Monolithic Architecture (Architecture & Design)

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A number of architectural works recently completed internationally exhibit a particular sensibility best described by the term "monolithic". Some of these works have already acquired a certain notoriety, primarily as a result of their strong physical presence in important urban settings. Others are still under construction or have yet to be realized. This book presents this controversial contemporary phenomenon to the general public. Looking closely at several buildings in Europe, Japan and America, the essayists set out to define monolithic architecture in its larger context, searching for its physical and conceptual roots in earlier times and proposing reasons why such structures both answer certain contemporary questions and provoke emphatic public response. The works include projects by such established figures as Peter Eisenman (Max Reinhardt Haus, Berlin) and Rem Koolhaas (Sea Trade Centre, Zeebrugge, Belgium), as well as by up-and-coming architects, such as Herzog and de Meuron (Signal Box, Basel, Switzerland) and Phillipe Samyn (Belgian Forestry Department Shell, Marche-en-Famenne, Belgium). The projects range from grand public showcases (Jean Nouvel's Tokyo Opera House) to private homes (Ungers and Kinslow's T-House, Wilton, New York), thus demonstrating that monoliths are not simply monumental but, rather, resonant of certain other traits. These buildings primarily share an extreme economy and simplicity of overall form; most characteristic is their capacity to deliver tremendous eloquence with very few formal means. Some adopt straightforward, elementary configurations, others limit more gestural impulses to a clear and single utterance. Most contain considerable planimetric and sectional complexities within strict volumetric restraint. All have a monolithic character that ostensibly defies current preoccupation with fragmentation and heterogeneity. This presentation of provocative but lesser-known projects by notable figures on the contemporary architectural scene is a contribution to the ongoing debate regarding form - and formalism - in architecture and a useful addition to every architecture library. This book documents an exhibition organized by The Heinz Architectural Centre, The Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh with Rodolfo Machado and Rodolphe el-Khoury serving as guest-curators.

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