

MAJOR MAYER

Applying science to technology and design determines Mayers' aesthetic.

words / lori fredrickson



Architect Jürgen Mayer talks about public sustainability, and his fascination with a

Although Berlin architect Jürgen Mayer has recently captured the public eye for works such as the soon-to-be-opened Metropol Parasol, a public works center in Spain, and Mensa Karlsruhe, a dining hall for Karlsruhe University in Germany, his firm, J. Mayer H., consistently engages all mediums from sculpture to design to installation. Because of the varying levels of scale their work encompasses, each project overlaps in a way that denotes a grander, overarching aesthetic – one that is in a constant state of flux between technology and nature.

Sometimes that aesthetic is about applying science to objects. Mayer recently used the visual of Data Protection Processing – a sealant used to bind paper surfaces like bank checks – as the pattern for mosaic surfaces of clothing and

J. Mayer H. works across many fields in art and design. How does your larger, architectural projects?

When you look at the work that we're doing, I think what's important is we're not afraid of scale change or restoring new things. It starts behind our work in installation and goes all the way up to architecture. The furniture that we develop has different ideas from those we develop for architecture – adaptability, elastic space, programmatic adaption – but they are formulated in a project like Metropol. It's cross-referencing; certain tests in smaller scale become a test ground for a larger project.

There's also a lot of cross-referencing between technology and



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on earth. At the same time, we're facing more and more extremes: hotter summers, more frequent storms.

The idea of weather as something that shapes our culture is something that I discovered in 1994. The first project I tried, Weather House, was something that changed the color scheme with temperature using thermochromic paint. Next I did the installation, Pitterpatterns, with unofficial rain dropping from the canopy of the room. When rainwater collected on a roof, it circulated throughout as a computer-controlled rain curtain from the cantilever of the building, using magnetic valves that open and close according to a computer program. It drops down in different formations which then also have a very strong acoustic effect. This kind of form-generating process references biotechnology and more complex geometric forms. It's running from instruction to production methods.

Sustainability is very important. In what ways do you see the emphasis on sustainability changing architecture?

I think that sustainability is already very strong as a dynamic in how we think about architecture - not only ecology, but even in the economic sector. We have to rethink how things are built, what kind of materials are available. In Florida, the wind speed kills a lot of lightweight buildings. This wouldn't happen elsewhere where the buildings are made of stone. It's different building traditions.

How is this changing the way you think about space? Reinventing building traditions, and finding ways to make projects sustainable in the future...

When I look back at projects in the last couple of years, I see the question of where the form comes from to how space can perform. I think it's important to

Tell us about Metropol Parasol.

It's in the very center of Seville, the largest intact city center in Europe, the location of a food market that they took down in the 70s that they made available for an urban space. They started to take out the earth to build a garage, and about six meters down they found all these old Roman ruins, so the project stopped.

Seville used the discovery to create a competition (which J. Mayer H. won) for a museum that would create both a window to the historic space and bring back food market programs and public space. When we looked at the competition, the first thing we thought of was creating shadow, which is important for Seville because it's so hot in the summer. This, and limit it down to three points because there are only certain places where you can have pressure.

There's an elevated plaza, which has an amazing view onto the city. Throughout are these huge structures shaped like mushrooms, made of compressed laminated wood with polyurethane skin, which protect from heat by giving shadow to the square below. All the old plazas in Seville have extremely old trees that have a similar spatial feel. Here, you have very heterogeneous facades. It's kind of an ambivalence thing between nature and architecture. We wanted to keep that ambivalence.

This issue of Clear explores the idea of supreme beings in different contexts of art and design. Metropol Parasol seems to revolve around a core idea - the present built around the past, fitting a newly-engineered building