

Block N15 Façade, Olympic Village

**REF 2014 submission
by Níall McLaughlin**

Project Details

Author:	Níall McLaughlin
	Níall McLaughlin realized this project through his practice Níall McLaughlin Architects.
Title:	Block N15 Façade, Olympic Village
Output type:	Building
Function:	Housing
Location:	Stratford, East London
Client:	Olympic Delivery Authority
Practical completion:	April 2011
Budget:	£18 million (N15 cores E&F)
Area:	9,200 m²
Main contractor:	Lend Lease
‘Chassis’ architects:	Glenn Howells
Pre-cast concrete:	Techrete
3D scanning:	Sample and Hold with Tom Lomax
Windows/doors:	Dane Architectural Systems
Balconies:	CMF
Lightweight cladding:	Dane Architectural Systems
Structural Engineers:	Robert Bird and Hilson Moran



**Statement about
the Research Content and Process**

General description

The project is part of the wider regeneration of Stratford for the London 2012 Olympics. Níall McLaughlin Architects were appointed to design a façade to clothe a building core developed by Glen Howells Architects. The façade is arranged as a grid of relief castings, which sample fragments of the Elgin Marbles. The panels were produced from digital scans of the scenes from the original frieze in the British Museum, enlarged and re-cast in concrete.

Questions

1. To ask how architecture can convey meaning within the abstracted and Taylorised methodology of contemporary procurement structures.
2. To explore themes of representation and decoration for the two projected lives of the building, one as an embodiment of the temporary festival event and one as a permanent addition to the fabric of the city.
3. To explore the use of digital software and fabrication to produce cladding panels for a multi-storey building.

Methodology

The research methods for the project were wide ranging and included:

1. Text-based research to examine the history of the making and dispersal of the Parthenon Frieze.
2. Analysis of nineteenth and twentieth century modes of representation (Semper, Botticher, Nash, Krauss, Warhol, LeWitt).
3. Experimentation with new styles of drawing to communicate research ideas through spreadsheets and time-based scores.

4. Experimentation with digital methodologies for scanning and enlarging sections of the Elgin Marbles.
5. Working through prototypes to refine the manufacturing process for the façade panels.

Means of dissemination

The façade for Block N15 has been the subject of a refereed article for *Archithese* (2012) and several lectures by McLaughlin in the UK and the University of California, Los Angeles, USA. It has been extensively reviewed in the architectural press, including in the *Architectural Review* (2011) and *Architects' Journal* (2011).

Statement of Significance

The façade for Block N15 was the winner of the British Precast Concrete Federation Creativity in Concrete Award (2012).





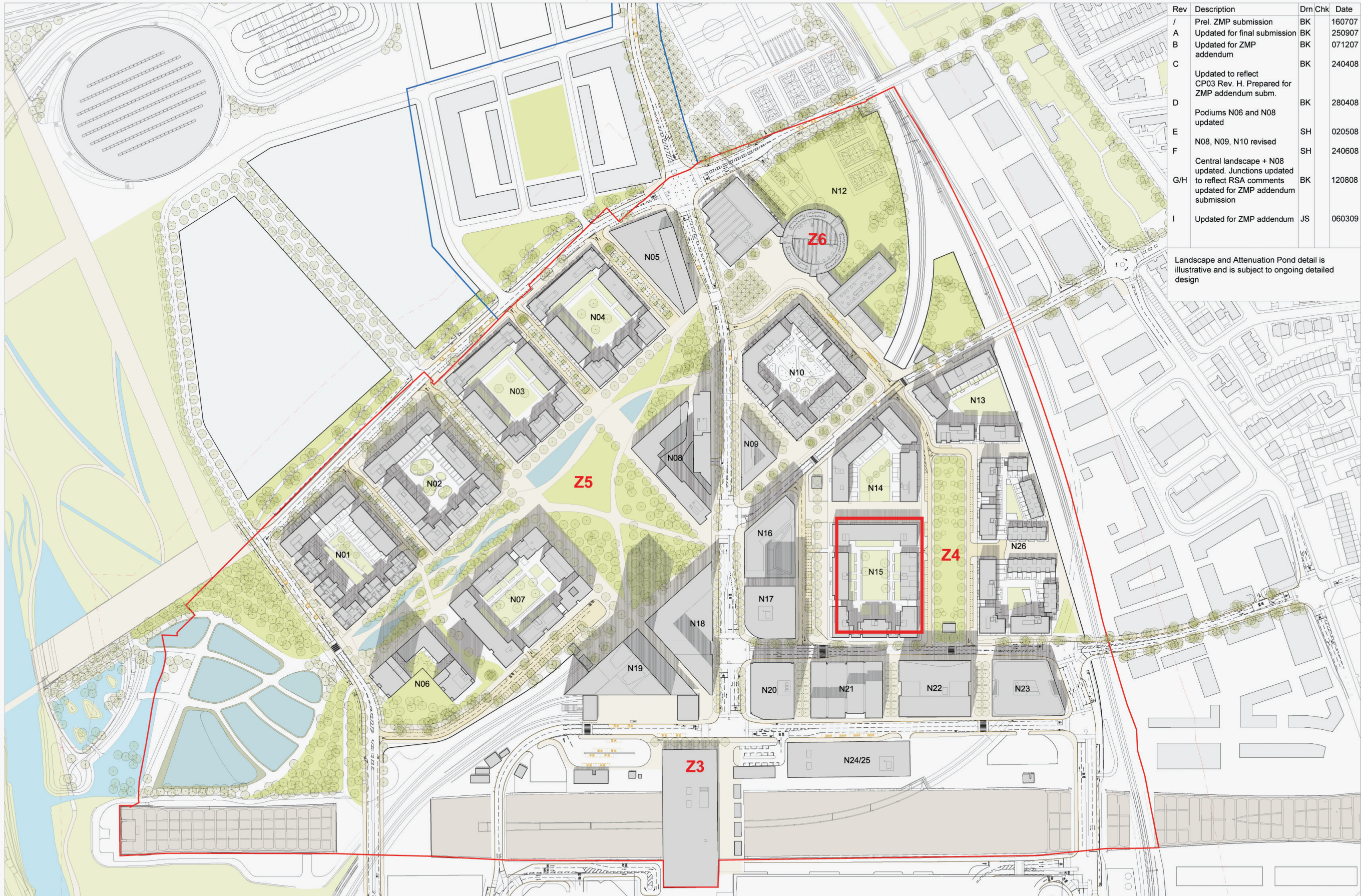
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Introduction

