

## **ARTISTIC EXPRESSIONS IN ARCHITECTURAL BUILDINGS IN NAIROBI**

**Robinson Onyango Manguro,**

Architect, Creations Consult Africa Limited, P.O Box 152, 00515, Nairobi, Kenya,  
[rmanuro@gmail.com](mailto:rmanuro@gmail.com), [rmanuro@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:rmanuro@yahoo.co.uk)

### **ABSTRACT**

Architecture is both an art and a science. There has been the old age theoretical question as to which one comes first: form or function. The science is recognisable in technological and functional aspects addressed in architecture but the artistic part expressed by the form is hardly recognisable in modern buildings. While we all agree that the artistic expression make architecture interesting, many of the modern day buildings have little regard for artistic expression. The design process has an effect on the resulting design and determines whether the function or form is highly regarded. There are some buildings that define the Nairobi city landscape and have an artistic expression and theory behind their design. This paper examines some of these architectural pieces and analyses their functional aspects as well as resulting artistic expressions. There is an analysis of the process involved in the development of the design of these buildings. It aims at pointing out the strong artistic expressions brought out by these masterpieces and reasons why they stand out amongst others. The design method employed by Architects in developing countries therefore needs to result in functional buildings as well as give the artistic feel that is lacking in many modern day designs that made architecture very interesting in ancient days.

### **Keywords:**

Artistic Expression, Form, Function, Concept, Design Process

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

The design process world over is evolving with new technologies and innovations. The Architect of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century cannot be compared to the architects of modern age, hereby referring to the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, in terms of the technology employed.

An architect ideally is meant to be involved from the brief development stage to the handover stage of a building. In the current times, Architects are seen to be taking up different roles in the design and construction process with some specialising in different areas. There are some who are purely in the housing sector; some have gone into urban planning while others are in project management. This research paper looks at the architect as a designer of spaces and more specifically buildings.

It is not easy to place architecture within the arts or the sciences. This is because it has an aspect of both categories of study.

The science is in such aspect of architecture as the building services, sound insulation and absorption, the thermal comfort levels and the functional aspects of the spaces being created in architecture. This cannot be complete without the expression and passion that comes with the form of the spaces that are being created and is mostly appreciated in the shell. It has to do with the aesthetic quality that is in these spaces. It needs an artistic mind to create such spaces. For this reason, an architect is best if he or she is both an artist and a scientist.

## **2 PROBLEM STATEMENT**

- There has been the old age theoretical question as to which one comes first: form or function.
- Form refers to the shell or cover appearance of a space. Function on the other hand is the practical usability of the various spaces.
- What guides the design of a building? Some architects design the building to function and fit a shell to it while others design the shell and cover artistically then force the functions to fit within.

### **3 DESIGN PROCESS IN EAST AFRICA**

In East Africa generally most of the architectural design work is carried out by architects in the private sector. The government projects are also carried out by private sector architects who are selected after a tendering process.

The architects meet with the clients and after understanding the client needs, develop a brief then goes into the design stage and other subsequent stages after approval and confirmation by the client. This process can be broken down as follows.

#### **Stage1 – APPRAISAL AND DEFINITION OF THE PROJECT (INCEPTION)**

- Receive, appraise and report on the client's requirements with particular regard to site information, planning and statutory requirements.
- Advise the client on the need for the appointment of consultants and procedures to meet his requirements including methods of contracting and on any supplementary service which may be required.
- Confirm in writing the client's instructions to proceed.

#### **Stage 2 – DESIGN CONCEPT (SCHEME DESIGNS)**

- Advised by any consultants appointed, prepare a design showing space provisions, planning relationships, standards of materials intended to be used and standards and suitability of services, in sufficient detail to enable the design to be approved by the client.
- Advise the client on the feasibility of the project as designed, the estimated cost, budget, time schedule and statutory requirements and on supplementary services.
- Confirm in writing the client's instructions to proceed.

#### **Stage 3 – DESIGN DEVELOPMENT AND APPROVALS**

- Incorporate any changes on the design by the client.
- After approval of the design, develop it sufficiently to co-ordinate the work and services of other consultants and specialists who have been appointed.
- Discuss the design with the statutory authorities concerned, and submit for their approval.
- Review the budget and time schedule.
- Confirm in writing the client's instructions to proceed.

#### **Stage 4- DETAILED TECHNICAL DOCUMENTATION**

- Prepare working drawings, specifications and other technical documents necessary for the execution of the project.
- Correlate the work of any consultants in the preparation of the documentation.
- Attend any regular progress review meetings called by the client, the form, frequency and duration of which are to be agreed to and stated in the schedule hereto. Unless otherwise agreed herein, where meetings exceed four hours a month, the excess ranks for charges under supplementary services.
- Confirm in writing the client's instructions to proceed.

