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## MONUMENTAL MEMORIES

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### MONUMENTALNE WSPOMNIENIA

#### Abstract

The condition of contemporary architecture allows one to ask: are monuments still needed? Do romantic visions of great architecture have their creators and recipients? The Italian architect Beniamino Servino, by creating drawings, restores and perhaps defines the idea of the monument anew. Colourful collages illustrate irrational forms that monumentalize architecture and landscape regardless of scale and context. Could the saved visions be not only an intuitive message but a rational need of contemporary architecture?

*Keywords: Servino, monumental architecture, chapel*

#### Streszczenie

Stan współczesnej architektury pozwala zapytać: czy monumenty są jeszcze komuś potrzebne? Czy romantyczne wizje wielkiej architektury mają swoich twórców i odbiorców? Włoski architekt Beniamino Servino, przez tworzone rysunki przywraca, a być może definiuje ideę monumentu na nowo. Barwne kolaże obrazują nieracjonalne formy, które monumentalizują architekturę i przestrzeń krajobrazu niezależnie od skali i kontekstu. Czyżby zapisane wizje były nie tylko intuicyjnym przesłaniem lecz racjonalną potrzebą architektury współczesnej?

*Słowa kluczowe: Servino, architektura monumentalna, kaplica*

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Architecture is located somewhere between art and engineering, matter and spirit. Its utility does not let one forget about technical requirements and functional precepts. Luckily enough, however, it seems that there exists such architecture which to a greater extent demands of the creator intuition rather than rational justification, a great vision rather than a precise plan. These are the works in which the idea and beauty of form are superior to building matter. We will certainly find many monumental works in this area whose power, strength and beauty exceed rational limits.

After all, one can agree with the thesis that the world of monuments is a history of humanity written in buildings. They were always connected with memory, shaped with architectural seriousness and sublimity. They can be often perceived as irrational buildings, they sometimes happened to be a manifestation of pride. Today, architecture seems to be more rational. But does this mean that the monuments are gone? Are they still needed?

Contemporary architecture has probably excluded the classical monument. The pompous design and dignified architectural detail are replaced with the homogeneous smooth surface of blocks. Their power is expressed by scale, prestigious function and originality of form.

According to the thesis of the conference, the path to architecture varies. The work of the Italian architect Beniamino Servino is probably the path of vision and intuition. The artist focuses his attention on research conducted through mixed media drawings and collages, thanks to which he evokes the idea of a monument in contemporary architecture. He places the drawn sublime buildings in neglected and abandoned areas.

The architect publishes his sketches on the Internet – they can be viewed on social networking sites. This is a kind of a metaphor for contemporariness – while most users post the latest photographs of places, events, and most often of themselves on the web, the architect shares architectural sketches with similar intensity. He creates a perverse juxtaposition of nondescript, ordinary photographs and thoughts written in a few lines. Most of these drawings come with a short commentary or title.

But right after the superficial first reaction, one can find *continuing investigation of the limit, threshold and ambivalent relation of representation and its importance in architectural thinking* in the work of Servino<sup>1</sup>.

Servino monumentalizes architecture – providing the drawn structures with heavy and tall forms, often ending with pointed and steep roofs. His popular drawing motifs include numerous crosses and TV antennas on buildings. The buildings are often rescaled: powerful and monumental. *For Servino there is similarity between representation of needs and place, text and scene, language and speech. The monument he is dreaming of seems to be a non-city, an ideological reappropriation of territory with the power to change the landscape*<sup>2</sup>.

In Servino's sketches and drawings, one can find a perverse form of play inspired by architectural works, which he easily adapts to the features of a monument – monumentalizing the given architecture somehow.

The irony emerging in the drawings makes us realize that there is an intuitive monumental form that can be rationally recorded in an image. The author published a number of them in the book under the meaningful title *Monumental need*. It's a collage of forms and words that complement each other. It provides an inspiring study of considerations on the title topic.

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<sup>1</sup> C. Boano, *The Ethics of a Potential Urbanism. Critical Encounters between Giorgio Agamben and Architecture*, Routledge 2017, p. 54.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibidem*.

