

THE INSTITUTE OF HISTORY OF ART, ARCHITECTURE AND URBANISM INSTITUTIO HISTORIAE ARCHITECTURAE, ARTIS et URBIS - IHAAU

'Among the most sinister phenomena in intellectual history is the avoidance of the concrete. It could very well be that our fate is contingent on certain hard knowledge that we do not yet have.' (Elias Canetti)

The pleasure of thorough historical research is a distinguishing feature of the Institute of History of Art, Architecture and Urbanism. Stressing the historical dimension of our world, the members of the Institute verify facts and half-facts and question the textbook stories that have been written before, deconstructing the specific agenda's that colored them. Accurate accumulation and precise analysis of scholarly knowledge is an absolute premise for valid historical knowledge. Striving at objectivity, the historian achieves positions that are well-anchored within existing bodies of knowledge. He does not have a solipsistic or autobiographical vision nor is he subjective to the latest fashions of enquiry. Within the Institute historians of different breed nurture and cultivate the memory of architectural traditions. They advocate a view that is both sobering and challenging and see it as their task to investigate and monitor the state and conscience of a discipline among other disciplines. The historical project the historian can stand for is looking back in order to maintain a kaleidoscopic and open view of the future. Without memory mankind would be lost and the architect would drift in a world of mere unrelated facts and events. He would be a victim to 'genial' inspirations. With her publications – and with her teaching activities – the Institute wants to provide a con-science of the existence of the architectural and relating disciplines and provide a tool for understanding the world a little better. One of the purposes of historical research is to reveal the complexities and contradictions within historical constructions and to expose the dangers of an operational attitude that wants to reduce history to a simple toll for future interventions. Even if history is structureless we cannot avoid isolating stable images but we should be conscious of its partiality. Others can benefit from the work of the historian and enhance the reflective activity.

The Institute of History of Art, Architecture and Urbanism was founded in 1999 as an autonomous entity that can work in collaboration with other departments without being subject to their dominant ideologies. It took over the existing chairs of the Department of History with staff. Beyond the teaching duties – the Institute provides the only opportunity for students to come in contact with the historical side of their profession and provides reflections on the memory of architectural traditions – the Institute has developed and expanded its own research program. This program and the results have been acknowledged everywhere as a valid contribution to science. In fact, also in the Mid Term Review 2007 the judgement was extremely positive.

History is not merely about the past, as design is not the primary concern of architecture or town planning. At the heart of both history and the design disciplines of architecture and town planning are concepts, problem analyses, mentalities, ambitions, dreams, ideologies, motives, interests - everything that defines architecture, urbanism and the discipline of writing history as typical for the humanities (Geisteswissenschaften). Apart from a natural focus on tools of the trade of architects and town planners, historians also concentrate on the context: ideals of clients, public opinion, politics, ideological motivators, decision making processes, the mechanisms of reception and propaganda (for example the visual representation of architecture and cities in the arts). Sometimes, projects are frustrated by this context, but often, this context is the origin of the most daring innovations. Without exception, the context defines the play field and the rules of the game. From the perspective of the design disciplines, the historical disciplines always tend to be multidisciplinary, though its methodology is well defined by, for example, the philosophy of history. In its research program, the Institute naturally promotes a characteristically historical approach. (The historian's own tools of the trade are taught in the courses offered by the Institute, which ultimately wishes to educate fully qualified historians, architectural critics or at least architects with a broad notion of history and historical research methods).

Instead of being market driven, the Institute's research program is motivated by the ongoing international debate on architecture and urbanism, and their history, theories and policies. A considerable part of the costs are financed via the Institute's output in terms of publications and completed PhD research, and several of the projects its staff members are engaged in are co-funded ('derde geldstroom'). Distinguishing features of the type of research promoted and realized by the IHAAU are its autonomous, fundamental nature, its historical methodology, the capacity to locate and use primary sources and the faculty to interpret these with the help of secondary readings. It is believed that these qualities are a pre-condition for the way history informs and enriches current practices. History is seen as a reversed vision of the future, in the sense that the future maintains and uses specific elements of the past often in arbitrary manners. Historical investigations are fundamental for understanding of actual preoccupations.

Priority of the research of the Institute lies in the field of Architectural History and of the History of Cities and their growth and transformation. The current research topics have been ordered in two programs: Modernity and Tradition in Architecture, the Visual Arts and Design, and From the Historical Town to the Contemporary Metropolis. The topics within these programs are related to the courses offered by the members of the Institute. In the recent past, studies by staff members have focused on Modern Architecture in the Netherlands, Urbanism in the Netherlands (1200-present) in its international context, the Global Metropolis, the German and Russian architectural avant-garde, Healthcare Architecture, Art in the Netherlands in the 17th and 18th century. The IHAAU and its staff members are fully integrated in the broader context of the Faculty of Architecture and the international scientific world. This portfolio focuses on the Institute's own research program. In principle, staff members can participate in both programs. As a matter of principle, most research within the framework of these programs are carried out by PhD students.

The Institute's high level of scientific output has been acknowledged by several qualified boards and committees, most recently in the Mid-term research review of 2007. Here, the IHAAU was credited as the department with most PhD researchers and 'the only department with scientific output' of the Faculty of Architecture.