinced that there is no other area that shapes the everyday life of the residents as comprehensively as their own apartment. The connections to the urban outdoor space are just as important to her as well-designed floor plans. Housing construction can be used to learn how to “see your own city in a new and different way”.