The architect conducts analysis and reflections on the form of architecture. The sketch presenting a silent form that imitates a temple crowned with a steep roof with crosses (ill.1) was annotated – with a reflection on the subject of form:

*Architettura solo forma – Architecture only form*

*Si, ma quale forma? – yes, but what form?*

*La forma di una bottiglia? – the form of a bottle?*

*Di un albero? – of a tree?*

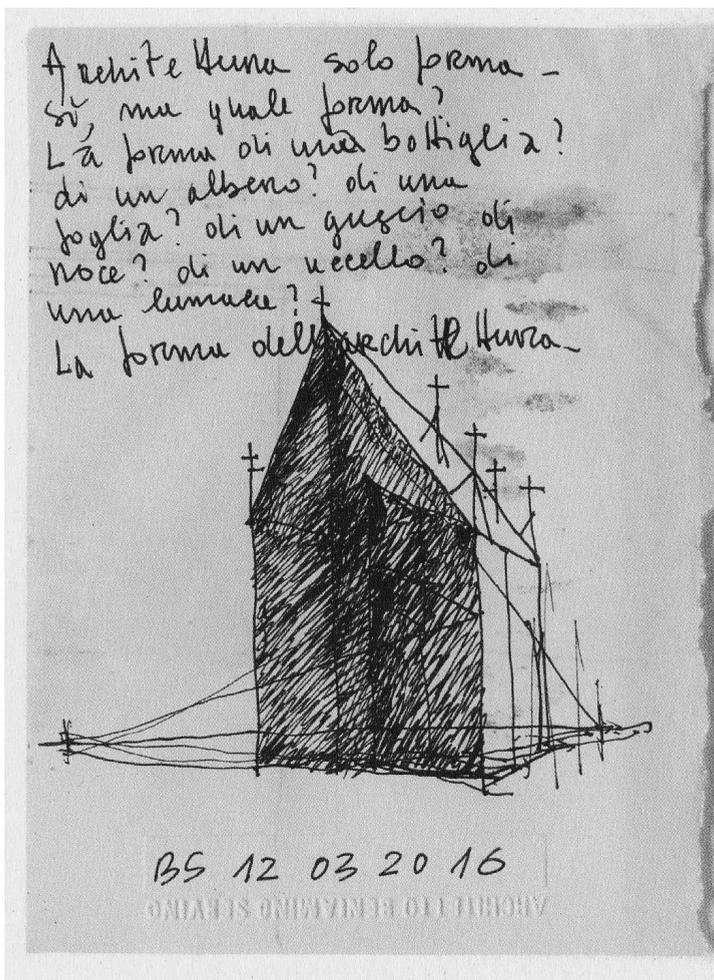
*Di una foglia? – of a leaf?*

*Di un guscio di noce? – of a nutshell?*

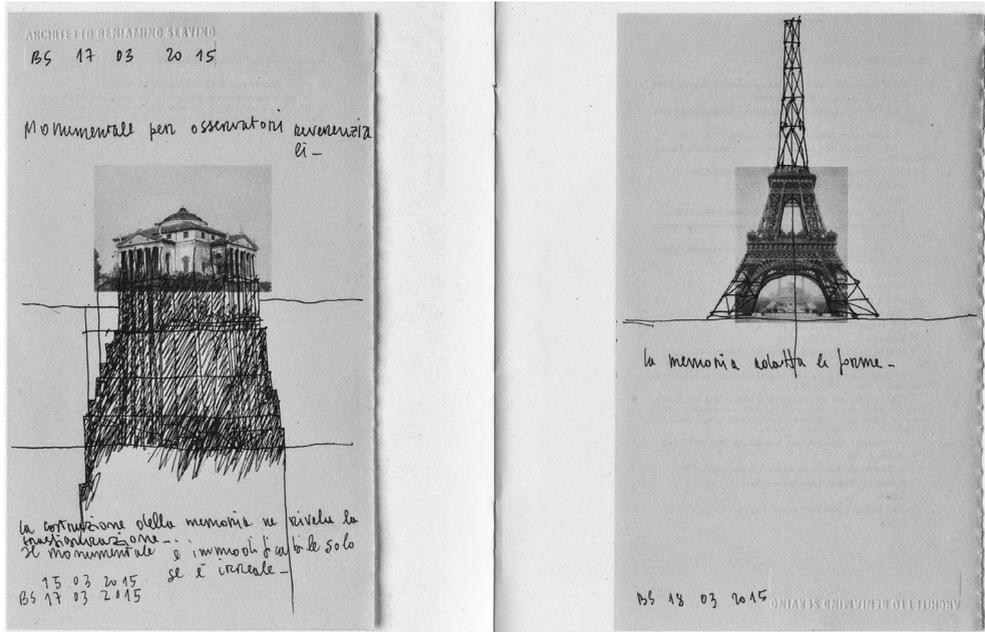
*Di un uccello? – of a bird?*

*Di una lumaca? – of a snail?*

*La forma dell'Architettura – the Form of Architecture<sup>3</sup>*



<sup>3</sup> B. Servino, *Small drawings*, Divisare, Europaconcorsi, Rome 2017, p. 5.



Ill. 1., Ill. 2., Ill. 3., Beniamino Servino, *Small drawings*,  
source: Servino B., *Small drawings*, Divisare, Europaconcorsi, Rome 2017

The next one is a collage – a photo of the *Rotunda villa*, (ill. 2) with a massive lower part sketched in, multiplying the height of the building almost four times. The villa constitutes the coping – the last part of the new building. Perhaps the explanation can be found in the description of the picture:

*Monumentale per osservatori reverenziali* – monumental for respectful observers

*La costruzione della memoria ne rivela la transfigurazione* – building memory reveals its transfiguration

*Il monumentale e immobificabile solo se è irreale* – monumentality cannot be modified only when it is unrealistic<sup>4</sup>

Architect repeatedly refers to the memory where images, shapes and forms are stored. Perhaps this is where the artist's intuition draws its source from. Memory in architecture is expressed by monuments. Even a collage with a sketch of the Eiffel Tower (ill. 3) was provided with a meaningful commentary:

*La memoria adatta le forme* – memory adapts forms. Thus, the shapes saved in the memory are transformed by the creator.