#### **Stage 5 – CONTRACT ADMINISTRATION AND SUPERVISION**

- Call for tenders and/or negotiate the building contract where required.
- Advise the client regarding the award of the building contract and the
- Completion of Contract documents.
- Confirm in writing the client's instructions to proceed.
- Prepare the building contract documents and present same for signature by the parties thereto.
- Administer the building contract/s.
- Inspect the works. This form, frequency and duration of meetings and visits related to administering the building contract/s and inspecting the works will vary according to the nature and stage of the construction and the architect should clarify for the client the attention to be provided pursuant thereto, such to be stated in the schedule hereto.
- On completion of the project, provide the client with as-built drawings.

The 5 stages above have their influence on the outcome of the design with the first 3 having the most influence on the process. The paper will discuss some issues that determine whether an architect stresses more on the form or function.

#### ***Factors Influencing Design and Its Outcome***

##### **3.1 Client's Brief**

The resulting design is majorly a result of the client's needs and influence within the process. There are circumstances where the architect is used by the client simply as an advisor and the basic concept will have come from the client. Depending on the level of exposure and influence a client wields, the architect

eventually produces a design which (s)he and the client are happy with. In some circumstances, the architect ends up doing a design which he might not be so convinced with just because the client wants a design done in a particular way.

A client's priority is normally the function of the building. Most clients in E Africa, whether individual or corporate, stress on the function and are less concerned with the aesthetic value, mostly blaming it on cost implications.

### **3.2 Cost**

The amount of funding available for a certain project determines the resulting design. More often than not, designs which stress on form and aesthetics end up being a little costlier than the designs that stress on the functionality. Due to budget limits by the clients, the designers' creativity is limited as the clients are not willing to spend on aesthetic features.

### **3.3 Project Size**

Smaller projects have less opportunity for the designers to exploit their artistic skills and creativity as compared to larger projects.

### **3.4 Time Constraint**

With less time there is less stress on the creativity. This is mainly because designers take a considerable amount of time to exploit their creativity and it keeps developing with time. When proper design procedures are followed A design done over a long period is bound to end up with more creative design as opposed to one done within a short time.

### **3.5 Function**

The function of a building determines whether the designer can do artistic forms and expressions on it. The more formal buildings like government offices are less fancy in terms of exterior design. Schools and hospitals also require less fancy design so as to fit with the function. The less formal buildings like shopping malls normally exploit more fancy designs.

#### 4 CASE STUDIES

On the landscape of Nairobi, some buildings can be seen to stand out for their architectural features. These can be described as artistic landmarks within the city. This city gives an insight into three of the buildings that stand out to the author as architectural masterpieces and still providing logical and well functioning spaces. The buildings studied are all large scale architectural projects according to the East African standards in terms of both cost and size.



*Fig 1: Buildings Forming the Nairobi City Skyline*

##### 4.1 *Kenyatta International Conference Centre*



*Fig 2: The Main Tower of the KICC*



*Fig 3: The Auditorium with a Form Like the Traditional African Hut*

This is one of the most popular buildings in Nairobi. It is a major international conference which stands as a landmark in the middle of Nairobi City. Kenyatta International Conference Centre, was initially designed as a nondescript seven-storey structure meant to house a few Kanu(then ruling political party) offices. When the

architects took it to former President Jomo Kenyatta for approval, he trashed it and sketched another one on his notebook, featuring 28 floors and told them to re-draft the original.

David Mutiso, Kenya's first African architect, was part of the Ministry of Public Works architects who had designed the original seven-storey building, before Norwegian Ckarl Nostvick was called in to help plan the taller version.

### ***Artistic Concept***

The concept behind the conference centre is based upon the African forms of Architecture. The circular form of the African hut features very prominently in the main building which has the offices and the small conference hall on the side.

The colours employed by the designers are earth colours used in the traditional African architecture.



*Fig 4 and 5: The Traditional African Hut Form compared to the KICC*

### ***Planning and functionality***

From the master plan one can see the main areas existing in the Kenyatta International conference centre. These can be broadly clustered as the Main tower

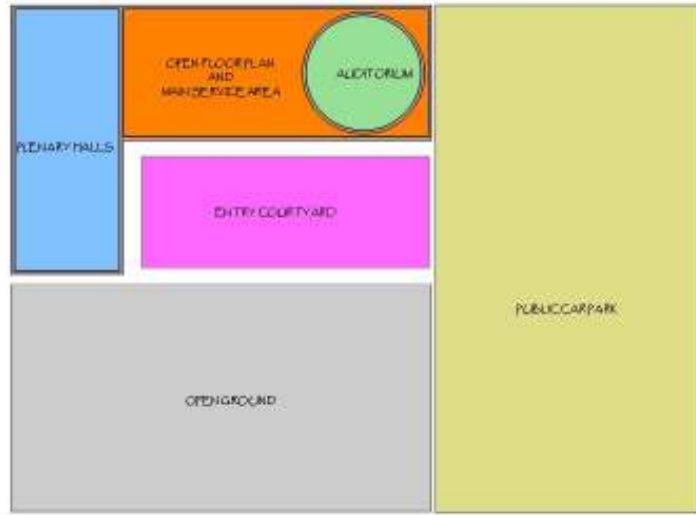
This is composed of offices, service areas and large the plenary halls at the lower levels. Apart from the main function of hosting international conferences, meetings and exhibitions, the complex serves as an office block. The offices are located on the main tower.

