



In a prominent location the new church define a site that respectfully integrates into its surroundings

International Prize for Sacred Architecture 2016 St. Trinitatis — Leipzig

The benediction on 9 May 2015 marked the end of an odyssey for the Leipzig parish community that had lasted over seventy years. Their permanent return to the centre of the city manifests itself in the building of the new St Trinitatis church. The new parish church has grown from the body of the surrounding city. It derives its presence from the tall main church structure and the church tower, but above all from the inviting openness of the courtyard area. With its shell of Rochlitz porphyry, the building references regional traditions. ‚This will not remain solitary in foreign surroundings. It stretches its arms out to the city and gives itself to the city as a gift,‘ summarizes Pope Francis in his greeting on the Christening of the church.

Background

The first Trinitatis church in Leipzig was completed in 1847 in the immediate vicinity of Leipzig’s historical city centre. After suffering severe damage during WWII, the ruins were demolished in 1954, with the promise of a larger replacement. There followed an odyssey in which the congregation was temporarily accommodated in various church buildings around the city, ending in the late 1970s with the construction of an unprepossessing functional building outside of the city centre. Only a few years later this building proved to suffer from serious structural defects which could only have been remedied at considerable financial expense.

Urban planning concept

The challenge was to define a space, set in a prominent location between the dominating feature of the New Town Hall and the Wilhelm-Leuschner-Platz, which harmonises respectfully with its setting and forms a clearly-defined margin along the municipal plaza as well as the inner ring road. Completely ‚infilling‘ the triangular site, the elongated building structure accentuates the opposite poles formed by the main church structure and church tower. The courtyard area is undercut between the two high points, creating a new central meeting space. In urban planning terms, the silhouettes of church and town hall define a kind of portal along the ascending topography of the Martin-Luther-Ring which marks a prelude to the further development of the adjacent area of the city including the Wilhelm-Leuschner-Platz S-Bahn station and the Nonnenmühlgasse area.



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Church hall

The new Trinitatis church comprises four main elements: the church space, courtyard area, community centre and church tower, which are essentially characterised through lighting, height and material. With its clear ceiling height of over 14 metres, the church space conveys a transcendent spatial experience which is further intensified by the large skylight installed 22 metres up. Daylight of varying intensity floods down from here over the wall behind the altar, illuminating the church space and defining its atmosphere. A further important spatial element is the extensive church window on ground level (artist: Falk Haberkorn), which mediates the communication between congregation and city like an interactive ‚display window‘. The organ is positioned in a conspicuous location on the gallery, to the left of the altar and chancel. The church space extends above into the gallery on the upper level, providing space to accommodate the choir as well as additional benches. The church interior is oriented transversely, creating sufficient space for the congregation to be arranged in an open semicircle, the optical and focal centre of which is the chancel. The chancel is not partitioned off from the congregation, which also opens the chancel up as a multidimensional space which can be used for different forms of liturgy. The chancel is simply surrounded by a slight slope (running from the entrance to the altar) which follows the arrangement of the church benches and permits optimal visual perspectives.

Liturgical paths

The chancel is connected with the portal and the baptismal font, the niche occupied by the Madonna, the church window (opening onto the city), the tabernacle and the chapel via five aisles. These aisles divide the rows of benches into six segments. The church is entered via the main portal, in the vicinity of which the baptismal font is placed, evoking the sacrament of baptism as one enters. At the same time, the font also serves as a stoup for holy water. Opposite the large cross on the wall behind the altar (artist: Jorge Pardo), a second cross, echoing this in negative form, is cut into the large wall above the gallery, opening the church interior up to the light from the low-lying sun as it sinks in the west. A particular feature of the church space is the large church window which, in line with the parish’s missionary aspirations, is intended to awaken the curiosity of passers-by and permit individuals to approach closer. It both opens up and forms a boundary to the church space,



Anointing of the altar by bishop Heiner Koch in the course of benediction on 9 May 2015

and serves as a deliberately placed opening, as an interface between the secular and the religious sphere. The resulting hermetic openness of the church space generates the accessibility desired by the congregation while guaranteeing the minimum degree of seclusion vital for contemplation, tranquillity and concentration. The conception and design of the window were developed as part of an international artistic design competition.

Sustainability

The new building is based on the principle of self-sufficiency reflecting a holistic interaction with the environment. To this end, familiar standards of service life and convenience were questioned and re-evaluated. The focus was not simply on possible savings during the use of the building but rather on a comprehensive assessment, from production, through the life cycle, to ease of maintenance and disposal. Following extensive consideration, traditional, regional, sustainable and durable materials were used for the new building in preference to individually high-performance components. The new building generates over 75 % of the resources required for its use (power, heat, water) itself and is an outstanding model of a sustainable urban living space.

Façade

By using Rochlitz porphyry we are continuing a building tradition within the city of Leipzig (Old Town Hall) and the region („zum Heiligen Kreuz“ Benedictine monastery in Wechselburg). The horizontal layering of the courses of different heights anchors the building solidly to its location, giving the impression that it is growing out of the ground. The projections and recesses in the layering transform a traditional regional form of architecture into a contemporary, independent building of particular emotional value.

Completion: 05/2015

Client: Katholische Propsteipfarrei St. Trinitatis, Leipzig

Architects: Schulz und Schulz, Leipzig

Artists: Jorge Pardo, Los Angeles (liturgical furnishings) / Falk Haberkorn, Berlin (church window)

Lighting designer: Peter Andres Lichtplanung, Hamburg