

PREDICTIVE ARCHITECTURE  
Architecture In the Pop-Digital Age

*Roger Connah (2025)*  
(with interventions from Samuli Miettinen)

That a thing will happen if another thing which naturally happens before it has already happened: thus, if it is clouding over, it is likely to rain. That if the means to an end have occurred, then the end is likely to occur; thus, if there is a foundation, there will be a house. **Aristotle - The Art of Rhetoric**



HOOVER 1958 DYSON 2025

I hope that the design and implementation of the new architecture and design museum can show the way for how new things can be built responsibly and skilfully. Architecture and design are very human – they are born from dreams and longing and gain their meaning in places where we can experience and live together **Samuli Miettinen – Kumma (2025)**

” Grounded in the realities of place, the winners’ projects embrace sustainable materials and circular practices, embed communities in design and construction, expand architecture’s reach through art, performance, research, and technology, and reframe preservation as a future-oriented act. Ultimately, their work is defined by care, for context, for community, for memory, and for ecology.” **Christele Harrouk Editor-in-Chief ArchDaily**



KUMMA JKMM ARCHITECTS 2025

There are rarely any architectural design competitions. In the majority of competitions high-quality design is sought not interesting architectural art. It often feels that finding a usable architect in an honourable manner has become central to competitions, and competitors have also begun to adjust their ambitions accordingly. If the personality of the works is ignored in the judging, competitions will become whispering competitions that do not advance Finnish architecture.

**Jyrki Tasa**

*A Phenomenology of Prejudice*

Has there always been a trend in Finnish architecture circles to fault the architectural competition for the results it gives, for the projects awarded first prize, without quite understanding the often wasteful, often excessive time and energy devoted to what appears increasingly to some, a hopeless, partisan process?

Metaphors and tropes, preference and prejudice usually come to mind quickly with any competition and the SAFA award system. Why and how does this happen, what does it signify? The recent first prize to the project Kumma, for the new Architecture & Design Museum down on the south harbour in Helsinki will continue this trend to fault any first prize with a trolling shower of gossip and language. Sadly, in Finland over decades, this appears to have become lazily inevitable. Is it still inevitable?

*SM I do not recall that the architectural competition itself has been much questioned as the cause of the results it produces. Silence can be interpreted as satisfaction with the outcome, but on the rare occasions when a critical discussion has been initiated, it has generated content that has cleared the air and even changed the climate.*

*RC I would quietly contest this – silence yes can be interpreted as ‘satisfaction’, but it can also be quietist, a methodology, eventually possibly a censorship. 20th Century Finland, its history, civic development (even its poetry) holds convincing examples of the role silence (or should we say ‘unspeaking’?) has played in the culture’s development. Unspeaking can be seen as Finnish for disagreeing with someone or something, as much as it may be read as ‘satisfaction’ (often ‘silently’ saluting the status quo).*

*SM Substantively, discussions have most often concerned the winning proposal, or whether the chosen site was appropriate. By contrast, there has been little discussion about the competition program or its arrangements and their effect on the quality of the proposals.*

*RC That the competition programme is not questioned or re-structured over time might indicate a loss in a critical sense; the competition is a measure of opinion, usually an inter-subjective soup. Results usually depend on and follow the narratives of those who scripts them, administer them and shield them. In terms of a competition those who can read their own prejudice are invaluable. If we are allowed to generalise, that the process is so often 'convergent' in psychological (or psycho-social) terms and not divergent has always been somewhat alarming about the Finnish competition. Worth staying silent about!*

Do we have any idea how visual stimuli work in a jury? Context is everything, misappropriations slippery. What catalysts read this building as suitable or not? What we might ask is any unanimous decision based on? Many projects could be considered to "blend" into the cityscape while respecting the environment, producing a landmark building. But do the words 'blend' and 'landmark' have any critical heft, do they mean anything more than willed prejudice? Apparently, according to the jury, *Kumma* blends in but stands out as a recognizable landmark. Which is it to be and what is a landmark today; is it sculptural, recognisable, formidable and sustainable?

*SM Usually, it has been trusted that the competitors were able to challenge the program's limitations and trusted in the jury's ability to evaluate despite those constraints. Critical discussion, rarely as it has happened, has reinforced the competition's outcome or provided new input for the project's further design. Often failed competitions have been silenced to death*

*RC Yes agreed. This is a fallback strategy of any jury. Most projects gaining first prize will go through alterations and refinement depending on the way the project is then managed, administratively and fiscally. And this can be a fall-back strategy for the architects too.*

*SM Architects have never blamed the competition itself as a procurement method for the results, but rather the juries, who have been quietly criticized behind their backs.*

*RC I think we have to be cautious about generalising in the manner of 'architects have never blamed'. This carries the charge and even acceptance of a homogeneous group. Do architects ever speak as one? Or is this the 'ideal' unquestioned construction of the institution? Surely Finnish architects differ immensely.*

*SM: Today, general architectural competitions for building projects are rarely organized. The threat to the competition system does not come from within the institution but from outside. Especially commercially oriented clients regard architectural competitions as unreliable, since their results and the designers of the proposals may turn out to be undesirable from their point of views.*

*RC Yes. How then does the prize-winning architect deal with the commercial condition/reality? Are they encouraged or forced to take on the diverse role of architects as consultants, accountancy experts and content consumer? Has that not always been the case, before this century's neoliberalism choked all, and architects have had to deal with what is called 'capitalist realism'? Which leaves the public where?*

*SM The general public's views, in turn, have varied for and against the competition's award. Opponents naturally consider contemporary architecture to deviate too much from public taste.*

*RC (an aside): The word 'trolling' is interesting. It is considered a 21<sup>st</sup> century term, one from Gen Z (not the Boomers!) in social media. But the act of 'trolling' was just as much part of an international modernism' in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Aalto himself was not immune to such acts when he wished to displace merit and other architects. This is also on record.*

*SM The reaction after the publication was cautiously positive, and little discussion has been initiated since. Trust in the anonymity of competitions and the impartiality of the jury remains strong. The shift from hand drawing to a more generic mode of presentation has further reduced the possibility of recognizing the individual hand of the authors.*

*RC Agreed but surely this could also produce the rolling menu of digital form and types of indistinguishable architecture that we now recognise as 'generic' (hence 'predictive') – what I have termed for want of a better expression, the works of the pop-digital era.*

*SM The question of contextuality and recognizability was the key task of the competition. Was this task correctly formulated—in other words, was the program written in such a way that it was possible to elicit as many diverse and high-quality responses as possible?*

*RC does such future architecture have to be scripted, correctly formulated, written down, and if so by who? And what role then does language fluency and competence play? Is an architecture literacy dependent on the words and phrases used about 'architecture'?*

*SM The South Harbour is Finland's National Landscape, whose character differs entirely from Dundee's open waterfront promenade. Sympathy for the environment seems to demand restraint.*

*RC Does it not depend on who and what defines this 'restraint' and what differs a national landmark from a critical/urban landmark? Do they coincide in this case? Is there a tacit cultural understanding of the 'natural landmark' that passes into architectural form? I suspect not. We are not I feel equating sympathy for the environment with a different waterfront. The Dundee reference was meant to suggest a different poetics of occupying the waterfront space (there are many others). This 'literacy' has I feel nothing to do with any recognisable form.*

*SM Architecture longs to break into dance, but is it permitted to continue a breakdance performance forever, or is it required to express itself in something more like a Riverdance?*

*RC Types of dances equating with imagined types of architecture (breakdance, Riverdance)? An analysis of the poetics of dance, even of these two forms, would offer a telling approach to what else could be in that waterfront space. An analysis of Dundee as dance not building could also resonate with this waterfront.*

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We might be advised to ignore all chatter of displeasure at the impending birth of the project *Kumma*, but we might also read such displeasure as a spatial map of opinion. Insiders sit on competition committees and juries and recount in secrecy what might have happened, confidentially thinking they would know which project would win, should win, and which project did win. Architectural competitions (not only in Finland) are usually a carefully acted out scenario of preferences and prejudices. This belongs to the phenomenology of a competition.