Auditoria

These are used for smaller meetings and round table kind of conferences.

### External spaces

This refers to the exterior spaces found in the centre. This space serves so many functions apart from the aesthetic qualities it accords the centres. Many social events in Nairobi like musical concerts, marathon start and finish points among others are held in this courtyard. There exists a large space which is normally utilised as a public car park.



*Fig 6: A Representative Plan of the KICC*

### 4.2 Lilian Towers

Lilian Towers is a building that is located in the centre of Nairobi City and is best known to house one of the prestigious hotels in the country.



*Fig 7 and 8: Comparison between Lilian Towers and the Original Concept, a*

### **Artistic Concept**

The building's architectural form is very symbolic and looked at closely can be seen to have derived from a maize cob. The bulging that can be seen on the exterior articulates the maize grains on a cob. The external finish is also white in colour and can be seen to mimic the breeds of maize that can be found in Kenya and larger East Africa.

### **Planning and functionality**

The hotel rooms are centered around an internal space within the building. The hotel rooms have windows on the exterior of the building and therefore accords wonderful views looking out towards the rest of the city.

### **4.3 Nation centre**

The building belongs to one of the most prominent media houses in Kenya, the Nation Media group. It stands at a very strategic position and its front elevation can be appreciated from a distance along Banda street. The building was designed in by

#### **Concept**

The clear concept that can be seen from the elevation is an African face mask with two eyes depicted by conspicuously large windows. The red antenna at the front which is majorly a decorative element depicts the nose. The alternating white and grey colours on the major façade further articulates the symbolic mask.

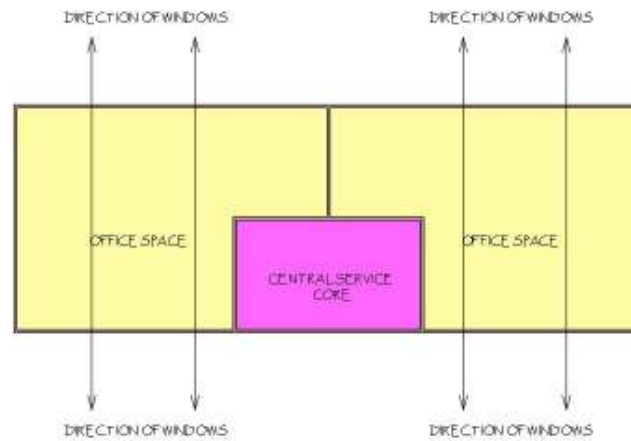


*Fig 9 and 10: The Nation Centre*

### **Planning and Functionality**

Apart from the owners, Nation media group, the building houses a number of offices and most notably, the Nairobi Stock Exchange offices is in this building. The media group has its newspaper offices, the radio and television station on this building.

The planning is typical of most office blocks in Nairobi. There is a centrally located service core with staircase, lifts and toilets and two large wings housing the main facilities like offices, and the television and radio studios.



*Fig 11: A Representative Plan of the Nation Centre*

## **5 CONCLUSION**

From the 3 case studies above, there is possibility of achieving a very artistic form while still providing functional spaces within the buildings. The buildings studied function pretty well and can be considered among the more functional buildings within the city while still giving Nairobi city the much desired aesthetic beauty. The two factors namely function and form need to be considered hand in hand and cannot be seen to compete against each other.

It can be seen that the resulting design is greatly determined by the process of design followed. A systematic design process as described above is good for the final product as it allows constant communication with clients and an assessment of the process.

The more informed clients appreciate both form and function of a building. Architects need to take control of the design process and act as professional advisors to the clients. This means that their professional input needs to be seen in the final design and implementation of a building project.

## **REFERENCES**

Benjamin A E., (2000) Architectural Philosophy: Repetition, Function, Alterity, Continuum International Publishing Group

Benton T, Benton C, Sharp D, (1975) Form and Function: A Source Book for the History of Architecture and Design 1890-1939, Crosby Lockwood Staples

Hille R. T, (1999) Form Function in Architecture, University of Michigan Press,

The constitution of Kenya, Chapter 525

East African Standard Newspaper, Thursday 9<sup>th</sup> October 2008