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A New Architectural Graphic Novel: “The Quicksilver Painting”

An imaginable story based on 70 years of history

For once, buildings figure only as a backdrop in this book about architecture. In celebration of their 70th-year anniversary, Stücheli Architekten are publishing the architecture crime comic “The Quicksilver Painting”. Matthias Gnehm’s graphic novel will be available from 4 November 2016.

“Architecture not for its own sake, but rather as the setting for a variety of experiences, for stories, that give a city character. That has always been our goal,” write Stücheli Architekten in the foreword to their anniversary publication. Consequently, for once it isn’t buildings that are the focus of this unusual architecture book but rather just one among the many different stories that could have unfolded in selected buildings. Comic author Matthias Gnehm had a free hand in developing the story. The only requirement was that he draw on Stücheli’s extensive inventory of buildings – representing 70 years of productivity – for the book’s settings.

Hommage to Zurich

Gnehm has produced a visually stunning tale that is enlivened by the interplay of history, time and fresh perspectives. In 1976, a quicksilver-coloured painting suddenly turns up in Zurich’s Kafi Ferdinand, only to disappear again almost as suddenly. Inspector Meier starts investigating and uncovers a mysterious phenomenon that recurs periodically in a variety of locations over the next four decades.

The fictitious story is full of actual historical anecdotes. Readers who want to find out more about these partly oral legends or about the buildings can look up the facts in an appendix. Thus, for example, we learn that in creating the sign for Kafi Ferdinand, one of Stücheli Architekten’s staff first had to locate Ferdinand Hodler’s divorce decree. The artist signed his paintings using only his last name. The book comes with a city map that also helps readers to follow the trail of the quicksilver painting. As nearly all the 29 buildings are within Zurich city limits, that’s best done with a bicycle or an old Solex moped, which incidentally was the preferred mode of transport of the firm’s founder, Werner Stücheli.

The book delivers a lot. It ends with a flight over Zurich and a song about a cable car that was part of the city’s 1959 horticultural exhibition – “Züri isch e tolli Stadt (wämmer’s us – Dischtanz erläbt)” (Zurich is a great city – when experienced from a distance!). But above all “The Quicksilver Painting” is a homage to the city with which the architecture firm has enjoyed an unbroken connection for 70 years.

Note to editors and booksellers:

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“Das Quecksilbergemälde”
(The Quicksilver Painting)

By Matthias Gnehm
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Matthias Gnehm

Matthias Gnehm was born in 1970 in Zurich and graduated in architecture from ETH Zurich. His comics and graphic novels have won him international recognition. His most recent title is “Die kopierte Stadt (The replica city)”, published by Edition Hochparterre.
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Stücheli Architekten

Stücheli Architekten was founded by Werner Stücheli (1916-1983) in Zurich in 1946. Today in its third generation, the architectural firm is run by five partners. With several hundred realized structures and projects, primarily in Zurich, Stücheli Architekten has decisively shaped the face of the city. From the outset, the firm has stood for architecture that integrates seamlessly into the city. For Stücheli Architekten, architecture is not an aim in itself but rather the setting in which life unfolds.

The best-known of Stücheli Architekten’s early projects include the Zur Bastei, Schanze and Schmiede Wiedikon high-rise buildings. Among the firm’s more recent projects are the expansion of Credit Suisse’s Uetlihof administrative centre in Zurich (2011), the Sandgruben secondary school in Basel and the ETH Zurich student housing at Höggerberg (both 2016). Ongoing construction projects include the Ambassador House office building in Opfikon-Glattbrugg, the Baufeld B office building in Zurich’s Europaallee (both expected to be completed in 2017) and ETH Zurich’s HIF research building at Höggerberg (anticipated 2020).
www.stuecheli.ch