*SM Various conspiracy theories can be entertained, but knowing the reality, much water has flowed in the River Vantaa since one could imagine that SAFA could in any way have influenced the outcomes of competitions.*

*RC This may be a disservice to the notion of a conspiracy theory (no smoke without fire etc) and may dismiss 'murky' realities on record in the last century.*

*SM Since the 1990s, architectural competitions have practically been open to anyone who wanted to organize them. Even in those competitions where SAFA is involved, the organizer is someone other than the Finnish Association of Architects. The general guidelines for organizers, published by Rakennustieto, aim to safeguard the rights of competitors, anonymity, and fair play.*

*RC Architecture has always been a 'club', certainly in the western world. Rakennustieto is surely not the *be all and end all* of the competition process, and *fair play* is often a dreamland which cannot really be scripted, politically or culturally.*

*SM The partners at JKMM Architects have served as jurors in some invited competitions, but in open competitions we have preferred to compete. The greatest source of inspiration has always been architecture itself, not winning. Indeed, we have lost more competitions than anyone else — hundreds. Often, we have lost to better proposals, and only occasionally has it stung, mainly on behalf of a colleague. Must we simply admit that competitions do not always produce good results?*

*RC Yes, we must, but it is the measurement of the result we are talking about. Why would a loss 'sting' if not a symptom of being part of a small society where anonymity recedes? Many firms of course have entered competitions, lost or won. Some firms prepare infographics on such figures. I invented in 1994 the plural for 'architects': a jealousy of architects! Most younger architects at the time knew this was not a conspiracy theory. I wonder if I should now change this term.*

*SM Amos Rex was not the outcome of a competition but of a direct commission. The Konstsamfundet, established with the endowment of the great patron Amos Anderson, wanted a reliable architect and, after interviews, chose JKMM Architects. The opportunity to design a building without major media commotion produced an exceptional concept—one that might never have been conceived as the basis for a competition.*

*RC This goes without saying – an enlightened patron, a direct commission, and a structure of trust can change everything. An exceptional concept it was and remains.*

*SM On the other hand, the innovative hybrid structure of the Tampere football stadium was prompted by a competition, that SAFA was not involved in organizing. The City of Tampere organized the competition itself. The jury included experts from various fields as representatives of the organizers, as well as a diverse range of architects, some of whom were members of the Finnish Association of Architects SAFA and some not.*

*Today, the variety in juries and organizers is considerable. The only negative hegemony I recognize is the dominance of money. In those invited competitions that cities require landowners or developers to organize, often offices deemed credible on economic grounds are invited. This, along with the lack of open competitions, is an obstacle to renewal, since it prevents young architects from winning competitions, realizing their designs, and thus renewing architecture.*

We must also accept, like juries, we too make assessments and offer ideas based on an imperfect, imprecise knowledge. We will never have as much knowledge as the architects who have a forensic sense of the deeper qualities of their work. Should this prevent us preparing a critical contribution? Let us remind ourselves; we are all neuro-journeying into our own likes and dislikes. This is also the reason for the ubiquitous hysteria for like/dislike, thumbs up/thumbs down emoticons displayed in social media platforms, museums and customer surveys. More significantly, if we can access it, a cognitive map of architecture's historical trends and tectonic patterns might offer a guide to the current contrasts and differences that exist today in Finnish architecture.

*SM I am grateful for this critical discussion. It is much needed. In the over-commercialized global construction industry—and in its mediocre Finnish version—the means of involving those decision-makers who still possess the culture and willingness to participate in this discussion are costly. Focusing only on the very highest tip of the iceberg is justified, if at the same time we can understand more broadly where the renewal of Finnish architecture could still find its starting point.*

## 2

### *Systems within Systems*

Competitions are systems within systems, and the juries are part of a set of networks which perform to whoever knows how to control them. This is likely to change in the future as mapping systems, data flows and neuro-imagery begin to measure levels of both preference and prejudice. But at present is it unwise to think, in a performative, entrepreneurial world, that competitions hold deep structures of knowledge to be passed on.

*SM Everything may already have changed by the time we are still waiting for it. Change is the prerequisite for the preservation of tradition. The evaluation of Finnish architectural competitions is based on an overall assessment. This always takes place through discussion. In this way, a change of mind within the jury is a form of collective development, not coercion. Voting becomes necessary only when consensus cannot be reached. Voting is usually a sign of pressure or of fundamental contradictions in the objectives of the project, rather than of disagreements concerning the competition proposals themselves.*

*RC "Change is the prerequisite for the preservation of tradition"; a useful if not wildly open maxim. Voting, consensus, contradictions are all of course part of the process. How much is predetermined by the competition proposals and programme and/or is part of the mental patterns and opinion maps I am talking about.*

*SM The evaluation of competitions is usually a journey of exploration. A good jury, however, must have studied its task in advance so that it knows what it is assessing. Of course, the process also involves decision-making that is bound to culture. This is surely the case everywhere. The unconscious sometimes guides choices more than knowledge does. In the case of international juries, preferences are deliberately mixed.*

Competition juries act like judges on TV food shows, watching, sensing and tasting the dish prepared in front of their eyes. They taste and test concoctions that may or may not suit their taste. But how do they do this? Is it their knowledge, their experience, their past, a past considered important to set a trend, to choose a favourite, to define a future? Do these judges know more about the foods and ingredients they like than the ones they don't like? Does the architectural jury know more about buildings they feel comfortable with than those that prove uncomfortable. Juries and competitions are a slow-moving, self-affirming process, where minds will constantly change, probably from the moment a building moves from an entry in a competition to first prize.

*SM When I served as a competition juror for the UIA, I wanted to bring into the process the Finnish way: instead of voting, a comprehensive discussion in which personal preferences can be revealed and questioned, thereby shaking entrenched assumptions alongside rational evaluation. Often with the help of humour, the best results have been achieved. It is a means that transcends cultural boundaries and provides a way to measure a sense of proportion.*

Immediate thoughts and reflections will continue to work through the first prize, and wonder how and why a low, dense, compact built form fits here. Does the building offer a summer presence, a winter warmth with few external inventions, apertures that open the building perhaps to the water, leaving the hope for that ubiquitous place in Helsinki so popular at the moment - the (cocktail) terrace? Does 'soft monument' suit the cultural and political strategies indicated here? Is this a highly competent generic architecture, a building caught somewhere between vintage and reliable?

The question of a building's inherent character is important and the most central factor in the success of architecture itself. The idea of the "soft monument" is a familiar one indeed, it could be used to describe the entire body of work of JKMM Architects. Might it be time to sharpen our expression? And is South Harbour the right place for that?

*SM Whatever the way in which a building comes into being, it must be given time. The advantage of a two-stage competition is the division of a difficult task into parts. An elephant can be eaten piece by piece. The competition brief for the Architecture and Design Museum was exceptionally demanding, and the required material extensive. Resolving the constraints of a narrow site in the cityscape and the stated, often contradictory goals of the program in the first stage of the competition made it possible to continue development in the second stage.*

There is another narrative that may help us understand the patterning and branding of a generic architecture in a ‘beloved’ urban setting. Exchange and debate offer many metaphors, and many will comment with predictable ‘tattle’ on the rhetoric of the building and the words from the jury and the prize-winning architects. Does any of this language matter or are these necessary deflections away from the qualities of an architecture that may not be reduced to words? It appears the jury has chosen this *Kumma* project, not only for a thorough professionalism but as if a low compactness with cave-like interior surprise offers the right fit for the urban siting. Many other projects would have offered this compactness of course depending on the language used. The differences in this building will we assume be revealed if we take a more detailed, forensic study. It is likely that the branding of the building will veer from identity to content and back.

*SM In the first stage, the mood board requested from the proposals were inevitably a form of raw exhibitionism—something not previously practiced in Finnish competitions. In the second stage, by contrast, our competition description focused purely on substantive matters, without any kind of atmospheric suggestion.*

*The winning proposal is still a sketch, and its architecture remains to be interpreted. It is, of course, important to discuss a public building and its architecture critically, especially while the architecture is still evolving in the architect’s mind. Amos Rex, by contrast, was not the outcome of a competition. In that case, the discussion was restrained by private funding, which was allowed to provide the citizens with a new social space. The architect was able to carry the process through without interference from publicity.*

*In the end, both procurement methods – competition and direct commission – have their own strengths when well executed. Competitions may open the field to a wealth of ideas and foster public discussion, while direct commissions can enable a more focused process and continuity of vision.*

*Opinion Maps*

The professional carnival for-or-against the building soon follows on after the first prize is announced. There is usually a widely ranging public reaction. Initial HS image published the day after the prize was announced, showed a soaring entry with angular tectonics, an extruded controlled form with triangulated apertures (Palkoaho/ Heikkinen 12.9.25 HS Kaupunki). The money shot across the harbour showed the prime location and property portfolios all around, but the white building looked suggestively imposing, heavy even, less 'soft machine' or 'kraftwerk' but a ghost in the property machine. I swear there was an interior image of a triangulated staircase which, if anything, belonged more to Hogwarts or Escher than harbourfront Helsinki. It is of course a cheap shot to use a previous building to recall a new building, but our opinion maps run this way.

