

FAS

FOREIGN ARCHITECTS SWITZERLAND

ISLAMIC CENTER,
Zürich:
Competition Results!SANAA Rolex Center
Lausanne

I N S I D E !



Cities and Desire: 2nd Prize City

Arriving in Chirüz, you get the impression that you are in Zürich: the contours of its hills are similar, the form of the lake and river are the same, even the streets are in an almost identical constellation. But only upon closer inspection, walking through the city, you find that the buildings aren't the same as the ones in Zürich, each stranger than the next. For Chirüz is the city reflected in the water of the Zürichsee, the distorted, liquid twin to the concrete city.

In Zürich, competitions are held to decide on the built form of the city. They build the first prize entry, always selected by the jury as the stable solution that mediates the issues of site, program and construction with competency. But in Chirüz, they build the second prize entry: the jury's secret favorite, the strange, provocative or irrational project that causes too much political controversy; the lustful, wild lover that you can't take home to mother. The unfulfilled wet dreams of Zürich, brought to fruition in some remote province of China.

A MOSQUE FOR ZÜRICH.

We at FAS would like to believe that we were wrong in thinking that the minaret-ban exposed something about the true face of the country: racism and xenophobia tainted with western supremacy and a zest of manipulation. We would like to believe that the self-comforting and condescending argument we have heard many times about the minaret ban is true, that "People are not truly against minarets, they have been manipulated!"

If it is true that the minaret-ban was just that one-time hopeless reaction against world Islamist extremism (= terrorism) and only a delusion on the country's geo-political powers (a Swiss minaret-ban to combat terrorism?); if it is true that the minaret-ban only went through because shameless politicians, unconcerned with the interests of their fellow citizens but eager for power and fame, led the campaign -and by chance- won; and if it is true that the minaret-ban is not a first step towards other restrictions on the freedom of religion or further discriminations against one specific community; if all of this is true and if Switzerland wants to restore its image, then an Islamic Centre -a mosque- is the perfect move: a signal of peace, tolerance and hope for the world.

Placed on Zürich's most desirable site, the Kronenwiese, a disputed location for years, an Islamic Centre will solve decades of fruitless discussions and the 7000 m2 would be of better use than the 95 apartments that the city plans after competition (this year) for 55 Million CHF.

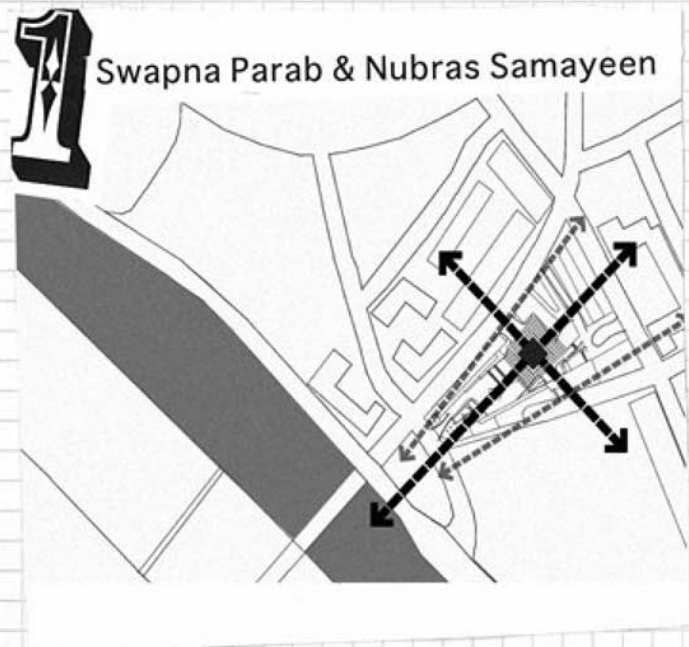
Consequently, and also because Swiss architects are asleep at the wheel, we at FAS launched the Islamic Centre competition. Hoping to catalyze a much needed discussion within the architectural community about cultural differences, we were pleased to receive such a plethora of thoughtful entries. Many, looking at 'integration' as a mutual exchange of information, found ways to bring Zürich into the Mosque, as well as bring the Mosque into Zurich. They challenged stylistic norms, some going so far as to suggest that religion, as well as architectural style, is bound to evolve in a changing cultural climate. It is no surprise that our entries came from all over the world, as Switzerland has recently become internationally notorious for this human rights issue.

Since local architecture platforms have been apathetic to their own problems, we at FAS recognize it as our responsibility to make voices heard, to open up to other cultures and mentalities.

