

# A Revelational Sign for Survival

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Countless Objects move sluggishly through the stagnant air, dragging behind them heavy shadows. Through the distanceless opaque air with lost perspective, the inane objects pass by, wearing pitiful expressions as though burdened with an inescapable destiny.

In Nadim Karam's world, performances begin like street theatre, without so much as the signal of a curtain rising. Proceeding at an unconcerned pace, he extends his stage to involve the surrounding people before they realize it. An initial glance reveals echoes of the solemnity of a religious drama; but from another perspective it recalls the aimless kind of life glorified in vaudevilles, as if to show us a shadow drama of the end of the world.

Freely changing his base from Beirut to Tokyo to Paris, this roving architect/artist is like a questing pilgrim in exile from his own country. He seeks life and death, and from these he goes beyond to pursue what could be called ultimately human themes. His mission is the sublimation of his personal expression of space. Arriving from a foreign land to the quickly changing city of Tokyo, he was very soon making appearances in Moscow and New York. He has also met with misfortune; at one time he experienced the terrible shock of being kidnapped in Beirut. The range of his work activity is wide; adding his vocation as an architect he has gone from stage art to the art of performance itself. Within his work, he constantly integrates his culturally critical viewpoints on humanity and the earth. Although technology has advanced to its present level of sophistication, and communications and transport have reached stages of refinement unimaginable by people pre-antiquity it should be obvious to anyone taking a step outside this civilization that the earth is in fact no more than a vessel for existence, and that it is barely supporting humans in their capricious aspiration for peace.

Nadim Karam's gaze when he regards many subjects – be they urbanism and the natural world or humanity and the ecological system – holds somewhere in it a sadness which is at the same time wrapped in a warm gentleness. The many things that unfold in the natural world under his eyelids, particularly the slow movement and the languid postures assumed by animals, overlap with the man-made modern world of cities and architecture. Taking shape through performance, this spectacle acts as a direct stimulant to our normally sleeping senses.

If one follows the train of his thoughts since he moved to Japan, his works appear at first glance to have been painted in the colors of romanticism; although on closer inspection display a manifest purpose and meaning. Take, for example, his theory of micropluralism, conceived in 1988. This work with Voltairean echoes is Nadim Karam's basic viewpoint of the modern environmental world; the inflexibility of a monistic doctrine versus the flexibility of pluralism. He criticized both doctrines, seeking a consummate emancipation, while at the same time expressing an artist's emotion in his plea for the continued existence of the systems we call earth and space. The act of architectural conception; the production of art works and the setting of performances; while being a clue for the creative occupations like those above, they themselves also overlap with what could be called visions for the salvation of humanity.

In July this year, Nadim Karam was invited to Nagasaki along architects like Shin Takamatsu and Funksas to coach at a workshop. The damage from the atom bomb half a century ago in Nagasaki, translated into the present, reveals a modern industrialized figure of urban desolation. This was the concern of his theme, and with the co-operation of the students the finished project was the perfect stimulus for the city's dormant potential. The topography surrounding the harbor of Nagasaki conjured the image of a crane, as did the form of the shipyards that cover the whole area with a forest of chimneys. This and all the associated ideas were brought together. The side that has a

beach falls into an established organic structure, and the recently reorganized region is heading towards the vision of a new city, giving the impression that it is about to take off in flight.

The architects who use the emancipation of humanity as a major theme incorporate various cooperative philosophic systems in the project; while humanity faces the future conducting kinds of reforms of consciousness inside which it tries to find its own place. At one time Gaudi modeled his spiritual architecture on a ship, establishing a magnificent epic poem theme within which are mingled the New and the Old Testaments. Alternately is the example of Buckminster Fuller who advocated 'Spaceship Earth', which is grounded on a much more rational system. It is the concept of a giant dome, in itself a system for the survival of the earth. No doubt in due course of time there will be someone who will devise of a container that will float in outer space. In addition there is Takamasa Yoshiaka, whose architecture integrates a strong power of organic unification, suggesting the image of the reed in the forest. As Yoshiaka showed; the "insect" and "grass" radicals of Chinese characters are ideo-graphic of architectural group consolidation as a cooperative body. A way of situating this in a larger context greatly merits investigation.

Nadim Karam will inherit the *métier* of this series of architects. However, he also possesses the magic of drawing people into his work through his own performances. We are reminded of this by the inclusion of the group of cows in the ceremonial funeral passage; the cosmic inspiration of the egg phenomena; the incineration of a picture in a sanctuary in space, and the ritual of regeneration.

While his special inspiration from now on will house ancient mystery somewhere within, it will also meet with the spearhead of the modern world. Or perhaps it is more appropriate to say that as the seed of potential power is uncovered, for the first time life will exist even in modern space.

The 20<sup>th</sup> century city spaces seem to have completely forgotten that the cities of the future should be endowed with many kinds of ceremonial passages. In housing communities, essential considerations like human birth and death have been neglected, office buildings are built solely to satisfy the needs of the time and give no thought to allow for small changes in people's conduct. To change this kind of amnesia, the alarm bell that Nadim Karam is ringing seeks to re-question the 20<sup>th</sup> century civilization, and intends to arouse awareness still further by his own actions.

Reading the series of messages in his works we are given afresh feedback on today's urban society, and we are assigned with a mission.