*SM The perspective images of an open architectural competition are public property, and the impressions they evoke are permitted. Personally, I see the openings as spaces between volumes, not as voids. In the exterior geometry shaped by sloping walls, triangular spaces emerge between the masses. For the architecture itself, more important than shape is the episodic movement in which compressed space opens upward and begins a whirling motion around the central hall, almost like a dervish's spin.*

*RC The dance possibly with a Sufi drummer?*

*SM In fact, the building seeks to create something akin to a single-room space, human in scale and easily comprehensible. The exhibition halls spiralling around the central space are straightforward, and the way the terraces connect with the interiors is seamless.*

*The iconography of the renderings inevitably shapes perception. If the perspectives were hand-drawn, they would leave more room for imagination. This is not a defence of the proposal, but rather an argument for the contemporary demand to reveal a building's atmosphere before it has been fully designed and constructed.*

Notions of Finlandia 3.0, a mausoleum, a performance centre, a casino or terminal or a super-sized Ikea will continue to emerge. Inside the frivolity of this comes a rather limited critical process of wonder and intrigue. I don't know why but a harbourfront casino in Monaco came to my mind, all vast inner spaces, roulette tables everywhere, a snooker hall, a Presley vintage stage. And endless sea-blown terraces in front of more and more expensive yachts and the vertical 'forest' aesthetic of mast and sail.

For a moment this could be the location for Ocean's Nineteen! Perhaps it was the journalist's use of the term 'luolamaiset rakosensa' that really threw me. Cave-like crevices. Pirates of a Karelian Casino! Or Dipoli down on the waterfront, an undulating landscape roof inviting destination trekkers, abseilers of the new millennium? We must immediately separate the rumours and gossip that all architectural competitions are rigged. This is an argument heard in any design circle; everyone knows someone else who can support the conspiracy, any conspiracy.

Rigged they are probably not but competitions are shaped certainly by maps of opinion, an interface of memory and stimulation. Any coercion or bullying is often unprovable, but competitions are always steered. The guiding implied in competitions by cognitive processes, opinion maps, and prejudice has never really been understood. Do we know why competitions can lead towards this or that safe solution rather than the immaterial or poetic. How does opinion and preference link architecture to its own generic patterns, even to signalling the 'canon' in Finnish architecture? What might spatial mapping and imaging systems tell us?

*SM This is an interesting question, and one that deserves further study. Is it even true? We have taken part in a few hundred architectural competitions, succeeded in a little over a hundred, and won fifty. Of these, a few dozen have been realized. In addition, we have certainly designed just as many buildings that did not originate from competition wins.*

How do some competitions lead towards acceptable, visually recognised solutions and others produce moments and architecture unknown to public and profession? Image preference, spatial preference, production preference or data preference? There is no right and wrong here, only accommodation. This is what cultural memory, nostalgia and familiarity are made of. It is a fragile, unforgiving contract. Querulous projects can result where other architects will habitually complain, whining about corporate architecture, a 'performative' museum, or the likeness to airport terminals. Some will recall the rhetoric of buildings which used to be called the 'blob' on the outside, which has become the 'blob' or 'cave' on the inside. Cavernous? Meanwhile does the public become more fretful or gladdened by contemporary architecture such as this?

*SM The Kirkkonummi Library, Amos Rex Art Museum, Dance House Helsinki, Akola li, Northern Esplanade 37, Nova Hospital, Lahti Travel Centre, Huvilanranta, the office buildings WeLand and K-Kampus, as well as the residential projects Bysa & Sandis, were direct commissions or the outcomes of quality-price tendering processes. By contrast, the Chappe Art Museum, Viikki Wooden Church, Saunalahti Children's House, Leipuri Daycare, the libraries of Turku and Seinäjoki, the University of the Arts, Tammela Stadium, Think Corner, the OP headquarters, the Expo 2010 and 2020 pavilions, the Verkatehdas Cultural Centre, and the National Museum extension have all come through architectural competitions. It is difficult for me to see a general difference between the two categories. Instead, differences can be found between individual projects, in both groups.*

What are the odds? Nobody really cares if the house gets built, no one really cares if it doesn't. It is just a matter of betting odds! Architects often consider themselves literate and consider the public illiterate. It is a contract of 20th Century hubris that has led to the current pop cultural digital imagery seen in contemporary global architecture. But there is also a very real chance under current third decade fiscal uncertainty and global disorder than the museum project will not be built. There is an even more pressing concern; how does the city and other business and design grandees run an 'institute' that may have already run its course?

Politically, culturally and professionally a museum of Finnish Architecture and Design might not be an oxymoron, but it might struggle a decade on to interest a public and city that is becoming dispersed, and architecture and design becoming something else. And if the cultural and city politics manage to fund and build the museum, what are the chance this re-establishes prejudices and conservative preferences. What happens to aging grandees, museum strategists, data trawlers and a rather uninspiringly safe jury. There is an agony in all competitions.

*SM For the future of design and architecture, what matters most is how the museum functions in relation to its audience and users—how it opens ‘doors’, and how people can move in and out through them. The Museum of Finnish Architecture has, in its history, acted as a creator of connections at those times when Finland has had something to offer to the world of architecture. Still, it has had even more to gain at such moments, which it has secured by serving Finnish society in shaping its image as a modern industrial nation.*

*Actually, the new museum is not really a museum at all, but a House of Design, whose program also includes exhibitions and whose capital consists of extensive collections, libraries, and archives. The vitality of such an evolving institution does not depend on the building’s architecture, yet the architecture inevitably leaves its mark on the institution. This is why iconography also matters. All of this has significance in the realization of a building project: the spaces, the functions, the shape, the impressions, the articulation, the scale, the craftsmanship, the light, the material, the openings, the views, the whole, and its consistency.*

4

*Strange Wonder*

I went to my trusty, original Suomalais-Englantilainen dictionary edited by Severi Alanne published by Työmies Publishing Company in 1919. On page 258, *Kumma* was simply ‘wonder’, ‘marvel’, ‘miracle’, ‘surprise’ ‘astonishment’. I tried to find more meaning as none of them somehow instantly suited the image of the project that I was looking at in the newspaper. Perhaps the building was none of these. Perhaps I wanted the meaning to move towards the ‘strange, the ‘odd’, the ‘quirky’ and ‘peculiar’. But none of these words seemed to fit what the ‘rhetoric’ of the winning project demanded. Strange wonder?

*SM My old high school Uusi Suomi-Englanti Suursanakirja (Finnish-English General Dictionary), edited by Hurme, Malin & Syväoja and published in 1984 by WSOY, states on page 520 that kumma means odd (man) or strange (thing). It may also mean surprising, but wonder is more of a verb, as kummastella means “to wonder why.” For us, it is more important to ask what architecture, in a certain time and place, wants to be, rather than what we want it to be. In this sense, the motto Kumma also means a sense of wonder before the form to which the creative process has led us. Naturally, we take full responsibility for the outcome. Yet the building is at once an ordinary house, part of the row of buildings along the South Harbour of Helsinki, and a public space. This dualism defines the building: on the one hand general, on the other particular. This is the essence of Kumma’s strangeness.*

The essence of strangeness? We might immediately consider whether, within the psychology of such a competition and jury, this supports the ideas that a competition searches for an image repertoire. Assigning image to ‘built-form plasticity becomes an open game, open source; it is semantic appropriation. Pictorial representation and image building form a cognitive storehouse of accepted buildings, a safety of recognized form.

*In Eastern Finland, in Haukansalo, Ruokolahti, there lies a granite erratic boulder, seven meters long, five meters high, and estimated to weigh 500 tons, left in place by the Ice Age some 11,000–12,000 years ago. It rests on a convex rock surface with only a minimal point of contact. Yet the stone does not move, unlike the so-called rocking boulders that can be shifted by human force. People have given this boulder the name Kummakivi (the Strange Stone). The stone is just a stone, but a surprising one because of its location and shape. This same dualism also defines the Museum of Architecture and Design. It is at once general and particular. If it is too general, it fails to meet the goal set for a public building; if it is too particular, it steals attention from its surroundings. Kumma is thus both strange and not strange, odd and ordinary. Kumma is also an abbreviation of the Kansainvälinen Uusi Museo Muotoilulle ja Arkkitehtuurille (International New Museum for Design & Architecture).*

Reduced from an original trawl of well over 600 entries to five for a competition run-off, we might then try and learn from this the emphasis a jury puts on the future project. The architecture is a measured response to known requests shaped by the competition brief. Certainly. But there must be a corresponding future implied in the choice of the winning project.

