

An intimate moment

by Gert Kähler

What a good thing computers are – they take an incredible amount of work off architects' shoulders! In the old days, every single detail, every design, every reinforcement bar had to be drawn separately – what an inconvenience! But to this day, computers can still only use and process what has previously been entered into them. And a design has never been produced from the imagination of a computer.

A design is the product of something quite different, namely creative work. This can take place in a team – an architectural design does not necessarily have to be the result of a solitary artistic genius's searchings.

It does not necessarily have to be drawn either – but freehand drawings and sketches have proven themselves: when the architect's pencil brushes across the paper, the lines become bolder and intersect – and then the master or the mistress of the pencil impatiently crumples up the paper and starts again.

But then that is not really drawing; that is designing. It is the creation of a building from the mind of the architect – a house which, put to paper in two dimensions, will later exist in three dimensions and be physically accessible in an urban context.

Which is quite wonderful: From the drawing we can make deductions about the architect and his buildings. If we look at Gottfried Böhm's drawing of the pilgrimage church in Neviges (1964–68), then we can see the heavy, gray concrete in front of us.

Hans Scharoun's first sketch of an idea for the Philharmonic (1960–63) already contains the core of the "vineyard" which would later characterize the concert hall in Berlin, even if he was almost certainly not thinking about stairway sequences or the acoustics of the hall at the time.

It is in the different ways of drawing that we recognize the architects: In his early sketches, Ludwig Mies van der Rohe already concerns himself with the idea of open space, as it was then realized in the Barcelona Pavilion, for example.

Mies's diametrical opposite, Le Corbusier, drew throughout entire lectures, and his pages were stories told across continents.

A drawing reveals the personality of its creator. It is about more than just the congruence between the drawing and the subsequent building: It is the narrow gap through which the observer can "look over the shoulder" of the designer – precisely because of its intimate uniqueness, it provides a glimpse at the creation of the draft.

Meinhard von Gerkan has spent his life gradually approaching a draft through sketches in order to then communicate it to an office where there are 500 employees sitting at computers. A great deal of experience has gone into these sketches. The architect knows that the functions in his sketches can be fulfilled, without needing to represent them in detail. But what has gone into them most of all – even in the smallest sketch – is the idea of the design.

As observers we are watching a birth process. It is an intimate moment. Today, with this exhibition, we are permitted to look over the shoulder of the designer. And we see how he brings the essence of a design to a point. Or rather to a line.