

## Karam's Animals in the City

**Peter Cook**, Chair of the Bartlett School of Architecture, London University College

Published in *The Giraffe, The Wild Cat and the Apparently Digested Objects*, Atelier Hapsitus, 1998

---

There is a sense of wry, controlled anarchy running through Nadim Karam's work. How else to define the unusual combination of motives that bring together the symbolic (but wily) animals, rhetorical (but practical) maneuvers with city structuring, theatrical surprises on the skyline (but perfectly consequential placement of related objects – a classic act of the architect)?

Karam has made doctoral studies in Tokyo and still visits there often. It is not a complete explanation, but it serves as a due to his comfortableness with the idea of combining humor with the normally serious: of including 'toys' with the straight-forward devices of building, road, wall, path, infrastructure, set piece. The Japanese include toy elements, even in the most serious of architecture.

In his lectures – and in his relations with his co-workers – he reveals himself strong enough to enjoy moments of despair or minor mishaps that actually occur in every artist's trajectory. He can improvise and re-rationalize in (dare one say) almost an English way: though again, the clue is likely to exist in his incorporation of that Japanese sense of laterality: lateral absorption of phenomena, lateral recognition of different values, lateral significance of widely different artifacts, and, again, humor.

Nadim Karam invents stories that are a healthy attack on the pomposity of our cities and our institutions. But he is well-organized, and, in the end, quite tough.

If I have dwelt upon his liberalism and openness: it is the highest praise I can offer, but he needs to be recognized for that criterion of the best liberal architects: the ability to edit and canalize. He has a good eye, which enables the family of animals, the storyline of the myth, the organization of paths, viewpoints, the composition of ensembles, all to be succinct.

He is a difficult architect-artist to categorize. He is unnervingly original. His work acts as a healthy antidote to the worthy and stuffy world of urbanism.