Negotiating Ungers: The Esthetics of Sustainability

International Summer School, Ungers Archiv für Architekturwissenschaft, Cologne
Oswald Mathias Ungers (1926–2007) was one of the most influential German architects of the second half of the 20th century. He founded his office in Cologne in 1950. At the invitation of Hans Scharoun in 1963 he began teaching at the Technical University of Berlin, where two years later he became Dean of the Faculty of Architecture and developed a for Germany unusual experimental curriculum that combined theory, history and design.

In 1968 at the invitation of Colin Rowe, he relocated to the United States and became Chair of the Department of Architecture at Cornell University in Ithaca. For almost a decade he dedicated himself to the teaching and research of primarily morphological design processes. He later also taught at Harvard, the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA), the University of Applied Arts in Vienna and the Academy of Fine Arts in Düsseldorf. Numerous architects such as Rem Koolhaas, Rob Krier, Ludwig Leo, Hans Kollhoff and Max Dudler studied with him or worked in his office. At the end of the 1970s he returned to Germany where he finally received important major commissions, including the realization of the German Architecture Museum (1979–1984), the Gallery of Contemporary Art of the Hamburger Kunsthalle (1986–1996) and the Wallraf-Richartz Museum in Cologne (1996–2001).

His enthusiasm for morphological processes now increasingly gave way to a strictly geometrical approach that culminated in the construction of his “House without Qualities”. As a passionate collector, Ungers’ life has not only compiled an impressive collection of art collections, but also one of the most comprehensive collections of architectural books currently on display at the Ungers Archiv für Architekturwissenschaft (UAA) in Köln.

The UAA is located in Ungers’ former home and office in Cologne that was built in 1959 and extended in 1989/90. It holds the personal archive of the architect including the documentation of all his building and exhibition projects, his teaching and writing as well as the outstanding library of Oswald Mathias and Liselotte Ungers. It is an independent institution with the aim to further the research and teaching of architecture. A special focus is on the intersection of theory and practice, as well as architecture’s connections with the arts.
In 1980, the German architect Oswald Mathias Ungers participated in a competition for a solar house in Landstuhl. With the solar house Ungers most clearly defines his approach to a sustainable architecture. The competition paralleled his work on the German Architecture Museum in Frankfurt (1979–1984). While the museum opened up new professional opportunities for Ungers, the solar house never materialized and has fallen into oblivion.

In this summer school, that is organized in cooperation with the Kunstakademie Düsseldorf and the UAA, we propose a discussion around sustainability. This examination will address different ecologies (environmental, social, and economic/political) and touch upon the democratization of production and the development of new infrastructure and platforms to support social life. Attention will be paid to a renewed relevance of architecture, how it can make best use of its potential to function as a tool that can be adapted and support a sustainable way of life.

The design for the solar house will serve as a case study to open up broader historical contexts as well as more recent theoretical positions around sustainability. Our aim will ultimately be to analyze the solar house and to activate its potential for a contemporary discussion. Looking beyond the interpretative frames established by Ungers himself, we will scrutinize Ungers’ assumption that sustainability belongs to the field of architectural esthetics proper rather than being a technological addition to the building.

The first part of the workshop will focus on situating the solar house within a discourse of the esthetics of sustainability. The second part of the workshop will look at Ungers’ approach to displaying and communicating architecture, centering on the exhibition MANtransforms (1976). We will study different formats of architecture exhibitions realized by Ungers and other architects and curators in the post-war era and look at their arguments, their modes and media of display, their curatorial concepts and their ways of addressing the visitors.

By expanding the discussion of esthetics of sustainability to conditions of display the summer school aims to transpose a closed discussion to a broader audience with the preparation of a public presentation and applying the strategy of the exhibition not only as a tool in communicating intentions but as an integral part of the architectural investigation.
Dates
23 July–27 July, 2018

The workshop will take place at the UAA in Cologne. We will work with the resources of the archive, i.e. plans & drawings, models, writings from Ungers' library. The summer school will conclude with a public exhibition at the UAA.

Organizing Committee
Lars Fischer (KU Leuven)
Cornelia Escher (Kunstakademie Düsseldorf)
Anja Sieber-Albers (UAA)

Invited Guests
Samuel Korn (Universität Kassel),
Gerardo Brown-Manrique (Miami University) tbc

References
5 Energie-Häuser, Entwürfe für eine klimagerechte und energiesparende Architektur, Köln 1980
Hertweck, Florian and Sébastien Marot (ed.), The city in the city. Berlin: a green archipelago, Zürich 2013

This Summer school is free of charge and open to 8 Master students in Programs of Architecture, Interior Architecture (including Erasmus or exchange students) at the Faculty of Architecture/KU Leuven.

For more information, email to:
lars.fischer@kuleuven.be

Interested candidates should send their digital portfolio and letter of motivation (max 500 words in ENG) to:
lars.fischer@kuleuven.be

Credits
Participating students will be awarded 5 credits.

Schedule for Selection
1 April 2018, deadline for application
16 April 2018, confirmation of acceptance
30 April 2018, confirmation of participation