Is there some way our brain stores favourites, preferences for this or that form, for one form over another, and then seeks the necessary psycho-support? How for example does a Finnish member of the jury hold 'brain' images of a suitable architecture, a generic (Finnish?) architecture framed by hidden and not-so-hidden dislikes or likes. Is shared discussion framed towards agreement, compromise, or hubris? Does this inevitably marginalise the radical and wildly different poetic solutions that may be offered, even buried within the mass of competition entries?

This begs the question: what brain scans of architecture are already embedded in an expected imagery in the winning project? Does the jury, the architect, the public still think in terms of a building fit; and how would that differ amongst these three stakeholders? If a critical voice expects considerations of the sensual as well as the pragmatic, what is the perceptual system embedded and shared across all jury members? Can we consider the jury a collective process, an editing of the boundaries of a project always, in a way, producing what we can call 'predictive architecture'?

The jury's growth process is surely as described: gradually resistance diminishes, and finally, one by one, each member accepts the obvious solution that possesses the right qualities as an answer to the question posed by the brief. But does this nevertheless mean that the chosen answer is the wrong one? What other answers might there have been? Was the winning proposal selected merely on practical grounds, or was it the result of a more holistic evaluation, in which sensibility and atmosphere also played a central role? We cannot observe the jury's deliberations, which—quite exceptionally—they safeguarded by signing an NDA commitment. It would be both interesting and important for such a process to be written out as a log or history.

"Dance, dance" Pina Bausch often repeated, "otherwise we are lost." Does this not encapsulate what is really at risk for any jury? Not the urgency of movement or safe, sensible solutions, but a capacity to reveal architecture as the poetry of space itself, as a moment, event and a future waiting to change the past. Does Finland - its professional body, its institutional body of architects and designers (of which the proposed museum is one), have a clear contemporary view of its architectural and design history? Especially after a steered and guided Modernist history operating as a cultural-identity politics for the emerging country after 1917.

*SM This is a good and central question. Or, to put it more precisely: who has the right to define the lyricism of Finnish architecture? As established a practice as JKMM Architects may be in the Finnish architectural landscape, we find this definition to be the most difficult task—and one that is often taken away from us. We hear all too often the phrase: "Architecture is such an important subject that it cannot be left solely to the architects!" After which the pens are taken from our hands.*

*Another phrase heard almost as often is: "Architecture may be mentioned once, design not at all." In such cases, both architecture and design must be smuggled into the project or leave the project. Both approaches have been taken; in the happiest cases, we have simply been sent away.*

*The understanding of terminology is complicated by linguistic differences. Whereas 'arkkitehtuuri' in Finnish is literally building art and design is muotoilu meaning form giving, in English the terms belong more clearly and essentially to the concepts of building design (architectural design) and planning (design) in general.*

*The point here is not to complain. We define the Finnish Architecture with the means available to us. Luckily there still are civilized clients. Architecture and design operate according to the possibilities of production, while probing its limits. You can believe that we test those limits by every possible means.*

How does a jury share design identity with an agreed educational network? Urban expansion hasn't halted in the country over the last century, but it has densified in the Helsinki region this century. This offers a potentially rich heritage across urbanism, design and architecture. Are the boundaries clarified? How do such competitions and processes see this heritage and what is the role of the 'identity' building in the neoliberalism of this third decade of the 21st Century?

The architect's role in the dance has often been to dance to the tune of the one who pays the piper. This has always been the case and still is, but the architect's task has also been to think of the 'little man' who uses the spaces. In the development of Finnish cities, a significant shift in zoning has taken place over the past couple of decades—from long-term urban planning to the short-sighted emphasis on immediate gain. The significance of the architect as visionary and strategist has been diminished.

More questions will emerge. Is a jury part of a collaborative effort, political and strategic, sitting alongside the restoration of known Modernist architecture from the last century? Awareness of this sometime inflated legacy could create a long-term imaginative policy framework ensuring both the preservation of Finland's Modernist and pre-Modernist legacy and the buildings and environments to come. To use nostalgia from The Moody Blues, the question to this Finnish architecture is this: are these *the days of future past?*

SM Still, Finnish architecture and design have a living and renewing tradition, but it is under threat now more than ever before. In the work of the museum too, everything ultimately culminates in how this tradition can be kept alive and capable of renewal. What is essential is to support its possibilities, independence, and creativity. The museum project might indeed involve the kind of political and administrative backward-looking stance suggested in the question, but regarding the most active players, I want to believe otherwise.

*Predictive Architecture*

We are all aware today of our predictive text message catastrophes. The algorithm that corrects, wishes to insert text before we have even finished the line or even word. You would swear the machine thinks it knows what we want to say, thinks we know where we are going. It boasts efficiency and tries to get there faster than we can ourselves. Often it produces another word out of quite another world. In turn it predicts new worlds and invents another text, which becomes another space. This space is often meaningless, a sudden piece of nonsense but it may surprisingly also create something odd, wondrous, strangely meaningful. In such catastrophes also lie our future in design.

Searching for architecture or buildings already recognised or creating anew., something not seen before. Juries often work similarly. They interact with the algorithm, caught in a predictive process re-imagining and re-possessing the architecture offered. The masks offered and the divinations the jury go through shape visual maps as the architects imagine forms often familiar, even comfortable and generic. Memory plays its part, preferring some landscape, towns-shapes, geomorphology over others. Some low and repressed, compact forms are preferred over others, or there exists a pre-conception, a prejudice against nuanced height. Such predictive architecture might be denying innovation and silently recognising a history. Is this leading architecture to an imagery saluting history, a fall-back on known, trusty solutions.

Or instead, the jury opts for the true catastrophe, the true disruption, like Sydney Opera House or Beaubourg. Like dance, the architectural conditions of a new 'monument' must be staged and contested beyond the building itself. What Pina Bausch exposes, and what architecture often forgets, Diogo Borges Ferreira writes, (18.9.2025) is that space is not simply built, it is performed. How then does a competition invite the architect's team of designers, planners, accountants, data strategists to think not only in terms of materials and forms, but of climate environments, ecological gestures, public relations, and cultural rhythms?

In spite of its *pop digital* imagery architecture in Finland has become a neutralised prestigious backdrop tied to a sensibly safe, often uninspired Modernism. Most will acknowledge this and know how for more than two decades, this has been an obstacle to development. Neutrality clouds memory, where architects and their representatives no longer ask if the building oppresses or liberates.

Does architecture still go through the Finnish 'body'; like dance, like Oodi's 'wonder', like Amos Anderson 'urban playground'; like the Sydney Opera House; how will the public inhabit this space, this soft machine, how will the structure enfold more than tectonics, how will this architecture emotionally charge the spaces the city moves through? Predictive architecture?

SM "I consider architecture is about events, a verb, with an ethical dimension. It elevates life, especially when it considers the small person and strengthens the internal justice of the community. For me architecture is not just about the static forms of buildings or fulfilling basic needs, but about an event where culture and human space appear as vital and transformative. Architecture has the power to change circumstances and create well-being." (4.3.2025 Samuli Miettinen, lecture: 'The Human Form of Architecture')

## 6

### *Days of Future Past*

How do modes of persuasion speak to a jury and between members of a jury? What self-interest is at play, what generosity acknowledged? How do juries really communicate the architectural or urban 'fit' they have invented? How important is an architectural literacy in a competition and how is it defined? Do the brain areas engaged in judging, viewing and tasting food recipes and dish preparation differ from those applied to judging a building, a building occupying a rather problematic site on the Helsinki harbour? Who sees the building as a receptacle, a content container or a cultural icon? Who see architecture as moment and event, beyond any 20<sup>th</sup> century parameters for the rational and orthographic? A phenomenology of prejudice!

SM ...or merely the phraseology of hindsight! The South Harbour area, as part of the buffer zone of a UNESCO World Heritage Site (Suomenlinna), is strictly defined in terms of urban suitability by a Heritage Impact Assessment. In practice, this and the principles of town planning within a national landscape set the limits for expression. These are, of course, lines drawn in water, and competitions are a means of exploring the boundaries of expressiveness. In practice, as so often before, the solution was found in whoever whispered the loudest.

