

Martin Steinmann is a knowledge creating architect. His critical approach to architecture over four decades has included studying, training, research, teaching, publishing and working as an architect. The central theme in Steinmann's work is the question as to the conditions for creating immediate reality through architecture.

Following his studies with Professor Alfred Roth at the ETH Zurich (1967), Steinmann worked initially with Ernst Gisel (1967-69). Over a period of ten years, he set up the CIAM archive at the GTA Institute of the ETH Zurich, writing his doctoral thesis on this subject with summa cum laude. In this way, Steinmann acquired a comprehensive overview of the genesis of the Modernism, expressing the opinion back in those days that the discourse on Modernism would "provide the elements for a future history of the CIAM" (1979). Like the CIAM, Steinmann was also of the opinion that it is the definition of housing construction which leads to the emergence of organic urban construction; here Steinmann, like the CIAM, is in favour of housing construction dedicated to the "social classes without means", "where aesthetic ideas become ethic ideas".

In his writing, Steinmann takes up subjects such as rationalism and realism, meaning and perception, construction and location, immediacy and the minimal approach. As editor of *Archithese* (Zurich, 1980 – 86) and *Faces* (Lausanne, since 1989), he has developed these subjects, thus influencing architecture practice in German- and French-speaking countries. Following the fierce criticism of the first period of Modernism and brief interruption by Post Modernism, Steinmann is the principal proponent of continuing Modernism, whose exemplary buildings are to be found not exclusively but particularly clearly in German-speaking Switzerland. His numerous essays and criticisms appear in all leading publications (*Domus*, *Casabella*, *a+u*, *Quaderns*, etc.). Steinmann's relationship to his role models Sigfried Giedion and Ernesto Rogers goes over and beyond the intellectual level, learning from them to see reality as history.

Martin Steinmann's work thus creates bridges between the classical concept of history as a concluded phenomenon and its organic understanding as a continuity which is constantly adapted to changing conditions, between general cultural development and architecture, between the generations of early Modernism around the CIAM and its current international dimensions; and between theory and practice of architecture, allowing him to research, reflect and design without snobbish inhibitions.

His objective of bringing contemporary architecture away from its traditions and placing it in the service of public good with its own rules for a sensory presence, sets him and his colleagues high standards of intellectual truthfulness. Thanks to his long years of teaching (since 1968, and since 1987 Professor at the Ecole Polytechnique Fédérale Lausanne), Martin Steinmann has firmly established his ideas in the heads of hundreds of young architects from home and abroad. His criticism of Switzerland's principal architects (Herzog & de Meuron, Diener & Diener, Marques & Zurkirchen, Peter Märkli, Patrick Devanthy & Inès Lamunière, Peter Zumthor, Burkhalter & Sumi, Morger & Degelo, Bernard & Maria Zurbuchen, Rudolf Fontana, Quintus Miller, Paola Maranta, Gigon & Guyer, Meili & Peter, Philippe Gueissaz, et al) has brought the standard of architectural discourse – constructed or written – to an enviable level when seen in international comparison.

With his return to architecture practice since 1991, Steinmann now exposes his own theses to the criticism of his colleagues. This vital bridge is the ultimate proof of his resolute integrity.

Wilfried Wang