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**Editorial****Today in China**

Last year in the exhibition "Inside the Chinese city, views on the mutations of an empire" (Paris), the President of l'architecture & du patrimoine, Francois Maziere discussed the dynamic Chinese construction industry, which is unprecedented modern times for its extent and rapidity. "We don't know what to prioritise, the apprehension, the jubilation confront capacity for transformation, the quality of the innovations, the pain in the face of the widespread destruction and Subject to all the contradictions, China fascinates and intrigues the western world. For Josep Romeneda, director of Centre of Contemporary Culture, no one dares judge the destiny of this model which has changed the face of the country in a few years, applying the principle of creative demolitions at a breakneck speed. "Subject to intense political, economic pressure, the city landscapes are changing at a prodigious speed. Towns in China are unrecognisable for those who saw 20 years ago." From Chongqing, a megalopolis as big as the Benelux countries combined, to Shanghai, the mushroom Chinese urban world is emerging without limits. Each large city is proud of its development and has infrastructure destined to attract attention. The 2008 Olympic games were the catalyst for a powerful groundswell which has development of some ambitious projects. However, like the most symbolic architectural visions, these monuments dedicated to the emergence of China reflect more the fantastic visions of the future than practical considerations. After Beijing, planning their sights on Shanghai with the 2010 Universal Expo. These two cities have been subject to an architectural metamorphosis that has affected the whole of China. As a counterpart to the grand achievements entrusted to international architects, some remarkable achievements bear Chinese signatures. These live forces bring a new approach to problems. The Exhibition "Heart-made. The Cutting-Edge of Chinese Contemporary Architecture", now on view in Brussels, Europalia China bears witness to this dynamism with a band of young architects, largely influenced by Rem Koolhaas and Holger Matthies. But is this architecture also not based on the desire to express traditional principles and know how to live in perfect harmony with nature? Reconciling the "deed" and the principles of ecology... Skyscrapers viewed as urban micro developments intended to contain migratory flows, the second emerging wave of buildings reflects all of China's top aspirations.

The [Archi-Europe](#) team**Portrait of the month****Ma Yansong**

A young architect from Beijing, Ma Yansong is an emblem of the new wave of Chinese experimental architecture. His visionary, sometimes humorous approach gives everyone the freedom to develop their own experience of the city.

After studying in the Yale School of Architecture in 2002, Ma Yansong worked with Zaha Hadid Architects in London and Architects in New York before forming MAD (Ma Design) in 2004. He was well aware that he was participating in the new architectural era. The MAD office has three partners and about thirty associates. A quick glance at the list of his projects, mostly in construction, confirms that he has now broken free of his masters' apron strings.

Surfing on the wave of success, Yansong has distinguished himself in many international competitions and in particular in Canada with his Absolute Towers in Mississauga, near Toronto, a rapidly growing Canadian town, like many others in China. The two residential towers are almost human sculptures. The two curvy forms have earned the nickname "Marilyn Monroe". In fact the rotation of the whole building by levels and degrees puts the inhabitants in contact with nature and light. The purpose of the Meadow Clubhouse in Ulan Butong – a project of eight houses planted in the grandiose landscape of Mongolia was to respect and respond to the landscape. Rather than imposing a unique plan, it was decided that the topography of the site and seasonal climatic contrasts would determine the structures.

About ten large projects in progress follow. Behind each one, a big idea. The agency is running in the fast lane. The Erdos museum in inner Mongolia should open in July 2010 in the new town centre in the middle of the Gobi desert. Enclosed in an envelope of polished metal which provides a natural ventilation, the new museum has an organic sensitivity and an echo of the environment's arid beauty. On the inside, its irregular and expressive form reflects the sunlight captured by the glass roof into the centre of the space. In Tianjin, now in full economic expansion, the Sinosteel international Plaza tower (a 358 m office tower and a 88 m hotel) also aims at texture effects. Five types of hexagonal windows, a traditional part of Chinese architecture, recall the cells of a beehive. Although the motive of the façade seems arbitrary it is intended to adapt itself to the conditions of the site.

In China, having seen the demographic explosion and the exodus to the cities, residential developments often take the form of a sky scraper. Again, determined not to follow standards, Ma Yansong stretches volumes in size with the Fake Hills project. Like the Russian mountains which would stand out from the urban monotony, the building espouses the form of a hill in reference to the local landscape. The harmony between the building and the natural environment takes its full importance. MAD also conceives the Conrad Hotel in Beijing in compliance with western standards, a building representing energy and the new urban identity, then the Taichung Convention Center in Taiwan. He takes the challenge to design the vacation centre "Tokyo Island", a collection of islands off the coast of Dubai inspired by the form of a piece of coral on the beach.

The building was admired at the Heart Made exhibition in Brussels, certainly the most emblematic building it is presented as a vertical city with parks and trees. "Urban forest" is a 385 m mixed tower (residence and commercial), made up of unequal superimposed blocks under construction in Chongqing (Inner Mongolia).

Ma Yansong's audacious proposals made a big impression at the Venice Biennial and prestigious exhibitions, going into science fiction for his star city which will be placed over the western metropolises or his floating city shown at the Danish Architecture Centre in Copenhagen at the end of 2007. Two of his works, WTC Rebuilt - Floating Island and Fish Tank shown at the Beijing Architecture Biennial are now part of the collections of the National Art Museum of China. These projects originated in the architectural exploration of contemporary art and the integration of digital media in the design of contemporary Chinese cities. His futuristic urban visions reflect a sharpened observation of nature mixed with high technology.

