

## **An Introduction to Datum: KL 2009**

### **Basic Design: The New Intelligence?**

No other period in history has seen the proliferation of such varied architectural expression as we are currently witness to. Building forms tempt the unknown exotic as do the materials from which they are made while technology skirts the edges of the impossible. However, even as we discover new and varied ways of reinventing form and space, the words used to describe our architecture pay more heed to the global architect's branding arsenal than they do to the truth of what is actually done: we have become more concerned about what we or others say about our architecture than what our architecture says for itself. In our relentless search for a unique expression of form, shape, curve and style, we have found an unrelenting sameness in our architecture despite the variety of our geographic and contextual origins.

Amid all the current architectural spectacle or attempts to dazzle, we still find amazement in the simple, calm in the unselfconscious, skills in crafting the affordable and processes of thought which transcend mere form: our ability to gauge truly critical architecture has not been dimmed by the ubiquity which surrounds us as we have been impressed but not quite convinced. We still understand the value of the simplest fundamentals which, when wielded with intelligence and the integrity of process, produces remarkable work: we understand the inventive nature and new intelligence of getting back to basics.

With the world in current economic, socio-political and environmental turmoil, the time for deep questions has come. Writers and thinkers in the way of Susan Sontag and Naomi Klein have begun the process of inquiry as to how modern economics has driven the basis of global development and consumption and, by extension, the fundamentals of why and how we design and build.

It is time to be less consumptive, more innovative and to do more with less.

Datum 2009 will be a time for questions and reflection. Its thread of continuity will weave the relevant, the morality of intention and the elegance of basic design into a reassessment of those intrinsic values that we as architects apply to our work.

With the intentions of Datum KL 2009 clarified and delineated, speakers representing various parts of the world were selected and approached for their participation in the conference, an attempt at drawing together a disparate group of individuals seemingly unified by the common basic objectives of doing what they say and saying what they do.

The speakers range from the internationally acclaimed to emerging talents; what each was selected for was our belief that they understand what it takes to make true architecture and not mere statements, what it means to think critically about the 'hard' and 'soft' issues of our profession in arriving at built form, both rich in the nuances of place and particular society, in aspects of function, material and detail.

The selected speakers include **Winy Maas** from The Netherlands, **Roman Delugan** from Austria, **Junya Ishigami** from Japan, **Marina Tabassum** from Bangladesh, **Han Tumertekin** from Turkey, **Zhang Ke** from China, **Stephen Pimbley** from the United Kingdom and Singapore, **Meejin Yoon and Eric Howeler** from the United States, **Alastair Hall** from Ireland and **Hud Abu Bakar** from Malaysia.

Where conferences commonly result as mere show and tell events, Datum: KL 2009 has made a decision this year to require deeper insights of its speakers as related to the depth

given to their selection. As such, the event this year will hopefully be a catalyst for stock-taking by its speakers as much as it should have its audience reflect and question themselves by way of deeper assessment. As vanguards and models for younger and aspiring architects, the speakers have an added responsibility this year and questions will abound. Who will take the lead? Whose work will respond to the issues posed by the theme this year? Who will prove that the choices for the seminar were justly made? Like the rest of the region, we look forward to the highs and the lows, the hits and misses, the anticipated deep questions and the promise of enlightenment for Datum: KL 2009.