Contents

Exposing Architecture  p. 7
OFFICE Kersten Geers David Van Severen

Hunting for the Present in the Past  p. 9
Giovanna Borasi

2  Entrance, Notary  p. 19
5  Showroom  p. 24
7  Summer House  p. 25
9  Tower & Square  p. 35
10  University Library  p. 39
12  New Museum  p. 41
15  Border Garden  p. 43
16  35m³  p. 46
17  20 Rooms  p. 46
18  Housing Complex (Gallarate)  p. 53
19  A Grammar for the City  p. 55
20  Art Academy  p. 62
21  Contemporary Art Centre  p. 62
22  Columbarium  p. 67
23  Bridge  p. 69
28  City Library  p. 72
33  Propaganda  p. 74
35  Cité de Refuge  p. 75
37  A Green Archipelago  p. 83
39  Villa  p. 85
41  Lakeside Villa  p. 93
44  3 Villas  p. 94
45  Trade Fair Complex  p. 100
47  Computer Shop  p. 106
48  Kitchen House  p. 118
49  Water Tower  p. 119
50  After the Party  p. 120
51  25 Rooms  p. 126
54  Student Housing  p. 133
56  Weekend House  p. 134
Two identical parallel volumes are pushed to either end of a brick wall that encloses an elongated lot in the town of Tielt. One is a computer shop incorporating a car passage, with living quarters on the upper floor, while the other serves as a maintenance and logistics area. The two boxes define a rectangular paved courtyard, ceding the margins of the irregular perimeter to a whimsical garden. They are constructed as typical industrial buildings, with slender steel posts and beams, steel decks and aluminium curtain walling. Whereas the front and the two facades looking onto the courtyard have glass infill and pronounced black mullions, the sides are clad with simple polycarbonate panels that are white, like the inner side of the encompassing brick wall. Portions of this wall rise up to wrap around the 7m-high volumes. Aligned with the street, a steelwork structure supports a raised section of the wall that forms a wide entrance patio, interrupting the continuity of the brick enclosure.

Ground floor plan:
1. Inner courtyard as parking and entrance zone
2. Computer store and reception
3. Logistic spaces
4. Garden
5. Passage
6. Atelier
Polished concrete floor
Black-coated curtainwall frame
Black-coated aluminium plate
Painted steeldeck ceiling
White-coated structural steel
White-painted brick wall
Polycarbonate panels
Steel beam (IPE 200)
Breeze block wall
Bowery Savings Bank is a building by McKim, Mead & White. Completed in 1895, it stands in Lower Manhattan, between Little Italy and Chinatown, with facades onto both Bowery and Grand. For McKim, Mead & White the construction was an occasion to carefully measure the distorted geometry of the plot – an irregular L-shape. A square and a rectangle are inserted into this area to provide the two main spaces (the banking room and the waiting area), expressed in the Roman Revival style. The remaining spaces, in between these two rooms and the borders of the plot, form a series of leftovers that are not wasted. On the contrary, the architects devote the utmost attention – far more than they do to the main rooms – to the patient scrutiny and re-composition of the accidents of the cadastral map. The borders of the property are mapped and annotated by means of different types of columns and pilasters, and by subtle variations in the distance separating columns from walls. This silent game of variations emerges politely on the facades: while the portico with four columns on Grand rests perpendicular to the wall of the banking hall, the entrance with the two freestanding Corinthian columns on Bowery follows the orientation of the street, thus diverging some ten degrees from the orientation of the waiting room. This faint misalignment (a surprising Lewerentz or Siza moment in the otherwise rather robust production of McKim, Mead & White) arises because the arch framed by the two columns is extruded following the internal geometry, thus exposing one side of the bank vault on the Bowery facade. This light, bleak cut in the impeccable classical pattern of the facade appears as a promise of imperfection. The masterful organisation of the plan seems to be entirely devoted to preserving the random nature of the subdivision of the land. Before the architects came along, there was a project here, even if only in the form of an abstract property line on a piece of paper signed by a notary. The city was already here. The city always comes first. In the one account that we have of a ‘debate’ among Roman architects (Cassius Dio, Historiae romanae, LXIX, 4, 3), we hear Apollodorus of Damascus criticise the emperor Hadrian on the grounds that he had neglected the possibility of using the basement of his Temple of Venus and Rome as a scenery store for the nearby Colosseum. This criticism (which according to Cassius Dio spelled first exile and later death for Apollodorus) is surprising and telling: the only discussion among Roman architects that has come down to us is about storage space! And yet this debate about storage space could also be seen, quite simply, as an enthusiastic eulogy for space. Architecture is about space, all space. And so storage has to be treated as an intellectual problem. To Apollodorus space is always precious. The Computer Shop in Tielt uses the same trick as the Bowery Savings Bank. The upper part of the facade follows the street while the lower part discovers the different geometry of the new blocks. The two regular volumes are placed into the plot to generate a figure of leftover space. Some bushes and a blind wall – this is what matters and what we love.
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Colophon

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