Ideas emerging from any jury are often waiting to be self-celebrated; there is a need to acknowledge choosing the right project, or at least not choosing the worst project (there is but small difference). Finding the words to support the competition process has become relatively easy, relatively opinionated. The jury's difficulty in identifying the potential of one project out of over 600 other works is immense. The lack of any deeper poetic register in the project is difficult to identify. The process lacks critical heft. It often fails to imagine building fit as a deeper psycho-cultural narrative outside the correctness of a large scale, corporate architecture in Finland. There is a desperate need for a more challenging critical process.

SM It is, however, typical to seek to elevate the winner and to find expressions in support of the choice. In this competition, the brief, the interim evaluation, and the minutes were all exceptionally diverse, which reflects the democratic nature of the process and the heterogeneity of the jury.

An architectural jury made up of diverse brains and minds relies on an accepted but often confused rhetoric of persuasion. Everyone knows the winning project is not always the best project in an architectural competition or the most suitable architecture: these are simply self-defeating issues. And the first prize is simply the one that is scrutinised by agreement and disagreement, by the language and competence of those who realise the need to settle on one solution over another.

None of this removes the quality of architecture that the winning practice JKMM Architects would produce and will produce if the project goes ahead. Simply, they have an impressive track record and there is nothing to doubt about their professionalism and invention. It is the dance that concerns us, a dance they achieved brilliantly in the Amos Rex Museum. (2018).

SM The most important task of an architectural competition jury is to be able to select a winner and to find genuine justifications for that choice. The difficulty of the task, however, is defined by the level of the proposals submitted and by whether, at any stage, an outstanding work emerges. A situation in which not everyone of the jury recognizes the winning entry as the best proposal in an architectural competition is an exception. There are competitions in which there is no single best proposal, but it is even rarer to find several equally best. More often, there is one that meets the evaluation criteria with insight. What is essential in a competition is to adhere to the evaluation criteria set out in the brief.

Who imagines the majesty of form, what gives the unbuilt and digital rendering an identity before building and assembling alters anything that resembles the image currently fixed. Who amongst the agents involved (planner, strategist, architect, accountant, contractor, data-planner) anticipate or steer any change. Is this a direction hinting at what is call a moment or event in architecture's future or in its future past? The principles of the competition brief are clear. The greatest weight in defining the objectives lies with the planner, the museum, and the user. In construction, however, there is the fear that it is precisely the accountant, the contractor, or the developer who will steer the outcome in a direction that must not be allowed to evolve into a dancing form.

SM Changing the criteria afterwards would be questionable in terms of the competitors' legal protection and, to put it plainly, an act of hindsight-which would mean the competition had been poorly prepared from the very beginning. Still, in a competition, proposals must always be given the chance to surprise. That is a profoundly Finnish trait and one of the fundamental reasons why Eero Saarinen was ready to unearth Jørn Utzon's proposal as the winner of the Sydney Opera House competition.

Professional talk in architecture often goes back to the last century when moments of architectural breakthrough occurred both in Finland and internationally. There are many examples. Sydney Opera House steered by Eero Saarinen as jury member, was an incomplete entry rescued from the rejected competition entries. Peter Rice was as important as Jørn Utzon to the achievement of vault and shell. It redefined the icon to come., before icons became as meaningless part of the language of architectural competitions.

SM The Sydney Opera House is a good example of the kind of event a building can generate once its architectural conditions have been staged and questioned beyond the building itself. This, however, should not be confused with the site-specific character of architecture. If Helsinki's Museum of Architecture and Design were to be built at the tip of Hernesaari, along Sörnäistenranta, or at the eastern end of Katajanokka, its external form would likely be more expressive. As it stands, some criticize it for being too expressive, while others for being too bland. Opinions and impressions abound.

*Beaubourg* (Centre Pompidou) was an event. The radical step, the oil refinery metaphor offered a visual and technological shock. The engineer Peter Rice again was as important as Piano and Rogers. Lloyds London, Bilbao Guggenheim Museum, Dipoli Students Union, The Jewish Museum in Berlin were more than moments in a competition, events in a professional world. Their architectural privilege was the past they could disrupt. Their juries recognised this.

SM Beaubourg was a true disruptor, one that changed architectural thinking. It sparked fierce debate and resistance but was still built on its site. As avant-garde as the French were, however, the building would never have been constructed on Place de la Concorde. The South Harbour is Finland's Champs-Élysées or Trafalgar Square. The muted tone has been chosen for a reason. The temporary swimming pool and Ferris wheel are responses to activity in the South Harbour area, but their level of realization is hardly inspiring.

These buildings, more than historical moments, altered the way we saw buildings. They not only saw change, but the future had to follow. These were not approved, generic or consensus projects, they built the shock of architecture. This was a new narrative. There was a time when works in Finnish architecture often produced from competition processes used to do this. When was the last time?



ART RYE



COMET IN MOONINLAND

*Approved Architecture, Smart Design*

Nostalgia or familiarity, the Finnish architectural profession has long relied on a benign, and not so benign, censorship. I have heard talk - gossip rather - of an approved architecture in Finland. I am told everyone understands this, even students. Some speak of 'gaslighting' in architecture as if they know in the neuro-imagery of a Finnish public there lies projects of architecture that are familiar, genetic and, often, nostalgic.

These might be projects that supposedly hold a mystery, a cultural memory (like Aalto's House of Culture or Finlandia Talo). These are buildings with a reminder of the past in a supposedly comforting way. This has been accepted for so long and was embedded in the last half of the 20th Century. The worry today is that it no longer produces a critical echo.

SM I would assume that today's Finnish architectural profession is, in its tolerance, one of the most superior in the world. The limiting factors are external - conditions dictated by clients, or simply the fact that all kind of influences still arrive in our country with some delay. The familiar and the safe are favoured by the builder-client.

On the other hand, in the Kruunuvuori oil harbour, new post Art Nouveau buildings are being constructed more than thirty years after the founding of Poundbury. The victory of Steven Holl's Kiasma in the museum of contemporary art competition in 1993 opened windows outward. For us then young architects, this brought a refreshing breeze of architectural diversity beyond the modernism-postmodernism confrontation.

Today's students once again admire the postmodernism, which to us yesterday's young feels mostly amusing. Architecture today is manifold. It carries many influences and allows for possibilities. The virtues of Finnish architecture are still functionality and economy, which do not preclude also startling, if necessary.

Looking at the five projects singled out for the final competition, all doubtlessly competent and professionally skilled architects, can we say any one of these projects promised a moment in Finnish architecture or in international architecture? Was this even implied by the jury's search for what might result, a low-lying missile or even an elegant bunker? A sloping roof would always echo Oslo but is that a reason not to award if a project can improve the precedent. Unlikely. Was there a gasp in any of these projects, was there a dance that could bring to the harbour a destination to take Helsinki's breath away?

*SM* The best can also be the worst enemy of the good! It may be enough that a museum becomes beloved by the people of Helsinki. Many monuments once intended as symbols of renewal have gone down in history as cold and empty. Success cannot be designed. Architecture is an expression of the will of its makers and a performance of action. In the case of Amos Rex, too, we feared until the very end that the project would fail, because so many compromises were made in its realization. In the end, the very idea of a form uniting social and private space was strong enough to carry success. Continuous activity is needed for architecture to preserve its integrity.

The desire to remain low (a low profile?) may have ensured the jury that the image of the panoramic marketplace city would remain unobstructed. That the vista of Helsinki marketplace, the views over to the Helsinki City Hall and President's Palace, to the Orthodox Church and to Aalto's 'Sokeripala' (itself a loathed, provocative project well after completion in 1962) would all remain unblocked. Is this enough? This could be successful but is it simplistic?

*SM* The competition program set a limit for eaves height but nevertheless allowed the building to exceed this limit with proper justification.

*RC* What and who defines 'proper justification' – is this a sort of righteousness in the 'experienced' hands and cursor of the architects? Is such freedom a useful sophistry?

*SM The competitors made use of this freedom. Yet the winning proposal remained low in height. Would it have been better, after all, to restrict the height more strictly- nor did the competitors simply fail to find a form suitable for the place?*

*RC I am not sure if the competitors made us of this freedom. Low height does not preclude transparency or even immateriality. It is a constraint yes but working in a constraint can offer stunning ways to go 'against'. I question this lowness as a device to remain restrained, so as to see the national (harbour) landscape beyond. "Gröna Lund" might have offered a cheekier comparative and poetic solution, with a gamed 'transparency' overground and the monumental archive tombs deep underground. This is not entirely a joke!*

*SM JKMM Architects submitted four proposals to the competition, three of which were clearly taller than the winning entry.*

*RC I should like to see those.*

There is also a suggestion that further development on this monumental and angular building is, according to the chairman of the jury, intended to be developed in a more approachable direction. What is a more approachable direction? Less monumental, smarter digital or artificially and architecturally more intelligent?