Another sketch titled *36 crosses* depicts a bulky building that climbs up, evoking the shapes of the biblical Tower of Babel. Elsewhere, we recognize the forms of brick and concrete buildings of the complex designed by Louis Khan in India, which were extended in the

<sup>4</sup> *Ibidem*.

drawing, losing their original character and scale. They turned into a majestic pompousness from monumental simplicity.

We also recognize familiar shapes in the sketch entitled *La forma finita e' provvisoria (the final form is a provisional form)* – a heavy lower part, a higher one with openings and the whole topped with steep roofs. The title of the picture constitutes another thesis – the final form is an imperfect perception of the idea and intuition.

The architect uses a collage based on architectural photography efficiently and willingly – this combination and layering of façade elements seems to be arbitrary. The structure is subject to transformation and monumentalization. It is given a new meaning in a new architectural scale. It is also a reference to the recipient's memory – what is recorded in it as known to us is transformed into a new role – a monument.

Another game is based on sketched extension, multiplication, replication and composition on the basis of photographs of existing buildings, often historic and important ones in the history of architecture. They are used to reflect on the meaning of architecture.

There is also no doubt that Servino's intuition is recorded in his sketches. They are so strongly associated with creativity that one can accept the general statement that architecture does not exist without a picture. Perhaps these sketches can set the limit of intuition in architecture? Do rational and intuitive needs are significant in monumental architecture?

The architect focuses his interests on this particular architecture because he asks about its monumentality in the contemporary context – the city, the natural landscape.

On this ground, one of the few of Servino's realizations – the funeral chapel at Castel Morrone in Italy – deserves attention. Built in 1999 in the extended part of the old cemetery, the work was created from local stone and concrete.