The athletes’ housing for the London 2012 Olympics was designed to a standardised model with an identical internal layout, structure and services for all 2800 homes. The uniformity was a means of creating maximum efficiency for the developer Lend Lease, who had undertaken to deliver the Olympic Village for the Olympic Development Authority. The developer took on the money and time risks and expected to make a profit on their investment of capital and expertise. However, the Olympic Development Authority also wished to promote its own values through the process. London’s bid to house the games had been in part successful because of a commitment to use the infrastructure of the games to create a new urban quarter. There was discomfort as to whether such standardisation would leave behind a

positive urban legacy and a desire that the Olympic Village would be a shining demonstration of good design to the rest of the world. In response, Lend Lease instructed their architects to appoint practices as sub-consultants to design façades for the already standardised ‘chassis’. [fig. 1 – 5]

Against this backdrop, Níall McLaughlin Architects were commissioned by Glen Howells Architects, to design the façade for Block N15. The practice celebrated the paradox at the heart of this commission with a façade arranged as a grid of relief castings, which sample fragments of the Elgin Marbles. The panels were produced from digital scans of the scenes from the original frieze in the British Museum, enlarged and re-cast in concrete. [fig. 6]



Rev	Description	Drm	Chk	Date
/	Prel. ZMP submission	BK		160707
A	Updated for final submission	BK		250907
B	Updated for ZMP addendum	BK		071207
C	Updated to reflect CP03 Rev. H. Prepared for ZMP addendum subm.	BK		240408
D	Podiums N06 and N08 updated	BK		280408
E	N08, N09, N10 revised	SH		020508
F	Central landscape + N08 updated. Junctions updated to reflect RSA comments	SH		240608
G/H	updated for ZMP addendum submission	BK		120808
I	Updated for ZMP addendum	JS		060309

Landscape and Attenuation Pond detail is illustrative and is subject to ongoing detailed design



Aims and Objectives

This research project for the design and construction of the façade for the athletes' housing was an attempt to express the dilemmas of architecture associated with modern building culture. There is an ideal of a society that draws upon its own local resources to make buildings through shared labour and consequently these buildings manifest the possibilities and limitations of available materials and represent commonly held ritual practices. The procurement of the Olympic project held up a mirror to how far removed modern building culture has shifted from this position. The façade for Block N15 aimed to attest to the premise that the contemporary architect must rely on a form of irony in order to practice. This

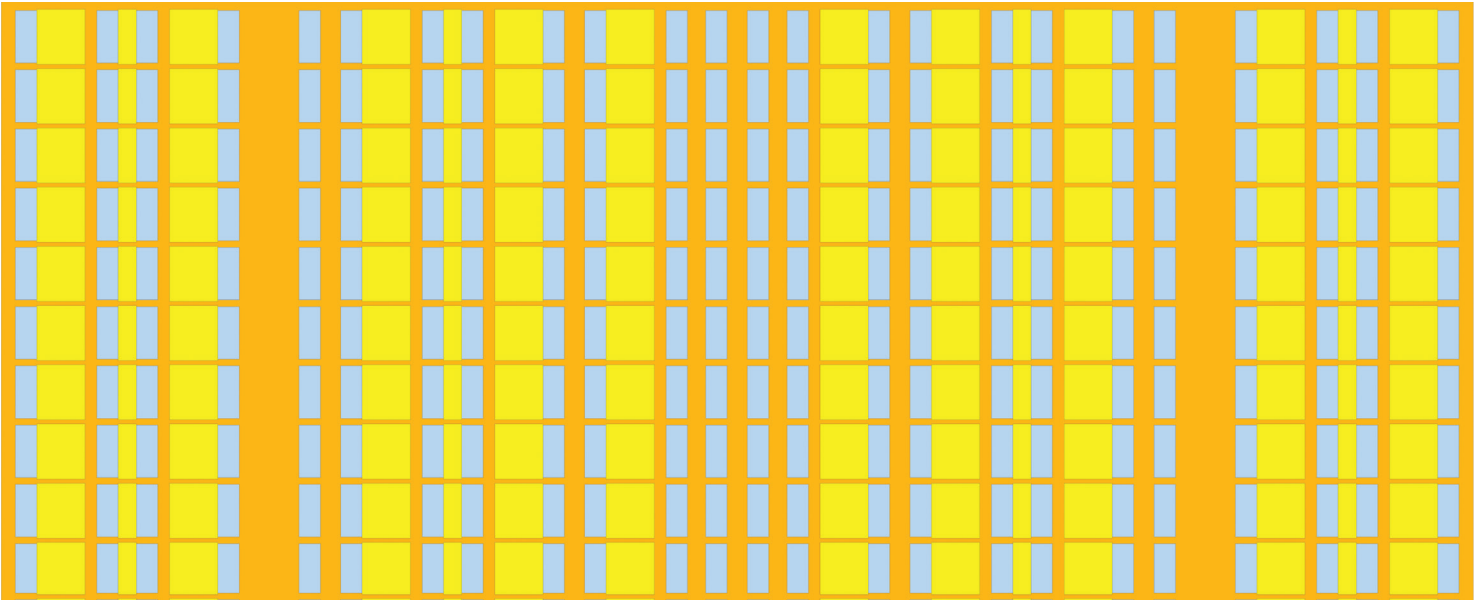
seems to be an authentic mode of representation for the present day. Fernand Hallyn describes irony as “a representation of reality whose eventually fictive nature I recognise, but which I decide to employ as if it corresponded to reality” (Hallyn 1993). In conjuring the horsemen on a screen we did not claim that they embodied a better, prelapsarian age; in arranging them within a grid we offered no authority to origins or order. The project aims to ask how an architect today might continue making pieces of the world without a common consensus about what that world should represent. An answer, in the words of Samuel Beckett, might be, “you must go on, I can't go on, I'll go on.” [fig. 7a & b]