SM. Low height alone is hardly enough, since the competition included many other low-rise proposals. None of the others, however, was able to demonstrate a higher form that would justify itself in that location. In any case, from the very beginning I considered low height a desirable quality. In this case, respecting the eaves line does not mean submissiveness, but rather the permission to play beneath it. Vertical dominants can be employed in some other future design project.

The roof surface of the building is practically not visible from surrounding city, which makes the museum's most important qualities how it relates to the shoreline when viewed from the sea, and the immediate spatial environment it creates beside it. Approachability is the art of details and surface articulation. A strong concept allows for future development.

There is more mystery here. The jury also apparently agree with the design team (of *Kumma* we assume) that “climate-smart construction solutions are at the heart of further development.” Though this sounds reasonable and we know all projects undergo change after their award, there is something odd in this statement. Did the design team hold private sessions to suggest how to improve the ‘winning’ project? Was this to assure the jury that if they award first prize to this project, it can be refined and change towards more pressing climate and sustainable concerns? This is slightly out of kilter. Is it that climate smart solutions are not quite available yet to be incorporated into *Kumma* or is it that more research is needed.

Is this not surely an acknowledgment that architecture might have to alter radically to keep in mind constant climate change solutions, scenarios of planet extinction and other environmental emergencies? Are the architects of the soft monument to move to sustainably smart solutions? Is this an architecture flexible enough and suitable for that? Is it flexible at all?

It's a strange time for a competition jury to be asking this. Were there not, other more suitable climate-smart, extinction-aware sustainable solutions that might actually have suggested a flexible architecture of event? Were there other projects acknowledging the urgency of the earth's moment and this decade? Such requirement on that site and in the future might have altered the whole ‘smart’ approach to the harbourside project. Instead, the soft monument might be preferred for its awkwardly cultural landmark status. Can an adaptive process follow.

Strange wonder!

SM Regarding ecological sustainability, each of the five finalists prepared carbon footprint and handprint calculations, which had to meet the prescribed threshold values. The candidates did not engage in any discussions with the jury that might have compromised anonymity. Each proposal included specific reports on solutions and technical systems that address and mitigate climate change.

Our proposal is based, among other things, on green low-carbon concrete and steel, which are real, market-available products that can be reserved and scheduled for implementation. In addition, we propose reusable brick masonry as a façade solution. All of these have their costs and schedules, which the project must invest in and prepare for.

I would assume the jury is mainly seeking to guide the implementation organization to accept the costs arising from sustainable construction. I regard this as a clear demonstration of high integrity, since it is backed by the will of the financiers to realize a sustainable and high-quality building. This is also what my earlier quotation in the beginning of the writing refers to.

Considering cultural and social sustainability is equally important. All the above-mentioned objectives challenge the entire project, not only the designers. Given our track record, I believe we have a strong foundation for achieving these goals, provided that the entire project commits to pursuing them together.

## 8

### *The Image of the City*

Is this a wise insight or an urban prejudice; a misperception that the building, any building on this prime site must remain low to allow an uninterrupted urban vista and Helsinki 'panorama' to remain unchanged? Won't this building – any project become part of that panorama and change it possibly for the better? Currently the most authentic urban event in Helsinki is the harbour, the waterfront where the city landscape is full of snatches, urban complexities, stories of arrival and departure, offering vistas toward quite the most elegant mini-St Petersburg you will ever see. To smell 'space', to see it dance over the quiet elegance of the square, where *lihapiirakka* and coffee awaits in orange tents, a small but generous mini-NATO camp (tongue-in-cheek). This space is also climate change in action.

SM This is a strong opinion, with which I just as strongly disagree. In fact, the arguments support low height, though it is relative quality, since the eaves line is almost twenty meters above sea level. The large ships are moving from the South Harbor to the West Harbor. In the future, only smaller vessels will arrive in the bay, from whose decks the South Harbor landscape will appear closer to its original scale.

Taking the Helsinki tram from the Olympic Terminal down towards the Helsinki harbour, passed the familiar Silja Line cruise ship probably waiting there. Go further on, heading for the marketplace passed the vacant lots which are never ever 'really' vacant even into the night. These are valuable views, the jury tells us, from Tähtitorninvuori towards Kauppatori and Katajanokka. This is clearly part of preserving the cultural-built landscape, but other questions emerge. Are these original authentic harbour spaces really due for an urban makeover (better word than gentrification?); are these hidden spaces to be substituted by, buried under a series of performative, residential, corporate hospitality spaces with a smart climate-change acupuncture?

SM I believe they are. The city is tying the Olympic Terminal more closely to the Market Square. New cultural activities will be in the Olympic Terminal as ferry operations move elsewhere. The new public spaces are increasingly breathing with the city.

Unfortunately, this current massing risks creating from architecture an unpoetic platform for rooftop views and questionable terraces from where to view that other vista of the marketplace. Is the image of the city so impoverished that it needs clear sight uninterrupted views from the billionaire residences and Palace Hotel? Is this 'property' speaking, a real estate mentality, or the pandering to destination brochures? Is this a finding solution to the authenticity of the city or is it too late to ask this?

Disagreements with the competition, with its aesthetic and detailed ideas will of course come and go, but it is as if the idea of a promenade, innate to the authentic city space of Helsinki, has been buried inside the angular whale and a promised sequence of grottos and cave-like Q-coded spaces. Nothing wrong with that perhaps, but what about a city glimpsed in a hide and seek game from a moving tram? What of the image of a city seen through other apertures, seen through 'point' and 'field', glimpsed through chasms and ruptures?

Is it possible that the requirement to be as low and compact was the limited key to this award, for the final choice? An architectural promenade could possibly have fitted the conceptual planning here, where the building would create an environment to be used, an event and building travelled not visited, where archives of architecture and design are safely underground in preserved cave-light and sacred temperatures.

As the tram proceeds down towards the front of Palace Hotel, few ever imagine having the money or privilege to buy property in that row with charitable views across the harbour, to the loading, shuttling grounds and the water. To see this 'vacant' space filled up, occupied may speak of quite another loss to the city if it proceeds with this 'wonder'.

What is the question here? Has the urban complexity, memory and delight of such a site/sight been reduced to such a 'recipe'? The intimate scale of Helsinki, (Dostoevsky not Tolstoy) crossed with the loading-unloading world always in movement, the 'wonderful' vacancy of the Helsinki market at three in the afternoon when the water trucks wash down the cobbles and setts. The city in waiting, is always in waiting. The revolution once took on this role; Lenin took on this role briefly when he stayed in Vuorimiehenkatu. It is now Lenin's stain. This is what makes the city!

The Helsinki harbour area is endlessly charming and will go on probing the question – is this the right space for a low-flying drone-museum and a corporate waterfrontage of hospitality; a densification handled well in Oslo, but here? One only need to experience Dundee's V&A Museum, where its siting, its ziggurat form, material and tectonic sophistication offer an architectural moment, a public invitation. It is not a building it is an event, inside and outside, it offers snatched vistas, penetrates the building into the city and out to the river. It is both low and high, intricate and compact, the city's living room.

Create genetic Fazers, interiors complete with QR codes to access the next moules-frites bistro, with Bastard Burgers next to Marimekko outlets, and Moomin comets flying high with steaming sauna advertising for whisky. Flood this with mist or shoot into rain clouds. Achieve this with or without design-drones, and the content management and media space demanded of such programmes and this building might be the way forward. But hurt a building as a biopic curse, as fiscal control, it could become a predictive catastrophe! Our text messages are now being hijacked.

If the society, the jury, the architects and designers, the politicians and be accountants wish for this then please visit to the Helsinki airport terminal and think twice about bringing the terminal inside this whale. If any of this 'soft-machine' makes sculptural sense, then it is for this reason that this may not be the right place for what is designed, nor the right function and programme for what could be professionally, a stunning 'wonder' architecture. Literally, the proposed first prize building might succeed in sucking people inside the casino but to some that may not be enough to stay there.

SM After all these verbal acrobatics, I can only conclude that I think of the genius loci of the South Harbor in another way—and how could I not? I see the spirit of the place evolving through a new, high-quality layer of urban structure that at the same time preserves its original atmosphere.

9

*Hoover v Dyson*

“Might say it is like a Dyson vacuum cleaner sucking everyone inside.” The throwaway line from the main architect is charming. A touch of irony surely, it demonstrates dispassion in its own way. The low, shallow (matala) Dyson volume vacuuming people in like dirt into the condensed (tiivistynyt) but expansive interior are both instant visual features praised by the jury. These characteristics also appear to offer a rhetoric for an equally ‘wondrously’ heavy, cloudy, even impenetrable cave building with soared wings. The recycled brick on facade and terrace may bring “surrounding warmth to the sculptural architecture” but how does this strengthen the connection to the city?