The form of the building is shaped by a rectangular plan similar to a square in proportions. The body of the building is topped with a gable roof with a slight inclination.

The façades are shaped by natural tuff cut into equal blocks, laid without vertical and horizontal joints, which gives the building a contemporary look. A 3-cm vertical layer of polished travertine, which additionally fills the floor of the chapel, intersect the stone blocks of warm colour horizontally and irregularly. The palette of applied materials is completed by aluminium sheet used to build the corner door to the chapel. The Italian tradition originating from the cultural circles of the Mediterranean Basin causes that there are both burial fields and places for cremation burial in the so-called *loculi* in the area of the cemetery. In fact, it was for the needs of a single *locula* that this chapel was designed – a space that encloses a single niche in the wall.

The small building harmonizes with the surroundings, its shape and proportions and the colour of the applied materials blend in with the local landscape. It is contemporary architecture in a traditional context, a small monument, which enters into an architectural dialogue with the past with its form. It gives the appropriate setting for a serious function – or rather for a space closed in its walls. It does not have a traditional monumental axiality and symmetry – it is a corner building with a corner entrance, which was located at the intersection of two walking paths of the cemetery. The entrance is closed by an unusual and modern metal door in the shape of a corner two-piece block.

The architect probably deliberately called the chapel *Tempietto*, which brings to mind *Tempietto* at the church of San Pietro in Montorio in Rome. This small historic chapel, built to the design of Bramante in the garth adjacent to the church, is a round, intimate building

with a colonnade surrounding it. It is called, not without reason, the smallest monument in the world. The form rather than the size of this building probably decided about its lofty character. The chapel designed by Servino is of a similar small scale. This proves that a monument does not have to be large.

It seems that in designing monuments such as a chapel, one should use intuition as much as technical knowledge. It is the search for and crossing the border between construction and architecture, art and utility. As proof of the above words, we can recall the example of a contemporary realization in which the intuition of the creator appears first. In 2017, an original cemetery chapel made of marble was built in the northern part of Italy to the design of the Japanese architect Go Hasegawa. The structure named *Bright Cloister* by the artist was commissioned as a sculpture by the Pibamarmi company. Then it was placed in the municipal cemetery in Guastalla. The sacral building was placed in the courtyard in the newly created Garden of Remembrance.

Built as a stone structure composed of 13 blocks of adequately formed marble, touching each other with shorter sides, it encloses the space of a regular pentagonal with a central plan. The building has no roof – its space is open towards the sky. Rectangular massive blocks were hollowed out from the inside in the shape of characteristic niches with vaults. One of the blocks is an entrance in the form of an arched ceiling. As the artist explains – during his travels around Europe, he noticed a characteristic combination of three elements in the window space, especially in the architecture of castles – those were a window, a bench under it and a niche in the wall above it. Hence, he transferred these elements to the modern language of material and form – a heavy and massive block of marble drills in the described layout until the outer side of the wall is so thin that it can pass daylight. This is a surprising effect that reflects the architect's idea: window-bench-niche and experiment with a classic stone. Go Hasegawa emphasizes that the material he worked with is also new to him, because one does not build of stone in Japan. The architect is inspired by the play of light and shadow, light and darkness – which he finds in the matter of marble – from gravity to semi-transparency and light transmittance which shows its different thickness and different character.

Watching the work of Hasegawa, there is no doubt that the object is an intuitive architectural solution, an answer to the question about a contemporary monument in the form of the small sculptural work that serves a sacral function.

Through the analogy of a small monument, Hasegawa's realisation draws attention to another architectural work designed by Peter Zumthor – a chapel erected on the outskirts of the village of Wachendorf in western Germany. This is an extraordinary place dedicated to the Swiss hermit, Saint Nicholas of Flüe.



III. 4. Go Hasegawa, Bright Cloister, Guastalla 2017  
source: <https://go-hasegawa.divisare.pro/projects/364235-bright-cloister>

The chapel creates a peculiar sign in the natural landscape. It is a geometric sculpture waiting alone for the observer – user. *The work is perceived as a sculpture, the more so because it is not an icon of a chapel or anything but it draws its significance only from the earth, from the logic of construction. Perhaps that is why the vertical, so obvious in architecture, sounds lofty here – it is a manifesto of the nature of the building in the nature of this piece of landscape*<sup>5</sup>.