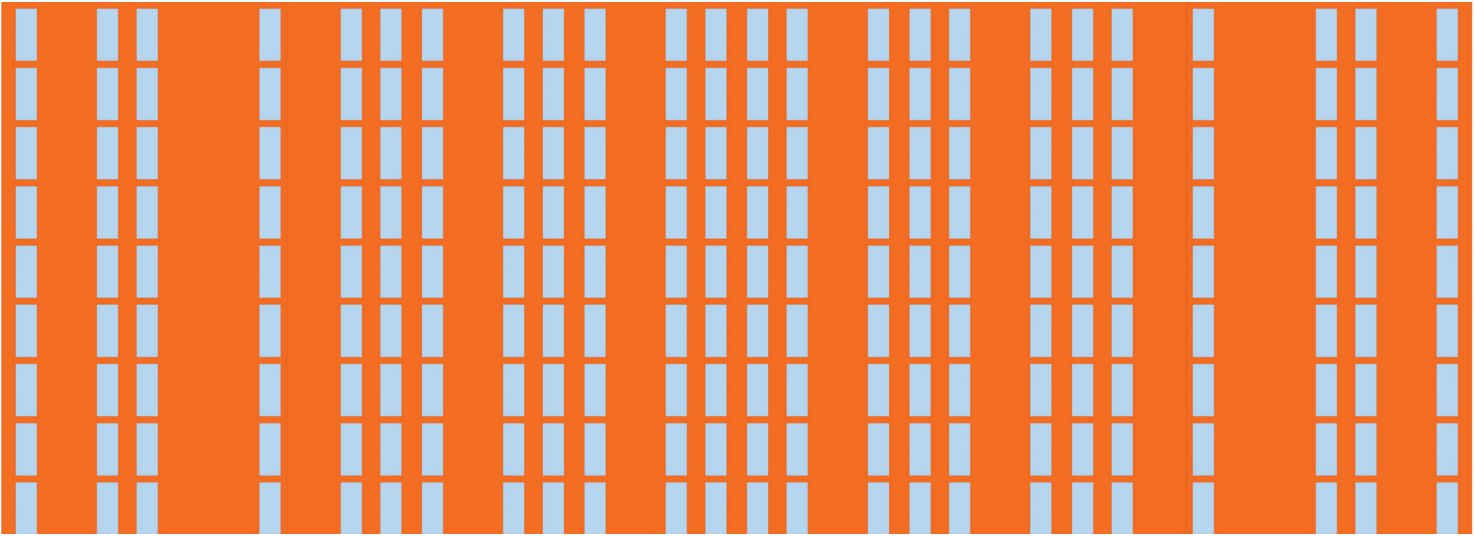
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5
The façade on the
standardised chassis.

6
A façade panel.



7a North Elevation

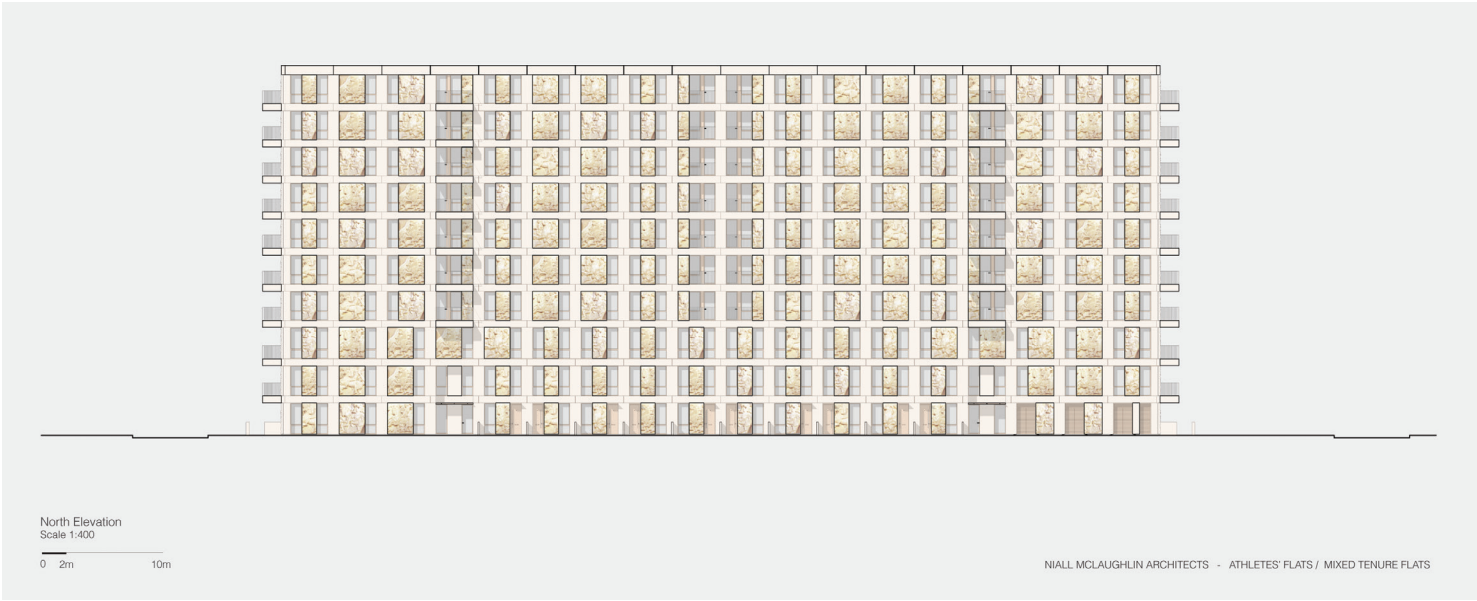


7b South Elevation

7a & b
Níall McLaughlin Architects,
spreadsheet drawings of the
south and north elevations
of the Athletes' Housing.

