



Opus 9

Richard Meier, Stadthaus Ulm

With an introduction by Manfred Sack and photographs by Klaus Kinold. 64 pp. with 74 ill., 280 x 300 mm, hard-cover, German/English

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For over a hundred years Ulm suffered from a mistake made in 1878: the clearance of Münsterplatz. The aim of the Romantics was to create a magnificent view of the tallest church spire in the world (161 metres), on which they were working at the time. But their complete clearance produced a shapeless square, vast, desolate and empty, and outstanding architecture was needed to put this right as soon as possible. This was the start, as a specialist magazine reported, of an »outrageous tragedy of failed competitions looking for ideas and architecture«. It was not until the most recent attempt in 1986, when the best architects with experience of such problems were invited to participate, that success finally came.

The result could even be described as a sensation, something for which no one had dared to hope: the competition was won by New York architect Richard Meier, one of the most distinguished master builders of our times. His design was applauded even by preservers of ancient monuments, those greatest of all sceptics. All of them, not least Ulm's determined city council and mayors, finally survived even a furious attempt by the »Old Ulm« association to sabotage this project, and above all this high-spirited architecture, by holding a referendum.

Of course the Stadthaus and its architecture are a provocation – just as the late-Gothic and monumental Münster was for the Stadthaus architect. But precisely this was the point of this game that everyone was intended to win and no one was allowed to lose, not the Münster, not the Stadthaus, and not Münsterplatz either. It was clear to Richard Meier and all his supporters that the dignity of the famous and fanatically revered old building could be acknowledged only by architectural self-confidence and that the pointed-gabled triviality that the fifties and sixties had tolerated around the edges of the square would not attract anyone. And why should the citizens' secular building confront its surroundings more tentatively than the citizens' parish church? Meier had been concerned »to recognize and redefine an order – and then to create a link between past and present, and while doing this to gain the timeless and topical elements of our culture«. And there is no doubt that he succeeded in doing this.

Manfred Sack is known well beyond specialist circles for his articles on architecture in the weekly newspaper *Die Zeit*. Klaus Kinold studied architecture under Egon Eiermann but soon turned to photography. He has long been considered one of the masters in his field.

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