China is a huge urban laboratory at this time. Ma Yansong visualises Beijing in half a century. The Beijing 2050 project reconfigures the city in three scenarios: a large green space in Tiananmen, a series of floating islands connecting business horizontally over the Central Business District rather than isolating them in towers and metallic bubbles spread over the oldest areas, the "hutongs", those back streets to the old residences that are threatened with demolition. This project may be seen as the very essence of Ma Yansong's thought. "The project is not an expression of revolt or a radical ideology. On the contrary it symbolises a desire to recognise our history and the realities of today. We believe that our visions will become reality in 2050."

## Project of the month



Expo Shanghai 2010 : The Belgian/European pavilion

Placed under the sign of hope of better cities for a better life, Expo Shanghai 2010 promises to be the largest universal expo of all time, with 167 participants and 70 million expected visitors. A little curtain raiser on the Belgian Pavilion currently under construction, with architect Christine Conix.

The call for tender for the design, building, maintenance and demolition of the Belgian/European pavilion was won last spring by the JV Shanghai 2010.be made up of Interbuild and Realys Group. As a building company established in Belgium, specialising in non residential buildings, Interbuild also made the Belgian pavilion in Hanover. The Realys Group project manager is guarantor for local involvement thanks to his experience on the Chinese market and his department in Shanghai. In JV Shanghai 2010.be. including among others Jan Hoet Jr and Virtualis (scenography) and CJI (local entrepreneur), Conix Architects is responsible for the architectural design of the pavilion.

Motion/Emotion

"In a constantly changing world everything happens with passion," Christine Conix says. It is more true than ever in this project that it is the building as such or the public space created round it. Our architectural task is continuously guided by passion because we want to go beyond the pure and simple planning of the building." The architect speaks of the very particular thought which underlies the concept of the Belgian/European pavilion, 5000 m<sup>2</sup> destined to a collection of images and shows. How to place it on the scale of Shanghai, its 19 million inhabitants, its energy, its lights, its tentacle like motorways? How to translate Belgian's central geographical position in Europe and its historical position at the cross roads of Latin, Germanic, and Anglo Saxon influences, its cultural openness and its diversity? And how to remain attentive to the notion of durability? "The fact that the building is ephemeral posed a big problem for us. It is important that it should open onto another life after the Expo. This is why we have designed it like a meccano set which can be dismantled and reconstructed somewhere else. In China, I hope. We have made up a simple shell corresponding to the image of the Belgians, firstly discrete towards the outer world but then they surprise with their talent, creativity and high technology." The building is integrated into the landscape with a garden sprinkled with trees, created to entice strolling around and to accommodate the waiting lines. Enclosed on three sides to adapt to Shanghai's hot and humid climate, its parallelepipedal form covered in aluminium mesh opens to the north through a long glass facade onto the large esplanade.

#### Symbolic

In a wide 12 m high interior empty space, visible through the glass wall, the form of a gigantic neuron is a strong and intriguing signal in a country which traditionally thinks in terms of symbols. "Seen as a symbol of today's complex and interconnected world, this textile neuron in changing colours above all reflects Belgium's connectivity with all the surrounding countries, its innovative power, its open spirit, its dialogue between different cultures and communities." Beyond the Belgian exhibition spaces, the pavilion will also reserve an important space for the European Union and will shelter the two floors of friendly meeting places. Speaking about sustainable development, social environment, national values and cultures, this projects confirm that Conix Architects are not just interested in creating iconic buildings for their own sake. Impassioned by the diversity of architectural operations, the office always displays the human scale as a reference in this work strategy.

See you in Shanghai next 1 May!

### Product of the month



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### Agenda

#### FAIRS: HEIMTEXTIL

(13 - 16/01/2010) - Francfort/Main (DE)

#### POLYCLOSE

(14 - 16/01/2010) Ghent (BE)

#### « Open Grounds » - « A Ciel Ouvert » Sylvain Willenz – Designer de l'année

(13/10/2009 – 3/01/2010) - Hornu (BE)

### Competitions



#### Win een 'eco makeover' ter waarde van €20.000!

Deadline : 31/12/2009

#### Tiananmen Square Landscape Architecture Competition 2010

Deadline : 06/01/2010

**Architecture Catalane 2004-2009**

(&gt; 10/01/2010) - Paris (FR)

**Insiders**

(&gt; 7/02/2010) - Bordeaux (FR)

**Open City: Designing Coexistence - 4th International Architecture Biennale Rotterdam**

(&gt; 10/01/2010) - Rotterdam (NL)

**Vienna Design Week 2009**

(1/10/2009 – 10/01/2010) – Vienna (AT)

**Art Fall 09 Ferrara contemporanea**

(&gt; 10/01/2010) - Ferrara (IT)

**Berlin Wall: the Future Inside the Present**

(&gt; 17/01/2010) - Glasgow (UK)

[>> read more](#)**2010 Skyscraper Competition**

Deadline : 12/01/2010

**Restaurant & Bar Design Awards 2010**

Deadline : 31/01/2010

**The Schindler Award**

Deadline : 30/04/2010

**World Habitat Awards**

Deadline : 01/06/2010

[>> read more](#)**Books****1. Heart-Made. A Cutting-edge of Chinese Contemporary Architecture.**

Fang Zhenning, Christophe Pourtois, Marcelle Rabinowicz

216 pages | € 44.95

Editions Fonds Mercator – Editions CIVA -Europalia

English

ISBN 978 9061538943

[>> read more](#)**2. Centres Culturels. Architectures 1990 – 2011**

Cecilia Bione

282 pages | € 69.00

Editions Actes sud / Collection Architecture

French

ISBN 978 2742784493

[>> read more](#)**3. Barrierefreie Architektur. Handbuch und Planungshilfe**

Joachim Fischer &amp; Philipp Meuser

304 pages | € 78.00

Editions DOM Publishers

German

ISBN 978 3938666463

[>> read more](#)