At the base of the structure there is an irregular pentagon. The walls, vertical from the outside, climb up to a height of 12 m. The triangular metal door is the only geometric form of the structure and natural environment defined in this way. The sculpture cast from concrete with the addition of gravel was shaped on the basis of a flat external formwork. The interior, in turn, was shaped by emptiness left after formwork beams set in the shape of an Indian wigwam. One hundred and twelve wooden trunks were gradually set on fire after the concrete had set. Thanks to this, the unique character of architecture was achieved. Black charred interior walls build a unique atmosphere of the building. They converge towards the upper, small skylight. It is a unique place focusing attention on the hole in the roof, which provides streams of light and air. Unsecured, susceptible to external climatic conditions, it intensifies the feeling of raw, hermitage conditions. The floor of the chapel is covered with hand-poured lead, giving a subtle reflex of light reflected from the floor. The whole is completed by over three hundred small holes in the wall structure. Perforations were supplemented with glass crystals cast by the local artist.

The material and building process had an indirect significance in shaping this architecture. It was the local farmers who built the chapel, a simple technology intensified the significance and operation of this work of art. The artist achieved a unique shape, colour and smell of the interior of the chapel. The outer shape has an original form, which gives the impression of being an inherent part of the landscape owing to the coloured concrete laid in layers. It is impossible to determine its features, scale or compositional role in the environment. It is a sign – accent in nature, among meadow greenery and arable fields. The object symbolizes spirituality, not a specific religion, it proposes a meaningful emptiness of the interior in place of the church splendour. Undoubtedly, it increases concentration and reverie, perhaps it evokes a sense of sublimity. It is a “small monument” that surprises with its scale and presence in a given place like the abovementioned chapel of San Pietro in Montorio in Rome.

The context is extremely important to Peter Zumthor: *As long as I can remember, I have always experienced the beauty of an artefact, an object created by man as a special presence of form, as a self-evident and self-confident hereeness that is intrinsic to the object. Sometimes when such an object asserts itself in nature, I see beauty. The building, city, house, or street seems consciously placed. It generates a place. Where it stands there is a back and a front, there is a left and a right, there is closeness and distance, an inside and outside, there are forms that focus and condense or modify the landscape. The result is an environment. The object and its environment: a consonance of nature and artificially created work that is different from the pure beauty of nature – and different from the pure beauty of an object*<sup>6</sup>.

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<sup>5</sup> B. Stec, *Kaplica Brata Klausa*, Architektura i Biznes, 7/8 2008, p. 41.

<sup>6</sup> P. Zumthor, *Myslenie architektury*, Kraków 2010, p. 75.

This building can be interpreted as an original monumental sign of humanity – the metaphor of a tower in the landscape. Yet, it might merely be that, which Peter Zumthor is talking about: *a building that is being itself, being a building, not representing anything, just being*<sup>7</sup>. The lonely building among the fields that with its form symbolically introduces *modernity which has not lost sight of the past*<sup>8</sup>.

Looking for justification and rational reasons for the existence of contemporary monumental architecture, one can recall the words of Adolf Loos, who considered the tomb and the monument to be the only buildings belonging to the world of architecture. These two types of buildings have for centuries been associated with the history of mankind. The first prehistoric primitive burial buildings erected from stone and clay served as a burial site, then their form developed towards more complex objects. The architecture of tombs is rich – these are independent buildings, located in chapels or cemeteries. Civilizations erected tombs to commemorate the memory of great rulers. Nowadays things look similar. And it must be assumed that the design of a burial site should be particularly guided by intuition.

