

The Henry Luce III Center for the Arts and Religion presents



**BOX of MIRACLES:
Contemplating
a 21st Century Convent**

January 23 — March 1 , 2012

The Dadian Gallery

A Box of Miracles, Contemplating a 21st Century Convent

Architectural Drawings and Models from the Sacred Space and Cultural Studies Concentrationⁱ at CUA School of Architecture and Planning.

The title of this exhibit is inspired in a short text written by renown architect Le Corbusier on the miraculous possibilities afforded by the simplest architectural geometry: a box!ⁱⁱ Yet, we hardly need the Modern master to remind us of the wondrous nature of buildings. Since time immemorial, peoples across Earth have counted on such ineffable dimensions of architecture to design and build sacred spaces. How else to explain the ability of seemingly inert form, space, and matter to invoke and secure the presence of God in their midst?

With these ideas at heart, CUA architecture faculty Julio Bermudez and Luis Boza and visiting professor Spanish architect Alberto Campo Baeza (the 2012 Walton Critic)ⁱⁱⁱ directed a group of graduate and undergraduate students to imagine what a 21st Century Catholic Convent could be like. The site chosen for this inquiry was next to the Potomac River, within the C&O Canal National Park and close to the Fletcher Boathouse (Northwest Washington, DC). The building program called for a facility supporting the monastic life and practice of 12 monks.

Answering this challenge first demanded students to study precedents. After all, the convent has always been a key topic in Architecture throughout history. The reason is that its program and building type has often spawned new ideas and styles. Once the lessons of the past were learned, students were asked to engage their design process within an architectural attitude of essentialism, beauty, and simplicity that supported and celebrated the monks' daily contemplative practices. More specifically, Campo Baeza advised students to approach the convent like a city homothety, that is, like a complex organism with cells, chapel, refectory, deambulatory, library, grove and services, each one inviting an unique reflection and expression. Thus, cells reminded students to look at the minimal habitat for one person. The Chapel invited them to ponder about the temporal, luminous and spatial embodiment of the transcendental. The Refectory encouraged an investigation of service, sustenance, and multiuse. The Library pointed at issues of memory and faith. And the Deambulatory and the Grove called for an exploration of the relation between Architecture and Nature. All these parts of the 'city-convent' had to come together under the auspices of a clear architectural idea that not only provided a sense of unity but also spoke of the plight of monastic life in a new millennium.

The work presented in this exhibit was produced during the first 5 weeks of Fall Semester, P 2012. For more information about this effort, visit http://faculty.cua.edu/bermudez/courses/bermudez-campo_baeza/

Works in the Exhibition

Turris Eburnea, “The Ivory Tower”

Ana María Román Andrino and Vanessa Hostick

Immersion - Retreating into Solitude through Architecture’s Connection to Site

Kara Borton and Christopher Motley

Our Lady of the Sky

Toni Lem and Alex Parzych

David’s Tower, Between Heaven and Earth

Amirali Ebadi and Brandon Ro

Tapestry, A Monastery

Corey August and Yousef Bushehri

CUArch Faculty: Professor in Residence, 2012 Walton Critic Alberto Campo

Baeza and Associate Professors Julio Bermudez and Luis Boza.

Acknowledgements

While the exhibit displays work done by ten individuals, there are other students whose effort should be also recognized. This is because the architectural studio functions as a communal environment that establishes the creative and critical context within which all design work unfolds. In other words, there is plenty of influence, collaboration, help and insights among all the studio participants. We thereby acknowledge the other 13 students that participated in the studio whose names, organized in alphabetical order (by last names), follow:

Graduate students Michael Bollino, Patrick Digiovanni, Robin Munoz Valencia, Christine Parisi, and Mandira Sareen.

Undergraduate students Anthony Andrews, April Despeaux, Samantha Giangliuli, Eric Hofmann, Robert Lang, William Sergison, Anthony Stoffella, and Claudia Wainer.

References

- i* The Sacred Space and Cultural Studies (SSCS) concentration is offered at the Catholic University of America School of Architecture and Planning. It is one of very few programs in the world where architecture graduate students, faculty, and professionals can reflect, learn, research, and profess the deepest spiritual and cultural roots of place-making. For more information visit: <http://www.sacred-space.net/> or contact SSCS director Julio Bermudez (bermudez@cua.edu)
- ii* Le Corbusier, “The Core as the Meeting Place of the Arts”, in *The Heart of the City: Towards the Humanization of Human Life*; Jacqueline Tyrwhitt, Jose Luis Sert, and Ernesto N. Rogers, eds. (London: Lund Humphries & Co. Ltd., 1952), 41-52.
- iii* Alberto Campo Baeza’s residence as the 2013 Walton Critic was made possible in part by the Clarence Walton Fund for Catholic Architecture. Past Walton Critics include architects Antoine Predock (2009), Craig Hartman (2010), and Juhani Pallasmaa (2011). For more information visit <http://www.sacred-space.net/walton/>

Curator's Statement

Julio Bermudez, Director of the Sacred Space and Cultural Studies (SSCS) concentration at the Catholic University of America School of Architecture, is a world-class scholar on the design of sacred space. Historically, he says, sacred spaces are those designated for purposes considered sacred by the people building them. They range from churches to temples, though Bermudez also believes, "You can find sacred space in spaces that were not intended to be religious. . . In the end, it's an experience. Are people transformed, do they fall into silence? Do they have awe?" These breathtaking moments produce "extraordinary architectural experiences."

In the SSCS concentration – one of just a few in the world where students study and design sacred spaces – issues of ethereality, durable materials, light, silence and verticality are considered and made tangible. The results of these encounters are on display in the gallery, providing a glimpse into the process involved in shaping contemplative environments. The projects designed collaboratively by Bermudez' and Luis Boza's students allow visitors the opportunity to find the sacred in their own space.

How timely it is that the Wesley community is able to witness these offerings in the Dadian Gallery simultaneously with the construction of its newest dormitory. Realizing that our seminarians may one day be involved in considering building plans of the sacred spaces of the future, this exhibition gives credence to a fundamental concept in the arts: the audience also creates.

Trudi Ludwig Johnson, Curator Dadian Gallery

The Henry Luce III Center for the Arts and Religion is a program of Wesley Theological Seminary. The Center sponsors a variety of cultural events which explore the intersection of art and religion. All contributions are tax-deductible and gratefully accepted.

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