Why does the term ‘neo-pharaonic’ and ‘mausoleum’ offer more instant ‘dismissive’ metaphors for a building with so much quality, but perhaps with little chance to be understood? With its Egyptianate triangulated sepulchral apertures does this become a comedy with raiders of the lost architecture resonance? Is this our image-world to be shared cross-culturally? This is not necessarily persuasive or even credible, but the building will fail if it denies the dance and becomes an expression of agreed worlds. The terminal scale and sculptural interior, the Dyson effect, invites a little mischief, call it *Ocean’s Nineteen*? Of course, a building becoming a stage and backdrop for a Hollywood film with Clooney and Pitt will be celebrated.

The huge Dyson ‘vacuum’ entry and ‘terraces’ which may struggle to be usable for months in Finland; are we unfairly imagining this as a performative concert hall-airport interior? What explains this condensed form, and does this imply a potential loss of architectural penetration? The metaphor of a Dyson as an image, sucking users under the huge entrance ‘canopy’ from a series of slow ramps from the marketplace could of course offer an inside/outside, external summer plaza. To recall the Dyson however humorously, is confusing.

Dyson is a well-developed and designed set of lightweight vacuum cleaners that suck up dirt efficiently, use transparency and a striking aesthetic to allow the dirt, the contents sucked in to be seen. The more useful metaphor for the function of this building's bulk and dynamic shape of *Kumma* however would be the 1950s Hoover. Radical at the time with a ponderously huge proboscis, heavy hood and large under mouth, the Hoover sucks all dirt into a voluminous bag behind the snout. The activity became known, and still is today, not as vacuuming but hoovering up. Never an object of transparency, these large Hoover machines were, we might say reliably wondrously heavy in the nineteen fifties.

One should not be too hard. This was probably a throwaway line by the winning architect, but it falls short of any serious critical contemplation to help us understand what might be hidden values within the dynamic massing of the building and its interior seduction. The building as vacuum repair in the city, where such machines were never built to fail? These Hoover machines could be repaired indefinitely. Perhaps an echo here to a past in Finnish architecture which is forever trying to replace the icons that went before with recognisable icons to come. Like trusty, familiar vacuum cleaners these buildings will never, ever stop working.

Is this the image, the space, the urban nuance required here on the harbour? Buildings reminding us of the past, cave-buildings lasting for the rest of life, may not be the event architecture needs to respond to today. The whim, conservatism, and even accompanying wonder of this project surely asks contemporary Finnish architecture for a critical and public re-think, not least in climate action, unending conflict and smart technology.

Consensus is worrying. An architectural promenade, as we said, might have created an interweaving urban, architectural and design experience, inside and outside, suitable to the memory and future of this Helsinki harbour site. *Kumma*, for no fault of its own excellence, sadly hints at a kind of damage limitation architecture, performatively as vast as an airport terminal interior. There is a sense of disappointing competence in the architecture that the architects must be well aware of. JKMM architects are much better than the kind of revivalist architecture produced here with some slickness.

*Hoover v Dyson*. What is an identity building and when did this language take over from the icon? We saw the 1990s pop architecture move postmodernism on, as late modern architecture struggled to keep up with an inflated ‘starchitecture’. But the pop digital turn, the hybrid software and data offices of the new diverse, expanded practices have all redefined the architectural project whilst confusingly embracing market economics.

SM The Dyson vacuum remark was a quote from our colleague Trevor Harris at the award ceremony. The press picked up the joke, and now it has been made into a bigger issue than it ever was. The reality is, on the one hand, considerably more serious and, on the other, vastly more joyful.

The proposal for the Museum of Architecture and Design is based on careful consideration and an awareness that architectural spirit and atmosphere evolve into something experiential and personal during the design process—when given the opportunity to do so.

The proposal’s architecture does not represent any mannerism or stylistic movement but consciously embodies itself in the place where it belongs. Nor does the proposal’s architecture attempt to be anything other than what it is. Its potential for development lies in its capacity to grow naturally into architecture through the good practices of architectural design. Thus, it is Finnish architecture that, in the end, is acceptable simply as it is.



*The End or the Beginning of Finnish Architecture*

Deeper scrutiny of the architectural entries, even the final five projects would of course show nuances, qualities and developments which often get hidden around the competition process. And all competitions have a caveat. Any first prize always shifts and alters as its reality comes closer, as client, architect and technology change. Where does the project sit in an interdisciplinary context and innovation. Is it a generous climate-aware project committed to sustainability, conflict and social justice. Where and how does the project dance? Perhaps this was not the jury's remit. Smoke on the water, and the cave-man's casino? The building imagined here might not be the building or architectural 'event' finally achieved. In fact, that's a necessity.

The award, however competent it might be, however brilliant it might be in museum management space does seem to look back. The vision is as open and closed as terminal architecture, and its sustainability and more inventive climate action strategies might be just what is required on the harbour site. But the real question posed here is not whether this is a noble 'Finnish' project but is it a project defining a moment in the new future for architecture as a tool for societal transformation. Is it, could it be, an event in terms of spatial dynamics, materials, inventive technologies, and sustainable ecologies? Is there an agenda of inclusivity and equity as architecture takes on complex global challenges, displacement, social fragmentation. What is a context-sensitive intervention and how do we talk of ecological regeneration and environmental resilience in a city like Helsinki. Does this matter?

I wrote a book in 1994 called *The End of Finnish Architecture*. It was a simple premise, often misunderstood. Finland had produced a strongly steered, promoted and critically received rational Modernism, centred on Helsinki and Otaniemi. The more extreme, expressive works connecting to international trends in architecture were tolerated but marginalised though - significantly - internationally appreciated. For those steering Finnish architecture (dating back to the prominence of the Museum of Finnish Architecture) there was a right and wrong way to do architecture.

A schism emerged. I felt the militant 'branding' applied to Finnish architecture in the 1960s and 1970s would frame and trap those following, the younger architects. If the senior architects and disciples who controlled the professional process and competition system continued to hold sway over younger architects, then the future would be in trouble. The issue was simple, if such hubris continued a critical void would be produced.

This happened. Educating the next generation of architects to consolidate and produce more versions of an approved architecture became antagonistic. Younger architects felt compelled to reproduce known solutions and received forms which some called a 'trivial modernism'. This was mimicry until the 1980s when the narrative shifted. Young innovative architects retreated into privacy and experiment, whilst Finnish architecture lost any serious critical voice. This was not only a schism embedded in the fifties, the first decade of promotion and management of the Museum of Finnish Architecture but there is little doubt, much evidence, it has shaped the closed narrative and history of Finnish architecture since.

The connections to the present day are more obvious but often remain concealed professionally. The schism and denial have to be revealed once more. It was not difficult to sense in the 1990s, as did many, this schism would lead to a critical vacuum. If the leading 'rationalist' architects maintained a stubbornness at the expense of opening architecture to a younger generation, Finnish architecture would lose its way. Some believed this, some didn't, but everyone knew this schism has remained until the end of the 20th century and onwards.

Architects today are still at a loss to explain how new works, critical moments in a future architecture, emerge from younger architects. Without any critical reflection or measured understanding of conceptual design thinking and the legacy/history of Finnish modernism, architects, competitions and juries would be in jeopardy. Not acknowledging this would lead to another mimicry, an appropriated architecture and generic forms. This is predictive, a process neuro-linguists speak of. This museum, the prize, the form, the competence and genetic nature suggest things have not changed. Da Capo? Possibly.

SM We entered architecture from outside its inner circles, studied in Tampere in the 1980s, and have managed to maintain a reasonable distance from the tensions you describe. I believe that when published, the book will in its own way reflect our view of the state of Finnish architecture. We are not free from the weight of history, nor would that even be possible. The most important thing, however, is that we try to not pass on ossified notions but instead help to open possibilities for the next generation to renew architecture. The challenge now, however, is not only architects themselves but the entire changing operating environment, over which architects have less influence.

I also see in your writing hints of erecting dividing lines, even though the intention is to dismantle them. I think of architecture precisely as an event, one that allows it to manifest itself in many different shapes. I regard the spirit, atmosphere, and mood of architecture as more significant and moving than its external figure, though in the end those too are bound to matter. Matter defines the light that breathes within space. Still, I recognize that more than in any of our other works, the Museum of Architecture and Design carry the possibility of either the death or the rebirth of Finnish architecture.