Illustrating this assumption, one can refer to the realisation of the San Cataldo cemetery in Modena designed by Aldo Rossi. This work reflects the transformation of the architecture of the past into a modern form, the expression of the memory of the dead through buildings. The cemetery was built on the site of the existing burial site. The new part was first painted by the architect – the painting presents a symmetrical geometric arrangement of elements constituting a closed composition. The original plan, implemented in fragments so far, was filled with buildings that create an open space, the most important part of which is the wall. This is the element the entire assumption was based on. The walls with openings – serving as windows or a place for urns, just like in the chapel by Servino, were arranged in blocks that enclose the space for the dead.

The axial composition facilitates orientation in the area, which the author calls the “home of the dead”. The work should be interpreted as a metaphor of emptiness, a city of peace, silence and order in space. This monumental axial complex is strengthened by the simplicity of geometry, repeatability of elements and the open space of the courtyard. The atmosphere of the place seems to be analogous to that of Giorgio Chirico’s paintings.

Another work of monumental art also undoubtedly created on the basis of the artist’s intuition is the tomb of the Brion family in San Vito D’Altivole designed in 1969–1978 by Carlo Scarpa. The Venetian origin of the architect has been revealed in the works – historical forms of architecture from the past still exist, and what is happening today constitutes its continuation. And that is how one should interpret the architecture of this tomb. It is a kind of scenography – a combination of small geometric forms delicately sculpted with ornament, integrated into the greenery of the garden. The concrete walls, colourful ceramics, pools filled with water – create objects that, thanks to their classical references, become subtle works of art. They relate seriously to the monumental symbol of remembrance of the dead.

Remaining in the area defined by Loos, one can look for further examples of forms fixed in the memory expressed in the contemporary language of architecture. The complex

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<sup>7</sup> www.archdaily.com, transl. by the author.

<sup>8</sup> P. Jodidio, *Architecture Now!*, Vol. 6, Taschen, Kolonia 2009, p. 562.

of the municipal cemetery in Modena was erected to the design of Antonio Monestiroli. Logic and order reveal a rather rational way of looking for form. The seriousness of the place and function determined architectural solutions. This place was created in a meaningful way but without literal religious symbols; an extraordinary space with an atmosphere of reflection, a sacred zone with no obvious symbolism. The Voghera cemetery can be included in the specific architecture of remembrance expressed through the beauty of space. The high brick walls enclose a large, wide space. The rhythm of white tombstones on the backdrop of red brick walls brings order, but also refers to the noble material patterns that are associated with the permanent structures of the past. The slabs constitute a modern detail of this architecture.

The building housing over four thousand tombstones has three floors, including one underground. It is built in a layout of a gallery that allows one to reach every grave. The brick walls are complemented by the white colour of the stone floor. The upper level is illuminated by the roof windows. The small openings in the façade serve ventilation, but above all they constitute a beautiful compositional element of the façade.

The inner square is shaped by three planes of different materials – gravel and concrete as well as lawns and shallow water pools. It is a compositional geometry in one horizontal plane.

In the whole space, one can find the beauty of the axial composition, a calm and understandable rhythm. It is a place of eternal rest expressed in architecture with subtle symbolism, focused and silent space. Nothing surprises here, it does not flaunt its form, colour or size. Its geometry guides people silently accompanying the deceased on their last path.

Monestiroli emphasizes the importance of place here. The compositional concept was clearly defined – white gravestones are facing the square. This place is covered with grass, an important element of the architecture of the surroundings. The green square is separated by the water from the observer, *turning it into an island and blocking access to gravestones to the ones walking on it. They can be observed only from a distance, with due respect for the significance of this place*<sup>9</sup>. The purposeful design forces the viewer to observe the whole assumption from an appropriate distance. It is an invisible border – the threshold between everyday life and sublime contemplation. This architecture leads one into the space of the cemetery in a serious way.

The uniqueness of space, axial and rhythmic spatial dispositions, symbolism of place and function – all this allows the work to be perceived as monumental: serious and lofty. This “city of the dead” of a large scale adopts shapes known from the “living cities”. Though even those sometimes become irrational in artists’ records. American artist Benjamin Sack creates original drawings depicting unusual visions of cities seen from above. Monumental imaginations of the envisioned agglomerations seem to have no borders while the historic buildings known from the past that fill them take on a monstrous form. The infinite and vast metropolises, slightly chaotic, and not allowing orientation in the directions, are created in the drawings made mainly in pen or marker. They are planes filled with architecture, the fully built structure of a city, where the only border is the edge of the picture or the sketched in rocks towering above the city.

