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MVRDV & N-V-O NUYKEN VON OEFELE ARCHITEKTEN
WERK 12, Munich

Original text from the ‚DAM Jahrbuch‘ 2021 by Peter Cachola Schmal

In 2020, the jury again visited the finalist projects for the 2021 DAM Preis. It was remarkable that they were able to travel at all in late August during the pandemic – this was only possible because the key corona figures had moderately dropped. All participants were delighted to have the opportunity to inspect the buildings and discuss them in person, since the jury’s initial selection had been conducted via video conference by necessity. Once again, these four finalists could not be more different from each other in terms of building programme, budget, objective, and philosophy. The finalists include: a residential experiment in Berlin that envisions truly large-scale prefabricated concrete construction; a combination of such strongly contrasting uses as a public agency and a high-tech greenhouse in Oberhausen; a conversion of a scenery workshop building into a drama school in Berlin; and finally, this hybrid building in the Munich district of Werksviertel.

This new, daring hybrid won in the end. Roland Pawlitschko observed in the *deutsche bauzeitung* that it is a spatial experiment recalling an earlier project by MVRDV – the Netherlands Pavilion at the 2000 World Expo in Hannover – which is presented here as a pragmatic, ‘mature and serious variation’. This is a building that promotes openness and adaptability in future town planning and architecture. It is situated in an urban district that, like the building itself, is also open to future uses without wanting to deny its heritage. The new Werksviertel district is situated southeast of the Ostbahnhof station. Previously, this district marked the historic boundary of the hallowed Munich city centre. For about ten years now, a transformed industrial district has been developing here, which, in contrast to the usual goods stations redeveloped according to a ‘tabula rasa’ approach, retains obvious reminders and architectural symbols from its previous life. Warehouses, silos, and railroad tracks bear witness to the time when not only Pfanni dumplings were produced here, but also Zündapp motorcycles, clothing, and much more. This is no surprise, since the former owners of Pfanni, the Eckhart family, sold their potato dumpling operation, but retained their site in the middle of the Werksviertel district. There, they only grant leasehold rights to individual parcels, rather than selling them, when they are not themselves the developers. They will also retain their rights to the WERK 12 property. They thus have actively entered into the field of urban development. In this way, the old factory buildings have been preserved and revitalised with a variety of uses. This even includes a sheep meadow on the green roof of WERK 3.

The Werksviertel is generally regarded as the most exciting urban development area in Munich at present. A diverse mix of restaurants and hotels (plus a hostel), startups and artist studios, alternative theatres, and even new flats and schools has rapidly sprung up at this hub on the S-Bahn mainline, just three stations away

from Marienplatz. Among the participating architects are offices such as: Steidle; Hild und K; Nieto Sobejano; and Henn. A concert hall for the Bavarian Radio Symphony Orchestra, designed by the Bregenz architects Cukrowicz Nachbaur, will also be realised on a 5,000-square-metre site there in the future.

In the district's central square, appropriately named Knödelplatz (Dumpling Square), stands WERK 12 by MVRDV from Rotterdam. The building was constructed in close cooperation with the local firm N-V-O Nuyken von Oefele Architekten. This building forms a stark contrast to Munich's city centre, and this contrast is precisely what allows it to truly dazzle. It is also a building that is open to future changes – not only in rhetorical but also very practical terms – while also meeting its current users' immediate spatial requirements. In the summer of 2020, some of the features designed and planned years ago were particularly impressive. For example, the external terraces, over three metres wide, feature wraparound concrete stairs and ensure an important aspect of the 'new normality' – a normality in which the use of outdoor space is the preferred means of staying safe from the coronavirus. Retractable solar-protection screens on the outer edge of the terraces provide shade. It was essential to deploy a fully independent external circulation system, including a lift shaft, for the concept of the building as a series of five double-storey platforms stacked on top of each other. This concept enables the flexible use of every floor; and this flexibility has been fully exploited. Most significantly, the galleries and double-storey, 5.5-metre-high spaces together make it possible to introduce different uses across ten storeys. The full glazing between the floor and exposed-concrete ceiling creates an immediate connection between interior and exterior. The simplicity of the exterior design contrasts with the highly complex interior programme, which reveals much about the intricate spatial planning and the integration of the intentionally exposed technical infrastructure. The primary tenant is a state-of-the-art gym occupying over 4,500 square metres, distributed among three floors, including a full-size 24-metre swimming pool on the upper level – with a view over the Munich city centre. This usage fits perfectly with Munich's image as the hub of a sophisticated fitness culture. Underneath the gym on the ground floor, there are numerous eating and drinking establishments that can expand onto the square. On the penthouse level, there is an Audi mobility research group, and there may soon also be a bar in the large open space (which at the time of the jury's visit had not yet been leased due to the pandemic).

With this design, MVRDV have not only drawn on their illustrious early period; they have also confirmed themselves once again as visionary prophets. For they are among the first European architects to work with mixed-use hybrids of the kind that have long been in use in cities in Southeast Asia and China due to their urban density. In the last ten years, they have made a number of visionary statements. Examples include: the Seoulllo Skygarden, a lush, inner-city promenade built over a former highway overpass in Korea; and the Markthal in Rotterdam, a hybrid of a market hall and a block of flats. The project entitled Valley, currently under construction in Amsterdam, will combine 200 flats and office spaces in a fissured, hybrid mountain of mirrored facades and green loggias. The old Expo Pavilion impressed the client due to its flexibility and openness – so much so that he originally asked Jacob van Rijs of MVRDV to simply transfer it to Munich. The pavilion is also currently undergoing a transformation: it is being integrated into a high tower block with hundreds of student flats and co-working offices. The old vision of 'stacked Dutch landscapes' thus spawned not only the new stacked landscapes of the body temple in Munich, but also its own metamorphosis. An extraordinarily fruitful transformation! This was realised through an equally fruitful collaboration: the associated office, N-V-O, was already engaged in the conversion of the potato warehouse into the WERK 7 theatre building¹ in the immediate vicinity.

The jury, chaired by last year's winner Alexander Schwarz of David Chipperfield Architects, Berlin, unanimously chose this excellent and visionary achievement to be the winner of the 2021 DAM Preis. Our congratulations go to the client Werner Eckart, managing director of OTEC GmbH, Munich, as well as to MVRDV and Jacob van Rijs, MVRDV Principal, Rotterdam and N-V-O Nuyken von Oefele Architekten, Munich.