



THE SOUTH AFRICAN INSTITUTE OF ARCHITECTS

GOLD MEDAL FOR ARCHITECTURE

IS AWARDED BY THE BOARD OF REPRESENTATIVES TO

CATHARINA JOHANNA SMUTS

It is very rare that architecture which serves community needs is recognised as worthy of recognition for excellence. Reasons may be that this kind of architecture defies the conventional definitions of excellence we are accustomed to. It is about time that our professions take a step to expand the definition of 'architecture worthy of excellence' and we should recognise architects, projects and initiatives which give architectural input for social good. This may sound unusual, but do the origins of architecture not lie in built environment practitioners seeking solutions to protect humanity from various social, cultural and climatic conditions by providing physical structures in response?

A few Architects of the current generation have consistently provided such architectural inputs for social good and over a long period, addressing various needs of communities. However, the work of Carin Smuts stands out. Most of her work has been in the public sector, and in marginalised communities, where additional qualities other than 'pure architectural skill' is required. Working with communities requires understanding of cultural dynamics, overcoming language barriers, and facilitating various social and economic dynamics of marginalised communities. She says herself that mostly, there is never enough money for her projects and this challenges her practice to find appropriate architectural solutions. CS Studio, which she founded in 1989 is described as having 'moved beyond conventional architectural practice to an approach which involves all stakeholders in the creative process of planning, design and construction'. The projects she has successfully executed, and the communities she has worked with, bear testimony to this.

Her views on architecture are not shared by all in the industry, but she challenges the 'conventional notions of aesthetics' and she believes that architecture should 'go back to basics' and address the basic needs of society using simple design interventions. Her stance, that 'the focus of architecture and green design cannot be reduced to mechanical solutions' is very relevant to the needs of our country which faces various challenges of inadequate resources to address the needs of the marginalised communities who comprise the majority of our citizens.

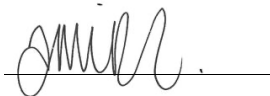
If we look at the challenges of displaced communities which have relegated these communities to the periphery of economic opportunity due to spatial injustice and apartheid engineering, we should take heed of the stance Carin Smuts has taken. Her practice has a record of producing innovative, cost effective design solutions which have largely contributed to "enriching the social and cultural life in the townships, addressing the needs of people to help overcome the isolation which was a product of apartheid spatial planning. Through her interventions, her 'service' has helped create new spatial realities in the marginalised environments she has been working in.

She has completed more than 100 projects in rural and urban environments over the last 30 years, covering educational, healthcare, arts, culture, heritage and religious buildings as well as community centres, low cost housing and disabled facilities. The scope includes the restoration of historic monuments. Her work has been executed in South Africa, mostly Cape Town, and abroad, Europe and North America including work she has done in Brazil. In 2008 she was awarded an International Prize for Durable Architecture in France in recognition of her outstanding contribution in Architecture. Currently she is coordinating a travelling exhibition between France and various parts of the world including South Africa.



JOHANNESBURG

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PRESIDENT