11
North elevation drawing.

12
East elevation drawing.



11



12

Questions



13

To ask how architecture can convey meaning within the abstracted and Taylorised methodology of contemporary procurement structures.

We accepted the commission to design only the façade of a pre-ordained building core-form because we recognised that it offered an opportunity to deal with a very clear example of a condition that is increasingly common in building construction; the separation of design and construction into an abstract system of component tasks and the precipitation of the representative part of architecture onto the thin layer of the building's perimeter.

The method of separating the design of structure from that of the skin, illustrates a coming together of cultural aspiration and rational management practices. On the one hand, the celebration of athletic achievement is seen to have its correlative in celebratory built form but, on the other, the prominence of the development necessitates that it is produced in a way that exposes the final client to the lowest financial risk. It is evident that one aspiration requires a celebration of particularity and difference, while the other leads to a highly normative system of design delivery. Social modernism is characterised by this kind of marriage of capital and social values, which creates

a particular working tension in the development of buildings that is comparable to two characters running a three-legged race.

The project offered an opportunity to ask how architecture can convey meaning within this Taylorised methodology of contemporary procurement structures. We sought to understand and represent this particular condition equivocally in a way that understood its origins, freedoms and difficulties. [fig. 8 – 12]

To explore themes of representation and decoration for the two projected lives of the building, one as an embodiment of the temporary festival event and one as a permanent addition to the fabric of the city.

The development of the Olympic Park as a whole was designed in such a way that it would make a festive statement for the big event but have a longer life as a new urban quarter with housing for a mix of tenure types. The project challenged us to explore appropriate forms of representation for the two projected lives of the building, one as an embodiment of the temporary festival event and one as a permanent addition to the fabric of the city.

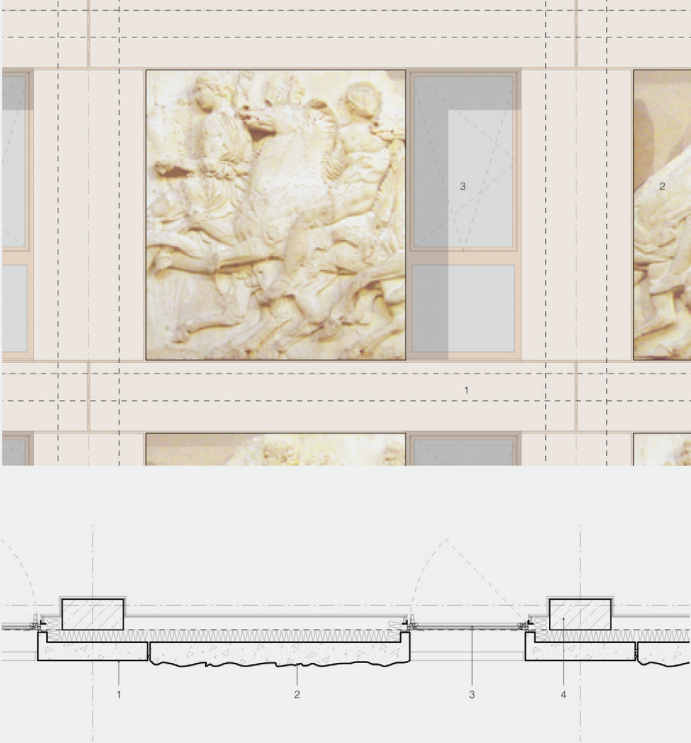
We chose the dispersed fragments of the Parthenon because they seemed to embody these paradoxes of

13
Young man dressing in a himation, west frieze, slab XLVII, British Museum.

14
Folding away the peplos, east frieze, slab V, British Museum.



14



Typical Bay Plan and Elevation
Scale 1:40
1 Pre-cast concrete panel
2 Pre-cast concrete panel with a 50mm relief
3 PPC aluminium double glazed tilt and turn window unit
4 RC in situ concrete frame
0 0.4m 1m

NIALL MCLAUGHLIN ARCHITECTS - ATHLETES' FLATS / MIXED TENURE FLATS

8



37



Selected panels from the Parthenon Frieze

NIALL MCLAUGHLIN ARCHITECTS - ATHLETES' FLATS / MIXED TENURE FLATS

10

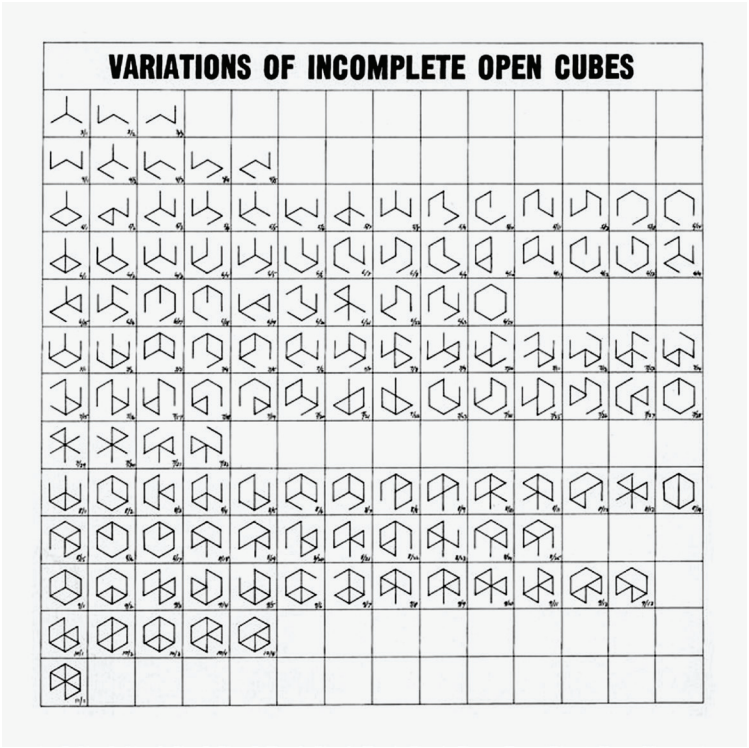
8
The skin of the façade.