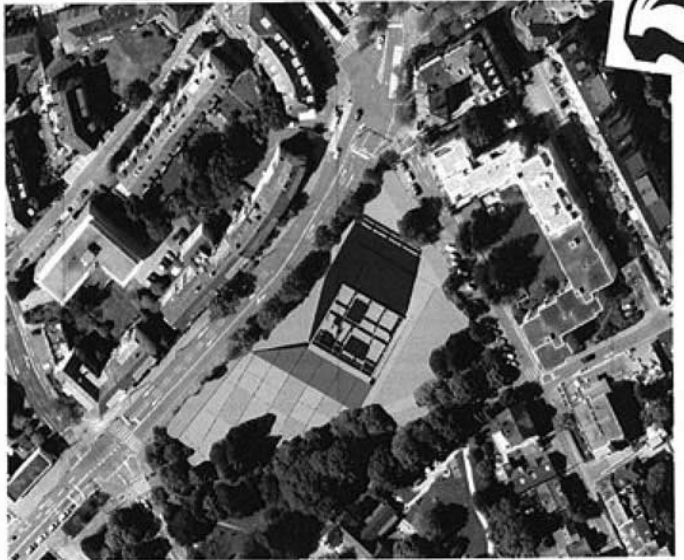
The success of our call reaffirms this need for discussion as well as a real desire for architects to interact politically.

Our next step is a move towards wider debate, deeper confrontation, and more real interactions. Therefore, we want to take the discussion outside of the architecture realm to the public forum and would demand the City Authorities to take responsibility and stand for a true democratic, tolerant and just Zürich: A city not only for Protestants bankers, catholic designers and Jewish seniors, not only for European hipster art students and Caucasians' depressed 'Kleinkindererzierin'; but also for Muslim single cooks, Shias family mothers, Bangladeshi busboys, Albanian cops and Turkish architects.

If not for them, do it for your banks and your hostages.



2 Hall/ OBSTRUctures

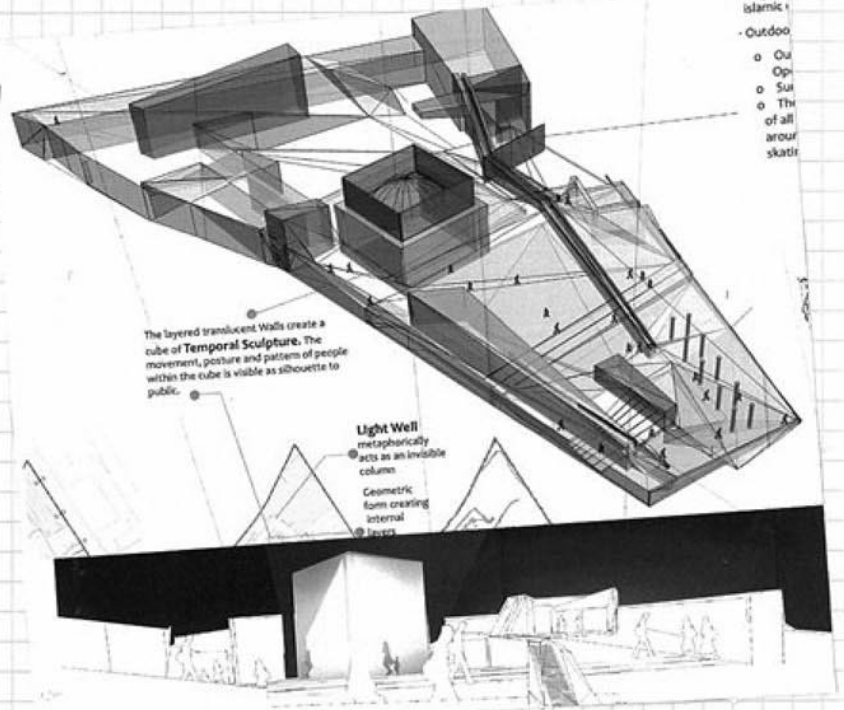


3 Frei+ saarinen



1st Prize

Directing energy towards a network of landforms, rather than built objects, this project succeeds in creating inviting spaces, somehow a peace offering between disparate factions. In lacing the site with an encyclopedic collection of Islamic metaphors, we were particularly interested that the "Paradise Garden" was somehow pious and secular at the same time. A Trojan Horse, it does not present its power outright; one could imagine being in the middle of this Islamic Center without even realizing it. The park avoids an unnecessary discussion about architectural style and minaret by focusing on urban strategies rather than architectural clarity. One could imagine it very well as the next 'Place to be' in Zürich.



2nd Prize

Stopp? Idealize? Regress? Imitate? Rationalize? Disguise? Bury? Rethink? Topple? Intert? Veil! Void! This project proposes that the Swiss minaret ban necessitates a reconceptualization of the minaret, and Islamic practice, in Switzerland: the "minaret" becomes an observation deck and prayer space on the top floor. However, its fortress-like appearance depicts an image of solidarity and singularity, introspective towards its site. Although menacing and undiplomatic, we found it to be symptomatic of a situation, that Islam is at odds with its surroundings in Europe.



3rd Prize

Ceci n'est pas un minaret

In rewriting the program, this 'Brave Swiss' mixes routine commercial space with the functions of the Islamic Center. In Zürich, where real estate is always in demand, it is particularly exciting to imagine that members of the conservative SVP (Schweizerische Volkspartei) might find their new headquarters looking out into a minaret-void. Ironically, the office tower and minaret are both symbols of power; their combination suggests that Switzerland's love of commerce outweighs its fear of Islam.

