

Andrea Gassner's reflections behind the exhibition in the kiln tower

Nicola Brusa

The exhibition “Stampfen – Stapeln – Spannen” (“Ramming – Stacking – Tensioning”) in the kiln tower is devoted to the building itself. Using photography, it focuses attention on the material and the construction.

The design of the kiln tower emerged from Roger Boltshauser's fascination with earth as a building material. Developed in the context of the architect's teaching work, the monumental tower is based on the tension generated between the solid rammed earth elements, the delicate tension cables, and the elegant proportions. In an exemplary way the building demonstrates the potential of earth as a construction material.

The exhibition “Stampfen – Stapeln – Spannen” (“Ramming – Stacking – Tensioning”) inscribes a further layer in the tower. The design concept uses six-metre-high tilted elements, each consisting of three black-and-white images by photographer Luca Ferrario, which are framed in raw steel and mounted one above the other. They show the kiln tower and the way it is constructed – inside the kiln tower itself and in front of its construction. This produces a complexity and depth that indicates the nature and the function of architecture beyond the immediate context of the kiln tower.

This combination of architecture and art is captivating. The designer Andrea Gasser from Atelier Andrea Gassner in Feldkirch (AT) has won two

renowned international prizes for this exhibition. At the end of 2023 she received the Chinese Award360° Gold in the category “spatial design”, while in spring of 2024 the exhibition won a bronze cube in the ADC Awards in New York.

Andrea Gassner, what do these two international awards mean to you?

Both the ADC Award and the Award360° are major international design prizes. Our contribution was chosen from among hundreds of entries from all around the world. Recognition of this kind is a great honour. For me the prizes are further confirmation of how well all the components of the architecture, the scenography, and the photography work together in the kiln tower.

Roger Boltshauser's kiln tower is monumental, archaic architecture and as such a showpiece. How do you display art in it?

The proportions and materiality of the kiln tower make the tower itself an exhibit. Rather than competing with the architecture, the dramaturgy of the exhibition elements should enable them to be inserted independently in this powerful building, underlining the most important aspects of the architecture. The scenography is successful if the aspects and the emotions of the architecture can be transferred to the design of exhibition.

What is the basic idea behind the exhibition?

We placed three large picture surfaces against the wall, one above the other. The frame of the lowest element leans against the wall, the top element is tilted forward at an angle. With the height of six metres this angle is required to ensure that people can see the uppermost images properly. The angle is inspired by the kiln tower's vertically folding door. The way the frames are stacked also strengthens the atmosphere of this vertical, gorge-like space.

You made a thorough study of the architecture of the kiln tower. What do you like best about it?

The vertical slit-like windows are fascinating. They make the interior glow and underline the slender, vertical character of the space. The construction combines weight with lightness. I also find the spiral staircase at the end of the space most exciting, it seems to connect heaven and earth. It is like an oversized cord of steel that winds through ceiling, inviting you to climb up to the roof terrace. Despite the heaviness of the rammed earth, entering this interior is comparable to entering a sacred, festive space.

The photos in the exhibition show the kiln tower itself. Why do you present the building in its own right?

The architecture places an emphasis on innovation and contributes to the further development of rammed earth construction and sustainable building. It seems obvious to me that the exhibition should convey information about the project itself. The building raises questions that we cannot simply leave unaddressed.

Such a space is, of course, an ideal setting for Luca Ferrario's monumental images.

The photographs of the kiln tower are in black-and-white, they are transfigured, in part hyper-realistic. These are powerful images that depict the object, several show the exhibition itself or the space in a space. The power of these images combined with the scenography that flows upwards creates a sense of suspension. This is precisely what we wanted to achieve. This aim also explains why we did not let the six-metre-high frames on which the images are mounted rest on the floor, instead they hover and, bathed in light, are detached from the ground.

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Roger Boltshauser – RESPONSE
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Scenography Atelier Andrea Gassner
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Curators Boltshauser Architekten, Andrea Gassner
Photographer Luca Ferrario
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Ofenturm
Architecture Studio Boltshauser der ETH Zürich
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Project management LEHMAG AG, Felix Hilgert