

SOS Brutalism

A Global Survey

A collaboration by the Deutsches Architekturmuseum
and the Wüstenrot Foundation

Edited by
Oliver Elser
Philip Kurz
Peter Cachola Schmal

Scientific editing
Felix Torkar
Maximilian Liesner



1

3



2



1-4
Photos: Jan Kempnaers, 2010
3
Cast-in-place concrete shower cylinder
and precast toilet cylinder. Both are
open on the top



The clearest manifestation of the ideas of Belgian architect Juliaan Lampens can be found in the Vandenhaute-Kiebooms house, completed in 1967. Lampens, who had been designing traditional villas in the fifties, experienced somewhat of an epiphany when he visited the Brussels World Expo in 1958—an exhibition that introduced diverse examples of Modernist architecture, not only to architects but also to a larger Belgian public. In 1960, Lampens built his own home, a flat concrete roof supported by one concrete wall and by three rows of steel columns. The architect told Hans Ulrich Obrist in 2010: a few years later Gerard Vandenhaute, a Belgian teacher and father of four children, rang the doorbell one Christmas Eve, asking if he could see the house. “After a short conversation,” Lampens continued, “I sounded him out to see if he could handle my going further and more radically with his house than I had done with my own. He immediately agreed.”

This resulted in an absolute openness inside the Vandenhaute-Kiebooms house: a 14 x 14 meter square, encouraging the family of six to live together in a space without any acoustic or perceptual privacy. The only fixed elements are three half-closed concrete cylinders, containing a bath, a toilet and a staircase to the basement. There are no traditional windows as such: the house is confined by a concrete wall and by floor-to-ceiling glass elements, creating a connection with the natural landscape. Concrete slabs descend from the ceiling to define the kitchen area. Wooden furniture creates bedrooms and living space, but the house remains one undivided interior landscape. Lampens had high and therapeutic hopes for this kind of domestic architecture, which he

considered anti-bourgeois: “To not limit a house to functions, but expand these towards habitability,” he wrote about the project. “To not compose a house, but to create freely from the desire for shelter towards a space for experience.” Elsewhere, he talked about his work as a series of places “where the professional and status man can become an experiencing person once again.”

Lampens never wanted to be part of an architectural movement, and also in his own country he remained a loner, whose work was published and exhibited extensively for the first time as late as 1991. Many characteristics of Brutalism apply to his work, such as the honesty in the use of materials, sculptural and sometimes exaggerated forms. The design is rooted in a strong belief in the psychological effects of architectural decisions on the inhabitant and in the power to counter or transcend the limitations of postwar civil society. As commissioner Gerard Vandenhaute expressed in the first monograph devoted to the work of Lampens in 1991: “His vision of housing is essentially directed towards the experiencing individual and invites a togetherness without convention.” The Vandenhaute-Kiebooms House has been listed as an architectural heritage site since 1999, and it has been remarkably kept by its original inhabitants, who have been living there for half of a century now.

Christophe Van Gerrewey

Bibliography

A+U, no. 523 (2014) [special issue on Juliaan Lampens]

Angelique Campens and Hans Ulrich Obrist, *Juliaan Lampens* (Brussels: ASA Publishers, 2010)

Paul Vermeulen and Gert Audenaert, *Juliaan Lampens 1950–1991* (Antwerp: Kunstcentrum DeSingel, 1991)