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FINLANDIA PRIZE
FOR ARCHITECTURE
2014

The Museum of the History of Polish Jews wins the first Finlandia Prize for Architecture

Sixten Korkman, Professor of Practice in Economics at the Aalto University, has selected the Museum of the History of Polish Jews to be the winner of the first Finlandia Prize for Architecture. Sited in a Second World War ghetto area in Warsaw, the museum was designed by Finnish Lahdelma & Mahlamäki Architects. The prize was received by the museum's head designer, Professor Rainer Mahlamäki, at the award ceremony held today at the Helsinki Music Centre.

According to **Sixten Korkman**, the building's restrained design, when experienced on-site, feels like absolutely the right approach to take, considering its use. It is an approach that respects the history and tragic fate of the Polish Jews.

"The fruitful main idea of the building is the tension between the restrained exterior and the dramatic form of the entrance hall. The mood of the building is solemn and dignified, but at the same time warm and optimistic. We are dealing with more than just a museum: this building is a powerful and significant work of art that will change the look of Warsaw as a whole", says Sixten Korkman, explaining his selection.

Korkman evaluated the designs based on three selection criteria: What is the relationship between the formal idiom of the building and its use? How well does the design combine aesthetics and function? How does the building 'sit' in its environment?

"The form and facade of the building fit in with the adjacent Monument to the Ghetto Heroes. The large entrance hall, which divides and structures the building, forms its heart. Its high, curvilinear or undulating, and slightly unpolished walls baffle visitors and raise questions about the message of the space. Many metaphors have been suggested in the interpretations of the entrance hall, which is an indication of its successful design", says Korkman.

Lahdelma & Mahlamäki Architects won the international architecture competition for the design of the Museum of the History of Polish Jewish in 2005. The building was completed in the spring of 2013, and the main exhibition was recently opened to the public, on 29 October 2014. The head designer was **Rainer Mahlamäki**, with **Riitta Id** (from 2005 to 2007) and **Marita Kukkonen** (2008 onwards) as project architects. The museum was realised in cooperation with the local architectural firm Kuryłowicz & Associates.

"It is a great honour and recognition to receive the first-ever Finlandia Prize for Architecture, and for a building that features a cultural dimension that touches us all. This is a fine ending to a project that has lasted nearly ten years. This award is for all those who contributed to making this building become a reality", says Rainer Mahlamäki.

A multifunctional building to promote research, education, and the culture of the Jewish tradition

The museum building is a multifunctional facility that promotes research, education, and the culture of the Jewish tradition. The permanent exhibition is housed in a 'raw' space of 5,000 sq m, located under the entrance hall. The exhibition presents the various forms of the culture of the Polish Jews, from the Middle Ages to the present day.

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The frame of the building is cast-in-situ concrete. The curved walls and the adjoining curved ceiling structures in the entrance hall are part of the frame. The technical design of the curved load-bearing walls was particularly challenging. The walls are large, uniform, and geometrically double-curved blocks, the largest ever realised. The exterior of the museum is glass. In the outer layer of the double-layer facade, laminated glass fins alternate with pre-patinated copper mesh.

The museum project was commissioned by the Ministry of Culture and National Heritage of the Republic of Poland, the Jewish Historical Institute and the City of Warsaw. Earlier this year, the Association of Polish Architects, in its review of the best architectural designs in 2012 and 2013, recognised the museum building with two awards (the *SARP Award of the Year* and the *Award for the Best Architectural Object Built Using Public Funds under the Honorary Patronage of the President of the Republic of Poland*).

All shortlisted designs represent high-quality public construction

The Finlandia Prize for Architecture is awarded to a design or renovation design for an outstanding new building or building complex that has been completed within the past three years. The prize may be awarded either to a Finnish or foreign architect, or to an architectural firm, for a project designed for a location in Finland; or to a Finnish architect or architectural firm for a project designed for a location abroad. The other candidates shortlisted for the prize by the pre-selection jury, in addition to the Museum of the History of Polish Jews, were the Serlachius Museum's Gösta's Pavilion in Mänttä; Kaisa House, the main library of the University of Helsinki; and the Seinäjoki main library, Apila. All four candidates represent high-quality public construction.

The members of the pre-selection jury were the editor-in-chief of the Finnish Architectural Review **Jorma Mukala** (chairman), the director of the Museum of Finnish Architecture **Juulia Kauste**, the architect **Esa Ruskeepää**, and the Professor of Spatial Design at Aalto University, School of Arts, Design and Architecture **Pentti Kareoja**. The secretary of the jury was the SAFA secretary general **Paula Huotelin**.

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The purpose of the prize is to promote the appreciation of high-quality architecture, and to highlight the importance of architecture in producing cultural value and increasing well-being. The Finnish Association of Architects, SAFA, made the decision to establish the Finlandia Prize for Architecture on 12 December 2011.

The prize logo was created by the graphic designer **Aimo Katajamäki**. The logo was inspired by the earlier Acanthus leaf logo, drawn for SAFA by **Alvar Aalto**.

The Finnish Association of Architects, SAFA, is a non-profit professional organisation that actively promotes the interests of its members, as well as architecture and high-quality living environments in general.