10
Selected panels from the frieze.

37
Façade panels.

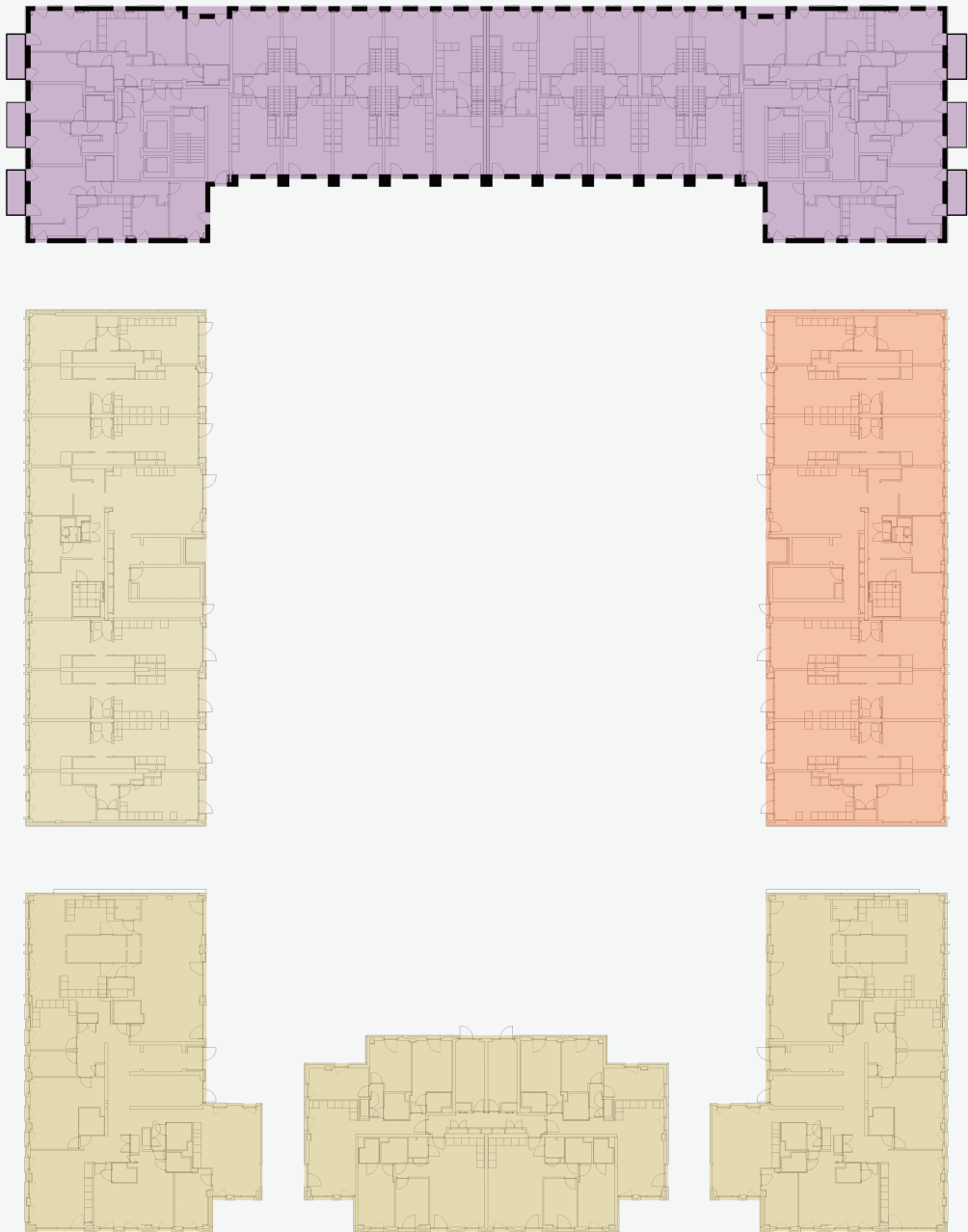


16



17

- 15
The grid of the façade.
- 16
Andy Warhol, *Marilyn Diptych* (1962)
- 17
Sol LeWitt, *122 Variations of Incomplete Open Cubes* (1974).



Block Layout Plan
Scale 1:500

■ Glenn Howells Architects
■ Niall McLaughlin Architects [Facade Architect]
■ Piercy Connor Architects

0 5m 15m

NIALL MCLAUGHLIN ARCHITECTS - ATHLETES' FLATS / MIXED TENURE FLATS

representation. The subject matter of the frieze relates to a wider research interest in the history and significance of the screen in architecture, through the writings of Gottfried Semper. The Panathenaic procession that the frieze depicts was an event dedicated to dressing the cult statue of Athena with a veil called the peplos. For Semper the underlying frame of a building is dressed, or bedecked, in a fabric which bears representations of the hidden construction and the ideals of the society that brought it into being (Semper 2004). In dressing ourselves, we show what we would like to seem to be. What Semper suggests is what the theatre of the Panathenaic procession enacts; we make masks and representations and we become what they are. [fig. 13 & 14]

For the dressing of Block N15 we hoped that in subjecting these figures to the grid of the pre-ordained building core we would emphasise their deracinated character, and also make something strange and beautiful. We wanted them to attest to the proposal that architecture does not need to suppress paradoxes. It can represent them. [fig. 15]

The use of repetition and the grid were key aspects of the project. We studied examples of twentieth century architecture and art that emphasize the grid and the role of repetition in their production and final manifestation, in particular works by Andy Warhol and Sol LeWitt. [fig. 16 & 17]

To explore the use of digital software and fabrication methods to produce cladding panels for a multi-storey building.

For the production of the cladding panels a thorough process of digital scanning, editing and pre-cast manufacturing was followed. This is explained in detail under the section Methods.



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9
Ground floor plan (block N15 in purple).

