

DETRITUS & ART / A personal point of view on Environment and Art by Rainer Stegmann

Artists seldom provide an interpretation of their own work; they leave this to the observer. Each of us will have his/her own individual view of a specific piece of art, seeing different contents and experiencing a range of own feelings and emotions. Bearing this in mind, I created this page where you will find regularly selected masterpieces from different epochs and I express my thoughts on what the work conveys to me personally. My interpretation will refer specifically to the theme "Environment". Any comments or suggestions regarding this column should be addressed to stegmann@tuhh.de.



HUBERT ROBERT / Demolition of houses on The Pont au Change (1788).

A colleague who read my Art Column made me aware of this painting. It is different from the ones I presented before because it shows directly its connection to waste. I regard it as a painting showing recycling of construction and demolition waste (C+D waste). We see some remnants of the demolished houses covered with rubble. As materials wood beams and larger stone plates were separated and prepared for transport and reuse.

Recycling of construction materials has a long tradition going back to high cultures some thousand years BC. An example from younger periods is a reused Byzantine capital from post antique times adjacent to a Hafsidic one in the Mosque of Kairouen, Tunisia, which was rebuilt from the 11- Century.

In Germany after the 2. World war huge amounts of materials from destroyed buildings were sorted by the so-called "Rubble Women" as a basis for rebuilding damaged houses. Later in the 70s -90s less C+D waste was re-used; it was mainly co-disposed with residential waste which filled up the landfills quite fast. To divert C+D waste from landfills the disposal prices were significantly increased, which made recycling more economical attractive.

In many countries C+D waste recycling is common practice where up to 70 to 80% is recycled. The materials are mainly used for noise protection walls, road construction and concrete production. Before buildings are destroyed doors, windows, insulation material, electrical devices and plastic materials are removed. The concrete, bricks and tiles are crushed and sieved in several steps and mainly

mineral materials of different grain size are produced; unwanted materials are often manually removed.

For recycling of walls, floors, roof tiles, bricks and other installations prefabricated houses should be constructed in a way considering future dismantling. Brunner, 2011 calls such an approach urban mining. Due to the implementation of the prefabricated building concept in the former DDR entire concrete walls could be removed and were partly reused.

Since C+D waste makes up in many countries the largest waste fraction and since the availability of construction materials as e.g. sand is decreasing C+D waste recycling is coming more in the focus of construction industry.

Coming back to the painting and to our situation today the main driver for recycling are shortage economy, cost and availability of raw materials as well as availability of landfills. Unfortunately, reasons as environmental protection and saving natural resources are seldom the reasons.

REFERENCE

Brunner, P. H., 2011, Urban mining as contribution to reindustrializing the city, *Journal of Industrial Ecology*

The next artwork will be a photo installation of the photographer Fabrice Monteiro and the fashion designer Jah Gal from Senegal: "The Prophecy #1", 2013. Monteiro was born in 1972 in Belgium and has a Benin father and a Belgium mother, he lives in Dakar, Senegal.



FABRICE MONTEIRO AND JAH GAL / The Prophecy #1 (2013).