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FORM FOLLOWS LOVE BUILDING BY INTUITION – FROM BANGLADESH TO EUROPE AND BEYOND

FORMA SLIJEDI LJUBAV
GRAĐENJE INTUICIJOM – OD BANGLADEŠA
DO EUROPE I DALJE

ANNA HERINGER, DOMINIQUE GAUZIN-MÜLLER



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Form Follows Love is a conversation between architect Anna Heringer and critic Dominique Gauzin-Müller that explores Heringer's practice, philosophy, and experiences across the Global South and North. The book presents not only built projects but also a worldview where sustainability, community, and creativity shape design. Heringer stresses that beauty in architecture has nothing to do with money but everything with creativity and love – a perspective resonating strongly with today's values as shown by her packed talks, prestigious awards such as The Aga Khan Award (2007) and The OBEL Award (2020), as well as exhibitions at MoMA, MAM and Venice Biennale.

We first became acquainted with the work of Anna Heringer in 2007 through a series of guest lectures titled "Beyond the Focus: Architecture of Giving". These two seasons' lectures were held at the Faculty of Architecture in Zagreb, which was organised by ARHlsquad, an association of architecture students focused on socially engaged architecture. The paradigm of socially engaged architecture that ARHlsquad aimed to present was particularly prominent at the beginning of the 2000s. The works of Anna Heringer and Eike Roswag, alongside Francis Kéré, Jason Coomes from Rural Studio, Emilio Caravatti, Jean-Philippe Vassal, and Peter Fattinger, were evident. They formed a group that offered a different perspective on the world and an alternative approach to architecture.

Nearly 18 years later, Heringer continues to nurture a deep sensitivity for such architecture, having expanded her practice into many realms: she produces her own *Dipdii Textiles*, has taught as guest lecturer at prestigious institutions including Harvard, and develops projects for local communities that positively impact the environment and society by valuing local potentials, materials, and knowledge. Her commitment to socially engaged architecture is influenced by her parents, who raised her with a strong awareness of environmental issues and through experiences in scout camps in the wilderness, as we find out in the first chapter on early inspirations. Her first and most significant building

project was realised at the age of 19 in Bangladesh, and its success and ingenuity testify to the values instilled in her upbringing and the project itself.

The central theme of her architecture – and of this book – is how architecture can have a positive impact on the environment and society. The narrative moves through her formative experiences in Bangladesh, the transfer of that knowledge to Europe, and the expansion of her practice into other spheres such as textile design, education, participatory installations, and activism. Throughout these phases, Heringer consistently builds what can be described as an architecture of love – one not focused on profit or spectacle, but on people, the environment, and collaboration. Her work demonstrates how architecture can positively impact both the environment and society by building with local resources to maintain ecological balance. She skilfully employs and amplifies centuries-old reclaim-reuse-recycle principles and strategies that are an integral part of Bangladesh's building culture.

The second chapter focuses on Heringer's formative experience in Bangladesh. During this period, she built several key projects: the Aga Khan-awarded METI School, the DESI Centre for electricians, where modern sanitary units were built in an earth house for the first time, homemade farmhouses for farming families, where two-story mud structures were tested to preserve agricultural land for food production, and Chwitter Sustainability Training Centre, where the claystorming design process was used. Claystorming is an innovative method that she developed with Martin Rauch, a pioneer in building with earth. This method is like a three-dimensional sketch, in which you get your hands on a big chunk of clay and start to work with it in a fast and intuitive way – testing all sorts of forms and scales, constantly reshaping the clay. In all these projects, knowledge durability mattered more than material durability. Architecture for development means leaving the knowledge behind instead of waste. Just as the ability to let go. When Heringer had to replace the bamboo elements of the school,

the local community accepted this intervention without resistance, informed by a Hindu cultural framework that embraces the concept of impermanence – the capacity to let go as an integral part of continuity and renewal.

The third chapter focuses on the transfer of knowledge from the Global South to Europe.

Heringer's main concern is that norms, standards, and certifications limit the sustainability she aspires to. She argues that it is precisely these regulations that prevent designing in truly sustainable ways, since there is no ethical justification for building differently in parts of the world where wealth makes any kind of resource accessible. The root of the problem, she believes, is fear – fear of impermanence, scarcity, personal limitation, mistakes, and, ultimately, fear of taking responsibility. This tension between rigid regulation and sustainable innovation is not unique to her work; architects worldwide face similar challenges. As Shigeru Ban points out, "Everywhere, people are happy when there's no clear standard for a particular type of structure, material, or construction detail. These gaps are happily exploited."

All projects presented in the book demonstrated the possibilities of building with natural materials using simple methods that continue local traditions, improve living standards, and maintain sustainability, inclusiveness, and intuitive design. Heringer does not abandon these principles in the Global North, nor does she accept the limitations imposed by regulatory systems. She does not conform to conventional boundaries of architectural practice, nor does she allow legal constraints to dictate the scope of her work.

The paradigm of socially engaged architecture has, over time, evolved into what may now be understood as an architecture of love. This practice constructs not only physical space but also cultivates human connection, community, and resilience. Projects rooted in such values are likely to shape the foundations of a future architectural era – one that prioritises sustainability, localised knowledge, environmental awareness, and participatory processes – all of which are more necessary now than ever.