19
John Nash, Regent's Park, London.

20
The Athenaeum Club, London.

Context



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25

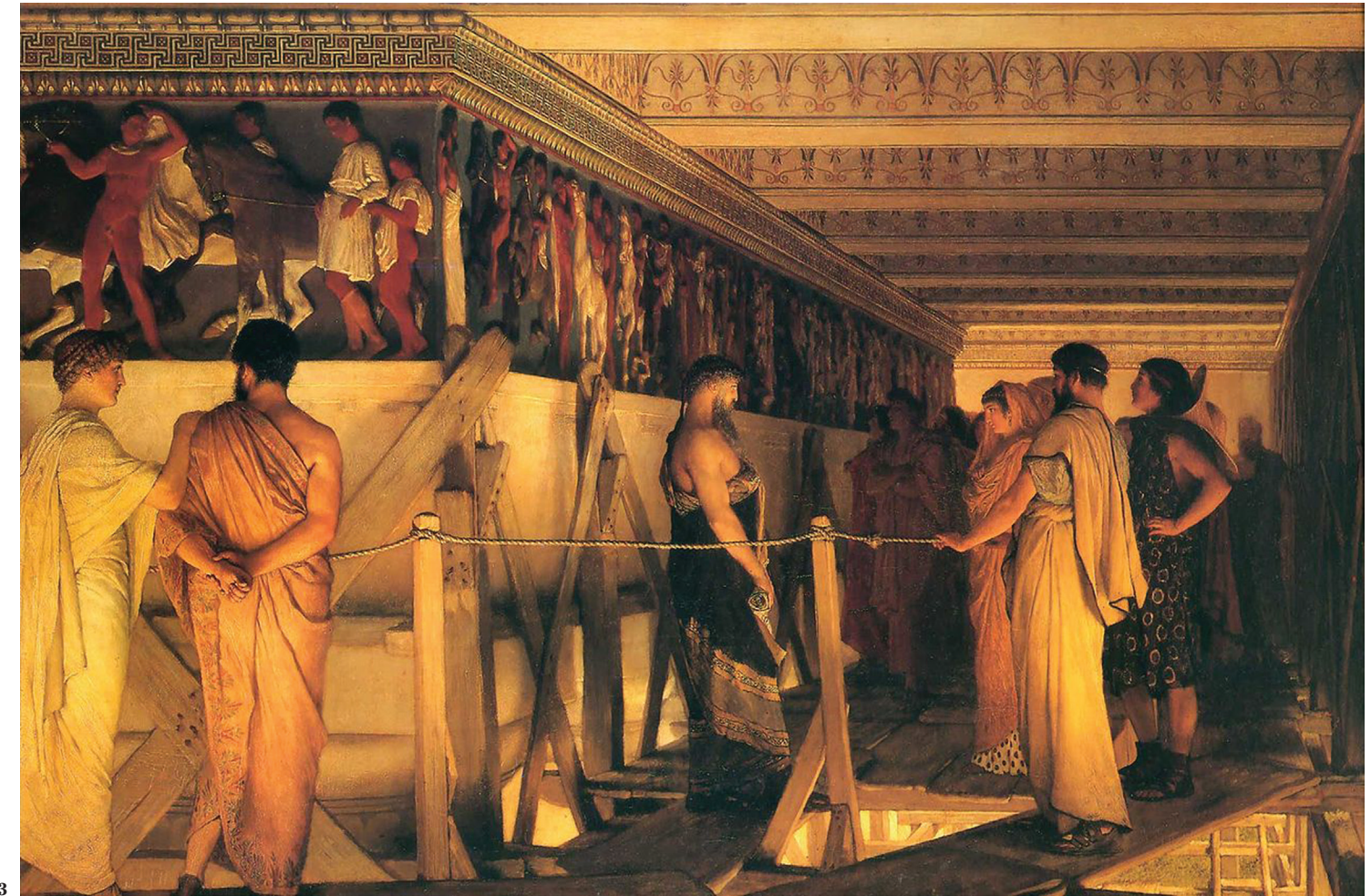
The history of the Parthenon Stones provides the framework and context for this research. The stones have been re-used and re-imagined in this project to reflect the themes of representation of the day. In charting the history of the stones we tried to develop a position for architecture to hold meaning within the contemporary context. [fig. 18]

The fragments of the frieze, once in a detached state and scattered round the world, held enormous power to carry new significations. In the nineteenth century, the arrival of the Parthenon Stones in London coincided with a crisis in the debate between original figurative sculpture and architectural form. Just as individually commissioned monumental sculpture was disappearing from public buildings, mechanically reproduced casts were becoming more technically sophisticated and more common. The nineteenth century architects, who made London anew, adorned their plain housing stock with gimcrack casts of these antique sculptures, creating an absolute separation between the intrinsic properties of the construction and a representational system embodying the aspirations of an emerging middle class. [fig. 19 & 20]

For Le Corbusier in the twentieth century, the Parthenon was the refined coming together of separate fragments, honed to perfection by abstract selective processes. The famous pairing of the Parthenon with an automobile in Le Corbusier's *Vers Une Architecture*, published in 1923, invites us to find

a common spirit between the conception of this ancient temple and the perfection of a modern wonder of engineering. The Parthenon is a machine for moving the emotions. With this image and others Le Corbusier strips the Parthenon of its complex authorship, its entanglements in the loam of its origins and its identity as the built manifestation of rituals. He replaces it instead with an abstract system of parts held up against a generalised idea of nature. For him, the spirit of Taylor and Henry Ford was alive in the Parthenon. [fig. 21 & 22]

We saw the contemporary power of the Parthenon, not in its becoming, but in its dissolution. The deep, contingent connections of community and place that allowed this building to emerge and change through generations were broken when it was treated as an abstraction. It was idealised and deracinated all at once and, broken into pieces, it entered the modern age. The modern avant-garde conceived of an impossible fictional garment for buildings, which was perfectly transparent. However, that fiction of transparency, or honesty, is more and more difficult to sustain in a system where technical demands delaminate the building's materials into increasingly specialised layers and where Taylorised management separates design into discrete particles of expertise. At the same time, there is no stable external order of figures that can claim to embody the ideals of an increasingly attenuated society. [fig. 23 – 25]

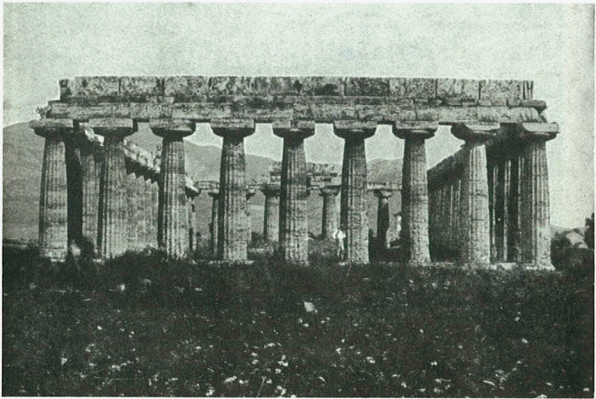


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24
The Parthenon Stones in the
Duveen Gallery, British Museum.