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<sup>9</sup> A. Monestiroli, *Tryglif i metopa. Dziewięć wykładów o architekturze*, PK, Kraków 2009, p. 131.

The urban layouts sometimes create a recognizable grid of blocks, streets, squares or cities satellites, and at other times they build the shape of a star, a tower, a human figure, engaging linear and more flowing, wavy compositions.

*Sack's work explores architecture as a flexible medium capable of expressing the unique space between realism and abstraction; where interpretation and our ability to create meaning is in flux*<sup>10</sup>.

The artist's pictures are drawn with great precision, rich in particularities, while the architecture is filled with details. The buildings include historic towers, bridges, aqueducts, temples, public buildings and, at other times, modern skyscrapers, bridges, domes and arches. All densely built up, creating a city that is difficult to grasp, complex spatial arrangements do not facilitate orientation, they are rather an intuitive and provocative look from the upper perspective at an unimaginable city in which buildings are piling up, exposing their roofs.

The buildings have several storeys giving them a megacity scale, creating a record of a monumental vision or even an apparition of a utopian city.

In the description of his online profile, the author introduces himself as the "Composer of worlds"<sup>11</sup>, which one should agree with.

The drawings stimulate the imagination and encourage the exploitation of the work. The context is surprising and diverse, and the scale is huge.

We find a somewhat different mood in Edward Dwurnik's paintings featuring diagonal streets and houses in rows that build housing estates or cities or even visions of cities. Like in the case of Sack, the viewer's upper perspective causes monumental feelings in the reception of the painted existing cities as well as the visions of unfamiliar cities. *The image of the cities borders on the absurdity, in its unending urban space, it is a one-way road in which, despite the simplicity of the direction, one cannot find oneself*<sup>12</sup>.

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<sup>10</sup> <http://www.robertfontainegallery.com/index.php?/artists/Emerging/ben-sack>.

<sup>11</sup> [https://www.instagram.com/ibensack/?utm\\_source=ig\\_embed&action=profilevisit](https://www.instagram.com/ibensack/?utm_source=ig_embed&action=profilevisit).

<sup>12</sup> I. Zuziak, *Architektura muzą malarstwa*, Wydawnictwo PK, Kraków 2009, p. 188.



III. 5. Benjamin Sack, *Garden in Thought*  
source: <https://www.bensackart.com/>

The visions of the cities created by Dwurnik and Stack are an intuitive record indicating their isolation and alienation. They constitute boundless concepts of forms known from history juxtaposed in an immeasurable scale. They remain in images as a metaphor of cities built

of human expectations and desires. But does the need to erect monumental architecture still exist? Looking for the answer, one can recall the debate titled *Why do we still need monumental art?* held by the Tate Modern gallery during the 2012 Olympics in London. As part of that event, the artist Anish Kapoor proposed a contemporary sculpture for the Olympic park. It is made of steel elements that make up a spatial structure of considerable height. The work in red towers over the neighbouring buildings. Referring to the medieval desire to erect a tower, achieve the impossible, reach the sky and the archetype of the Tower of Babel, the artist justifies the need to erect large and monumental buildings. This is a proposition of what a tower can look like these days.<sup>13</sup> The sculpture was to act like a magnet – a symbol of the district, which every tourist must see. The resulting work is not a straightforward building or a commercial toy. The spiral structure writhing upwards draws the viewer into an unobvious journey up. But does the form of the building bring to mind monumental architecture? This cannot be unambiguously confirmed. However, the work records the need to erect monuments, rationalizing the motives of its construction for commercial purposes. It seems, though, that monumental architecture has never needed pragmatic reasons for its existence because it was based on the feelings of a society erecting buildings and the intuition of the artists creating them.

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