

DEPARTEMENT CULTUUR, JEUGD & MEDIA

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Ultima 2016 Architecture Paola Viganò

As a designer, Paola Viganò has helped to put Flanders on the international map and is an example of the stimulating exchange between architects and their practices within a larger European framework. With her work she has created innovative public spaces in condensed cities, with sustainable development as the focus. The jury would like to honour this rich career and draw attention to it. The jury also sees the Ultima for Architecture as a broader stimulus for the recognition of architects and practices which put forward craftsmanship rather than authorship.

Paola Viganò, together with Bernardo Secchi, with whom she founded Studio in 1990, offered answers to the broader societal challenges of individualisation and liberalisation from the 1980s onwards, based on their central concept of 'progetto di suolo': a project for the ground, for the land that we all share. She rediscovered public space in all its stratification and gave this form as a connecting factor, where permeability, accessibility and care for the environment are central. In order to do this, they started from a close and committed reading of the 'suolo' in all its forms, geographical, hydrological, historic, economic, in terms of natural vegetation, settlement types and mobility. Thanks to their pioneering work, it is now conceivable to have farming in the city, or for natural water courses to structure public spaces once again.

Paola Viganò's thinking and work give an interesting interpretation to the continuum between practice and theory formation. She considers 'the project' as a form of knowledge development, and as a link between conceptual theory formation and concrete forms of action in space. In a period when the complexity of the practice of architects and urbanists is marginalised, rethinking the knowledge value of a project is fundamental for Viganò, and can give it a new social motivation and role for architecture and urban design.

In Flanders this has led to several impressive achievements, including the designs for the centre of Kortrijk, the cemetery and the structural plan for Hoog-Kortrijk, the design for the centre of Mechelen and Theatreplein in Antwerp, and above all, Park Spoor Noord, which essentially redrew the map of Antwerp and became one of the most popular public spaces in the country. The Brussels 2040 project, with its revolutionary proposal for a 'no car city', showed development possibilities for the capital which had been unthinkable until then. The youth hostel in De Hoge Rielen was recently selected for the EU's 2015 Mies van der Rohe award.

Paola Viganò is currently working on a design for the broad territory of the border area between Lille and Kortrijk and a design for Vergotedok/Bassin Vergote in Brussels. Viganò thus continues to offer inspiration about how to look at our country, and the jury is convinced that Paola Viganò's texts, vision and work will continue to provide insights for current and future generations of architects and urbanists.