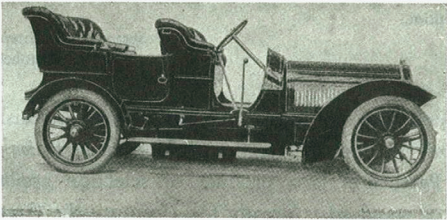
25
Clothing the façade.

23
Sir Lawrence Alma-Tadema,
*Phidias Showing the Frieze of
the Parthenon to his Friends*
(1868).

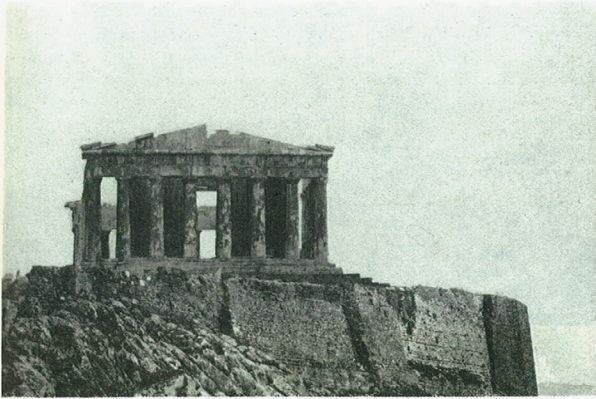


PAESTUM, 600-550 B.C.

When once a standard is established, competition comes at once and violently into play. It is a fight; in order to win you must do better than your rival *in every minute point*, in



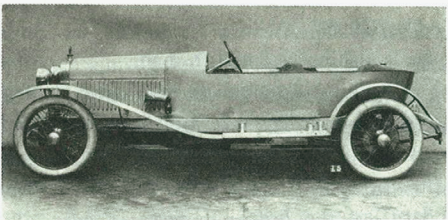
HUMBER, 1907



THE PARTHENON, 447-434 B.C.

the run of the whole thing and in all the details. Thus we get the study of minute points pushed to its limits. Progress.

A standard is necessary for order in human effort.