### *Postscript*

Dividing lines remain. They dictate and keep the conversation going and open. I used to stay away from a phrase which I feel is now relevant. Having to resist the dogma that many young Finnish architects still face, there is still in the Finnish profession of architecture a trauma of consensus. This consensus thinking may have lessened over the last 20 years, as some younger and not so young practices have produced some of the best public works in Finland (including the stunning Amos Rex work of the prize winning JKMM architects, and ALA's spectacular Oodi). The competition process can still produce such works. And we can only hope that the senior profession of Finnish architects and strategists age in decency and know when to step back.

I said at the outset, let us choose another narrative. The era may be changing, signs are that new ideas, urgent issues and complexities are being designed in and out of the algorithms offered and the artificial intelligence that can trap us. Signs also that younger architects and new practices might now be facing current global uncertainty and reducing their numbers. If they do so, we trust it will be with less professional censorship.

All architecture, especially such a project like *Kumma*, emerging from a celebrated international competition must become both a moment and an event. New modalities and ecologies will emerge out of the ground secretly prepared. If we could ask the architects to ignore all the whining and gossip, we would ask them to produce an inter-subjective architecture all their own. JKMM can do this.

Has the competition process in Finland come of age? It is now looking outdated, contrived and generally condemns participants to caution and conservatism. It might be time (It might have been time for a long time!), and this may be the right project to signal this, to re-think the competition process (professionally and in practice) into a new diverse and relational form. Architecture might settle on the familiar or the recognisable, but we have suggested how this risks the residual.

Competitions cannot be a short-cut to a slick and polished form however good the results might be. Polish suggests a desire for an unchallenged form, over concentration on aesthetics which invites closure and reinforces the idea of an isolated architecture. Are these the over-prepared, isolated icons and images still in the sole control of the (heroic) architect-designer?

We know this project is merely the beginning, but is this a reality? Yes, the project will adjust to new skills and technological advances, new smart approaches to ecological survival, climate awareness and fiscal unevenness. The winning prize will then be disfigured, weighed down by a selected 'history' as it seeks a new more responsive environment, as its form will be de-formed. The architects know this too. It is not a pizza menu, but if you choose a *quattro stagioni*, what proportion, what ingredients are layered over the thin, less thin or fat bulging crust? Architecture is no longer about layering, adjusting and stabilising the pizza.

Architecture can and must do more than just participate in what is to come in the city. Hope is that by 2030 the architecture and design museum with clear critical research of its performance and merchandising will go beyond architecture, offering different parameters and predications. By becoming an 'event,' it will refuse to be reduced to a merchandising outlet with its own espresso house, calypso terraces and casino caves.

The new Architecture and Design Museum can still surprise, and if built, it could morph into an architectural moment of some significance. It holds another architecture within its current form. “What we’re waiting for is an event, but in order to make room for its arrival,” James K A Smith writes, “we must renounce any attempt to divine its advent. An event worthy of its name must be un-foreseeable.”

The architecture that contains this museum should make room for its arrival and I currently un-foreseeable. Language and the whining about such competition and award matters very little. It won. And it will not become the airport terminal it is not. For a simple reason: no aeroplanes will be viewed from the terraces! It might become a casino though, if the yachts take over Helsinki south harbour! But that’s frivolous!

Most successful, young and once-young Finnish architecture practices own this contemporary pop-digital era/moment in the way architecture of all types, forms an images can merge. Enabled by software, smart processes, brave bricolage and data intelligence can lead to a new challenging conceptual approach eventually taking on issues wider than architecture itself. Kumma may promises a much better moment than that and if given the chance could develop, what this architectural practice has done before, an architecture of event.

Let’s hope so. In designing the new museum, we are not taking on any more pressure than with our other projects—which does not mean, of course, that pressure does not exist. We do not force things too tightly but instead wait for the whole project to support the goal it has set for itself. We trust that the project will agree to the dance, because that has already happened before.

SM I am very grateful for your critique. It is rare that I have the chance to reflect on the motives of our work and the outcome of a preliminary design under such a precise magnifying glass, yet from outside myself. *Grace and Architecture* made a deep impression on me when it appeared. Its polemical yet fresh and questioning narrative was quite exceptional in the architectural discourse of its time. The shaking of icons from their pedestals has influenced my thinking, and in part also the way we try to act in practice and relate to our colleagues in our office. Is it love in a critical sense, or precious grace? Hopefully both.

*Architecture in the Pop-Digital Age*

Roger Connah

(epilogue)

Historicity, objectivity and hermeneutic work were produced  
together in this era of technical literacy called orthography.

People of the twentieth century were still 'in history'.

John May *Signal Image Architecture*

A conversation may appear accessible but remain relatively ignored. There could be many reasons for this. Silence at what might be said can represent acceptance, denial, absence or indifference. The conversation is then usually filed under 'useful', implying it is not necessary to re-read. However, there is a critical duty after a conversation like this. We see this as a duty to offer some pointers not only towards understanding the text (that remains open) but an architecture of the future (past) in Finland.

*Pop-digital* was not a random phrase or a verbal tic. I selected the phrase and used it in the text, leaving aside the phrase 'punk-digital'. I chose 'pop-digital' suspecting younger architects, aware of the traffic between media and memes, between data science and deep learning, would know exactly what this phrase means to them when speaking about architecture circa 2025. Does this not represent today, a literacy in rapid imagery and alternating signals? Let's call this process 'pop-digital'.

*Pop-digital* offers a way of knowing what variations are available within any architectural process, and further insight into how variations can create another version, another narrative at any dis-ordering moment. Volatile, disruptive, anti-fragile? As in the understanding and interplay of memes it is always possible to alter any image, any repertoire; adulteration no longer exists.

The architecture of algorithms, the selected patterns, methods and processes used today on us and by us might help us understand the differences between the practices, products and contents of the 'orthographic' last century, and the cohabiting of all images in a timeless space this century. We may end up speaking of closed language models (CLM). The last century, pre-digital, saw the architect operate within their own controlled, individual or collective, heroic use of agreed components and modules. These endlessly re-ordered a foundational thinking; a recognised process organisation considered a rational *poetics*.

Accepted as 'modernism' in architecture this performative, inter-subjective rationalism, became activity processed systems. They could be turned into a heroic ordering of recognizable signs and codes. In the last century this was registered as a consensus found inside the architectural brain. (In our case, the Finnish brain!) Was anyone sure of the hoax played on us all as architects even today still rush headlong - and pop-digitally - to see who has the latest Mies Van Der Rohe award?

Headlong we said. Yes, to architecture as we think we understand it today; architecture as content, as process, as image. And, from a definition offered by 'neuro-linguists', architecture is considered: "the fundamental organisation of our information processing system, often specified in terms of components and modules. (*Neurolinguistics* MIT Press 167).

Predictive architecture of the pop-digital? Usually, a computer (software) is invited to make inoperative processes practical. An algorithm is a process or set of rules to be followed up in calculations of other problem-solving operations (insert here the architect's vocabulary: landmark, sustainability, form, materiality, climate etc). Large language models will shrink in time we no longer have, the pop-digital clock.

The architect was always the player. All buildings - wrapped or unwrapped forms - can be coded *memetically*, all depending on, reacting to, dismissed and shaped by the algorithm and image models implied. The architect then promotes, prompts, makes algorithmic steps into a brain that aims to steer towards those images and memes already forming within the brain. Does this add further significance and allow us to consider the algorithms of this century more than a match for personal architectural patterns and ways of working.

How then do architects speak of historically re-styling, revising or resisting a dominant language whilst making architecture their own, thereby shaping a modulated architecture and pop-imagery beyond the mimicry of the last century. The architect will track prompts, has always tracked prompts. Setting the poetics of known and unknown situations scripted by words may not be able to hold the architecture intended or contained. Language makes a delusion out of every bit of sense imagined, every explanation offered.

Is architecture always ready for another problem-solving operation. The architect even back in the pre-digital age was a personalised informational process, seeking (Modernist?) patterns to signal the 'algorithm' of their own prejudice and choice. The architects in the Pop-Digital age now become their own algorithm, co-piloted by software, CLM, AI and other building informational systems, and mapping 'track-ware'. Today or in the future (past), the architect may move towards being the architectural chatbot, being the human machine asked to shape data, images and move content, possibly solving problems usually considered way beyond the field of architecture. The result is already what we have now:  
*Pop-Digital!* **Roger Connah 9.5.2026**



Jkmm kumma (2025)