Post-War Collective
Community library and social recuperation, Ambepussa, Sri Lanka

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Summary by the jury
The project in the rural town of Ambepussa near Colombo, aims to reintegrate former soldiers into post-civil war Sri Lankan society. Coming from underprivileged socio-economic backgrounds, young men are trained in building techniques through their involvement in the construction of public buildings – as for example in the realization of the Community Library in Ambepussa. Respecting existing trees, the slender building sits lightly in the landscape and wraps around an inner courtyard, taking full advantage of cross ventilation and daylight use. Rammed-earth walls and recycled materials reduce the building’s ecological footprint.

Appraisal by the jury
The jury commends the intention of the project to focus as much on the building process as on the building as physical artifact. The combination of two objectives, pertaining to the term “building” both as verb and noun, celebrates a specific understanding of architecture, one derived from the very structure of its making. Greatly appreciated is the project’s vocational training aspect, which will contribute – beyond the immediate task at hand – to “capacity building” in a broader sense: the project would potentially heal collective wounds, build labor workforces, disseminate knowledge, foster sustainable development and strengthen social relations.

Image 1: 3D view of the proposed library. The single-story building mass spans nonchalantly across the landscape, touching the earth as lightly as possible. The building informally wraps around an internal courtyard that is also an extension of the external landscape. The placement of the building on site retains all existing trees, while its linear footprint allows optimized natural ventilation and brings in sunlight to all internal rooms; rammed earth walls provide thermal mass.

Image 2: The slip-form, rammed earth wall construction process is projected as an opportunity to transfer technology to locals and former soldiers. The subsequent training tasks are planned at an early design stage called “fabrication and training design”. Here, various components of the system and moldwork are delineated, the fabrication/training tolerances are defined, the production site (training ground), minimum module and sample labor gang (for training) are established, and fabrication steps are laid out.

Project data
Context Architecture, building and civil engineering
Client Sri Lanka Army, Sinha Regiment
Background Private commission
Planned start January 2014

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Image 3: Site location of the library: Extending the adjacent building scale, form and environmental meanings.

Image 4: Plan of the ground floor layout: Towards a serene flow of space across landscape.

Image 5: Building sections and elevations: Rhythm in formal organization, meaning in environmental response.

Image 6: Typical detail sections: Flexible, adaptable and robust building solutions.

Image 7: Building system organization: A systematically sustainable approach.

Image 8: Views across inside/outside: Building as a journey.

Image 9: Fabrication and training design: Steel roof truss.

Image 10: Labor up-skilling matrix: Steel welding and cutting skills.

More at www.holcimawards.org/projects/post-war-collective