

3: Culture

It's the thought that counts

Short-life structures or forever buildings?



Hugh Pearman Editor

One recent weekend, I went to see two buildings. One was put together rapidly from bolted timber, polished aluminium composite panels, slender concealed steel uprights and aluminium mesh. It will last the summer before being dismantled. The other, though small, was made of hundreds of tonnes of expensive limestone and bronze, impeccably crafted, and will last for centuries. Both are excellent. Both show architects working at the height of their powers.

If at times you worry about where architecture is heading, days like these bring back your optimism because no other profession can show such skills as these. The first building is the Dulwich Picture Gallery's temporary pavilion by IF_DO architects, a young practice established only in 2014. Which is the point of this annual programme by the gallery: rather than being for established overseas architects as the Serpentine's annual pavilion is, it is a lower-budget affair for emerging UK practices. Well done the DPG,



Goldhammer Mausoleum, Highgate West Cemetery, by Craig Hamilton.



IF_DO's temporary pavilion for Dulwich Picture Gallery.

the London Festival of Architecture and sponsor Almacantar. And read more about the pavilion on page 14 of this issue.

The other? That's the new Goldhammer Mausoleum in Highgate West Cemetery – the west cemetery being the original, spooky hillside one. Architect of the mausoleum is Craig Hamilton, one of the most respected traditionalists going. It is done in a stripped-classical 1920s manner, with touches of Lutyens and Holden about it, and bronze doors by sculptor Sandy Stoddart incorporating pomegranates – symbolic of death and resurrection. It's the first such mausoleum to be built in that crowded, atmospheric cemetery for nearly 90 years and to say that it is designed to last is an understatement: nothing is forever but this comes close. I'm not wholly convinced by it yet but it is gleaming new: it's how it will look in a century or two centuries hence that will count.

The thing is, I can imagine the roles of these respective buildings reversed: the Dulwich pavilion as a permanent building made of choice materials, the Highgate mausoleum as a temporary kiosk or entrance lodge done in timber and painted plaster. This cemetery is, after all, where the Architecture Foundation with Sam Jacob Studio erected a temporary sepulchre as designed by Adolf Loos last year: its impact was possibly all the greater for being a very fleeting, one might say ghostly, phenomenon.

I've said in this column enough times that architecture does not need to be built to exist. But if built, how important is longevity? It's arguable: some 'temporary' buildings last longer than, say, some supposedly permanent speculative office blocks. Many famous and less famous architects see their buildings demolished. But the power of good architecture, I would argue, transcends its physical mortality. And besides, you have a greater design freedom when you don't have the notion of permanence in your head. Interior designers have known this for ever. ●

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