

Experiencing Architecture

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It has been said that stones speak, and it is these stones, coming together in the creation of architecture, that are witnesses to the passage of time, the writing of history. Time is the central issue to the events being held in Malta in honour of World Architecture Day; the representation of time indicates that whilst architecture is somewhat immortal as it must face the test of time, it is also something current and very real, that which influences and affects our daily lives.

Architecture is more than just the provision of a building, but an experience. The late and great American architect Philip Johnson distinguished 'architecture' from 'great architecture' by saying that 'all architecture is shelter', but, 'great architecture is the design of space that contains, cuddles, exalts, or stimulates the persons in that space'. Great architecture is that which is able to arouse in us certain emotions and inspirations, feelings one gets when sitting upon the ruins to the back of the old Opera House in Valletta and gazing at the Baroque Church of St. Catherine of Italy, or, similarly yet from another time, distant to that of the Knights of St. John, the modern, sculptural volumes of the Church of St. Joseph at Manikata. Malta's history is abundant with such examples of great architecture; the creators of which were able to capture the essence of their time and inscribe it permanently into our landscapes and cityscapes.

Each period in Maltese history is marked by a school of architecture. Rulers and occupants throughout history wished to leave their mark on Malta in an immortal manner. Sometimes, it can be argued, this was done as a show of power; the Auberge de Castille in Valletta for example. Its monumental scale and highly decorative facade stood for the absolute supremacy of the Order of St. John. Also, the Protestant Church in Valletta – St. Paul's Church – with its large mass and steeple puncturing the Valletta skyline – is almost crying out to be heard in the midst of a dedicated Roman Catholic country. It is evident that architecture was very much on the agenda for these people.

The provision of noteworthy architecture should not only be limited to the design of churches, palaces, museums or other public buildings, but should be inherent in the design of all architecture. Children should be brought up to appreciate their surroundings in a more practical manner than simply through textbooks – architecture should be on the agenda from the early years of one's schooling.

An exhibition being organised by the *Kamra tal-Periti* in collaboration with the *Society of Architecture and Civil Engineering Students* exemplifies this inspiration of architectural education – a presentation of over sixty examples of architecture designed by some fifteen local architects and architectural firms where their efforts have produced architecture worthy of note. This is of exceptional importance as it is the first time in many years that so many architects and firms have come together in such a unique collaboration. Moreover, the Exhibition will include a display of carefully selected students' design projects, ranging from first year projects up to fifth year thesis projects, a display of the high standard of work achieved by students reading the B.E. &A. Honours course.

The exhibition is only one of several events being held in honour of World Architecture Day – an international celebration of quality architecture and urban design on the third of October each year. Malta's contribution to this date is *Time for Architecture*, a program of architecture-related events spanning from the 29th of September until the 16th of October, taking place in various locations in Valletta. Internationally acclaimed speakers will be brought over for the event, thus further emphasizing its importance. Also on the programme is a film festival, children's workshop, a book launch, a conference and a students' workshop. The aim is for developers, clients, architects and people in general to come to appreciate the importance of quality architecture and its bearing on our daily lives. Architecture can and should find its place on the national agenda.

Further information about these events may be obtained from www.timeforarchitecture.com

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