MADE IN EUROPE
25 YEARS OF THE EUROPEAN UNION PRIZE - MIES VAN DER ROHE AWARD, Collateral Event of the 14th International Architecture Exhibition - la Biennale di Venezia

Venice, June 2014_ The European Commission and the Fundació Mies van der Rohe present “Made in Europe”, an exhibition tracing 25 years of European architecture in the Palazzo Michiel from June 7th to August 4th, coinciding with Biennale Architettura 2014.

This exhibition highlights the archives of the European Union Prize for Contemporary Architecture – Mies van der Rohe Award, begun in 1988. It offers visitors a unique overview of the evolution of architecture in Europe over the past 25 years. The archive, held by the Fundació Mies van der Rohe in Barcelona, is Europe's biggest collection of documents on contemporary architecture, with more than 2,500 projects and 230 original models.

“2013 marked the 25th anniversary of the Prize, and we decided to revisit the archive,” says Giovanna Carnevali, director of the Fundació Mies van der Rohe. “This raw archive is physical evidence of time. It has the potential for multiple interpretations: different ‘histories’ are made possible, illustrating the richness and the evolution of national architectures.”

The Foundation offices are in the 1929 German Pavilion in Barcelona, designed by Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, demolished after the International Exhibition and reconstructed on the original site in 1986. “This reproduction became a document itself, the ‘Zero Document’. This is the origin of the archive, which correspondingly consists of documents and reproductions that help us analyse the past and imagine the future of architecture in Europe,” says Carnevali.

Visitors to the exhibition will discover how modern architecture over the last century has eroded the singularities of each European nation’s style. Can we then still talk about national architecture? Moreover, is there a “European-ness” in architecture? Is there a distinguishing feature in European architecture beyond the fact that it is “Made in Europe”?

Although arranged thematically (collective housing, education, cultural centres, etc.), the archive documents are exhibited without context. Viewed together, they can provide many different answers to questions like: what does collective housing mean? What are cultural centres? How are offices designed? These answers, although diverse, share a common European cultural definition of habitation and its application in architecture. They also bring to light the complexity underlying the “Made in Europe” concept.

The exhibition is divided into four areas: “Models,” “Data,” “Voices,” and “Making of.”

Models. The first and second galleries contain a selection of 150 original models by the Prize finalists. A timeline of the last 25 years in Europe also highlights links between developments in politics, science, culture and
Data. This is the core of the exhibition: almost 2,500 projects by nominees over the last 25 years of the European Prize. The project sketches construct the space and shape a pathway through walls of file cards on a 25x25cm grid, making the visitor experience the physical presence of architecture “Made in Europe”. A QR code on each project is linked to the online database, making the exhibition interactive, along with a dedicated Wi-Fi connection to facilitate an up-to-date interpretation of contemporary architecture.

Making of. The production of the “Made in Europe” exhibition was realised by a group of 15 students from the Escola Tècnica Superior d’Arquitectura de Barcelona - Universitat Politècnica de Catalunya, whose intense work of opening and revising all the projects in the archive has been full of surprises, somewhat like Walter Benjamin unpacking his library.

The "Made in Europe" exhibition will host two symposia.

The first will be the “European-ness porosity” symposium on the same day as the inauguration ceremony on June 6th. This forum will also be a meeting point for the Commissioners of the different pavilions and previous Prize winners. At the second symposium, in mid-July, past winners of the Emerging Architects category of the Prize and other young and talented architects will discuss the contemporary European architectural scene.