DELAGE, "GRAND-SPORT," 1921



THE PARTHENON

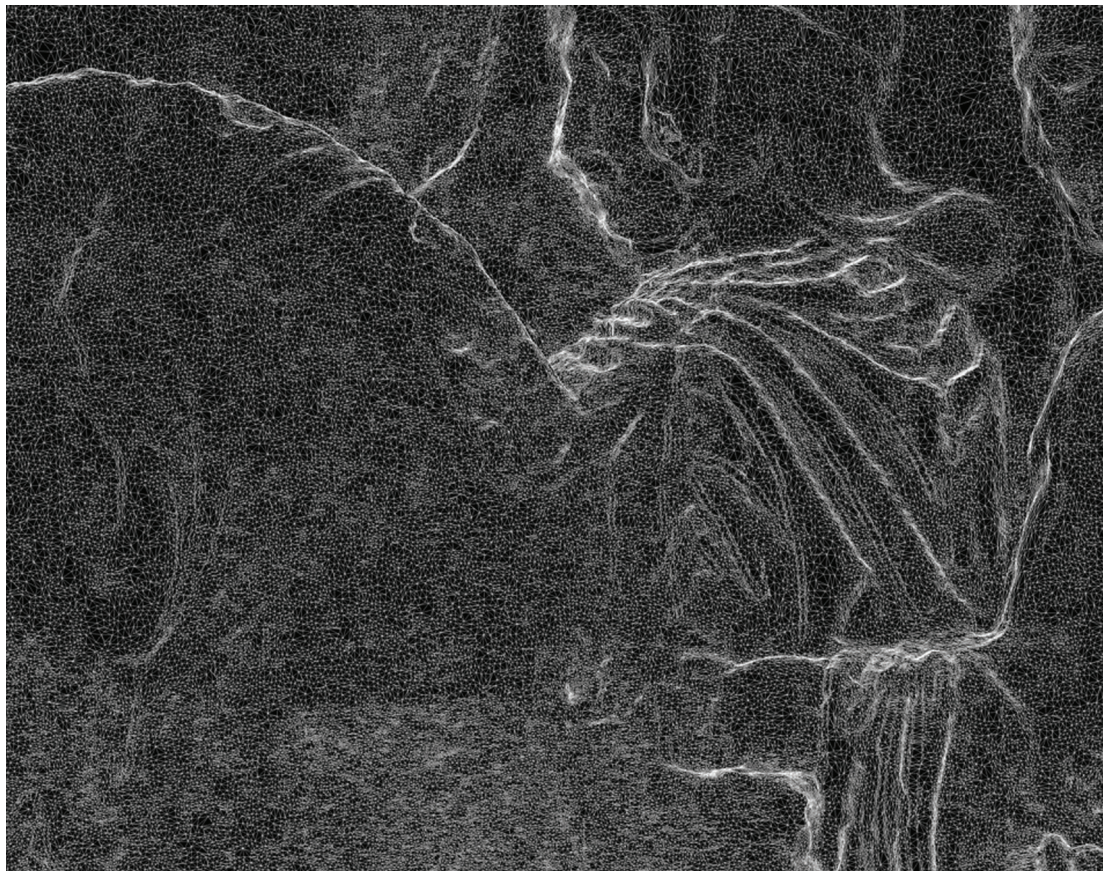
ARCHITECTURE
III
PURE CREATION OF THE MIND



18
Parthenon damage under bombardment by Morosini. Drawing by G.M. Verneda, 1707.

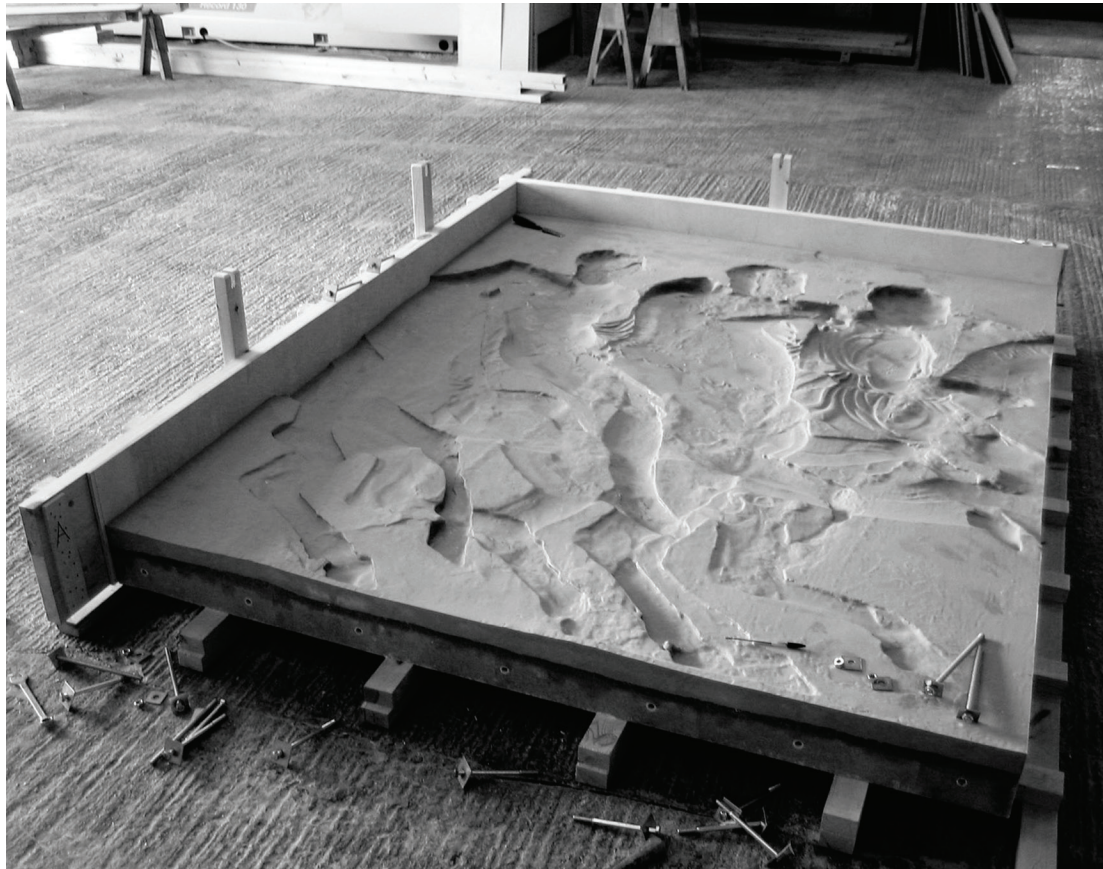
22
'Architecture. Pure Creation of the Mind.' Le Corbusier, *Vers Une Architecture*.

21
Le Corbusier's pairing of the Parthenon with an automobile, *Vers Une Architecture*.



31

31
The 3D digital scan.



32

32
Negative rubber moulds of the frieze sections.

Methods

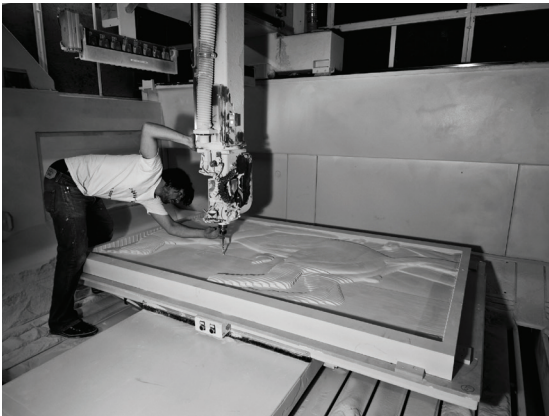
The research methods for the project were wide ranging and included:

- 1. Text-based research to examine the history of the making and dispersal of the Parthenon Frieze.
- 2. Analysis of nineteenth and twentieth century modes of representation (Semper, Botticher, Nash, Krauss, Warhol, LeWitt).
- 3. Experimentation with new styles of drawing to communicate research ideas through spreadsheets and time-based scores.
- 4. Experimentation with digital methodologies for scanning and enlarging sections of the Elgin Marbles.
- 5. Working through prototypes to refine the manufacturing process for the façade panels.

The project offered the opportunity for new forms of technical research as we explored the best means for translating the fragments of the frieze into pre-cast cladding panels. First we digitally scanned the chosen fragments of the frieze. A standard projector cast gridded and striped patterns on to the stones and

a tripod mounted SLR digital camera then recorded the patterns crossing over the surfaces. This data was relayed back to the laptop, where a 4D Dynamics program converted it into legible 3D digital surfaces. The scans were pieced together using Rapid Form software. [fig. 26 – 30]

We edited the files in our office. It was necessary to work out a viable ratio between the depth of the relief and the surface of the panel. The new panels are ten times the surface area of the older stones but the depth of relief available was the same. We altered the model to get rid of any inward sloping surfaces on the upward-facing edges, to avoid weathering problems. In addition, we set a datum and surface texture for any gaps where the stones had been broken or cracked, leaving a void in the originals. [fig. 31]



33



34

33
The 3D surface routed into high-density foam blocks.

34
The panels awaiting transportation.

35 (overleaf left)
Níall McLaughlin Architects, ornament for King's Cross Central development, project ongoing.

36 (overleaf right)
Níall McLaughlin Architects, view of apartments for King's Cross Central development.





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27
Digitally scanning the frieze.



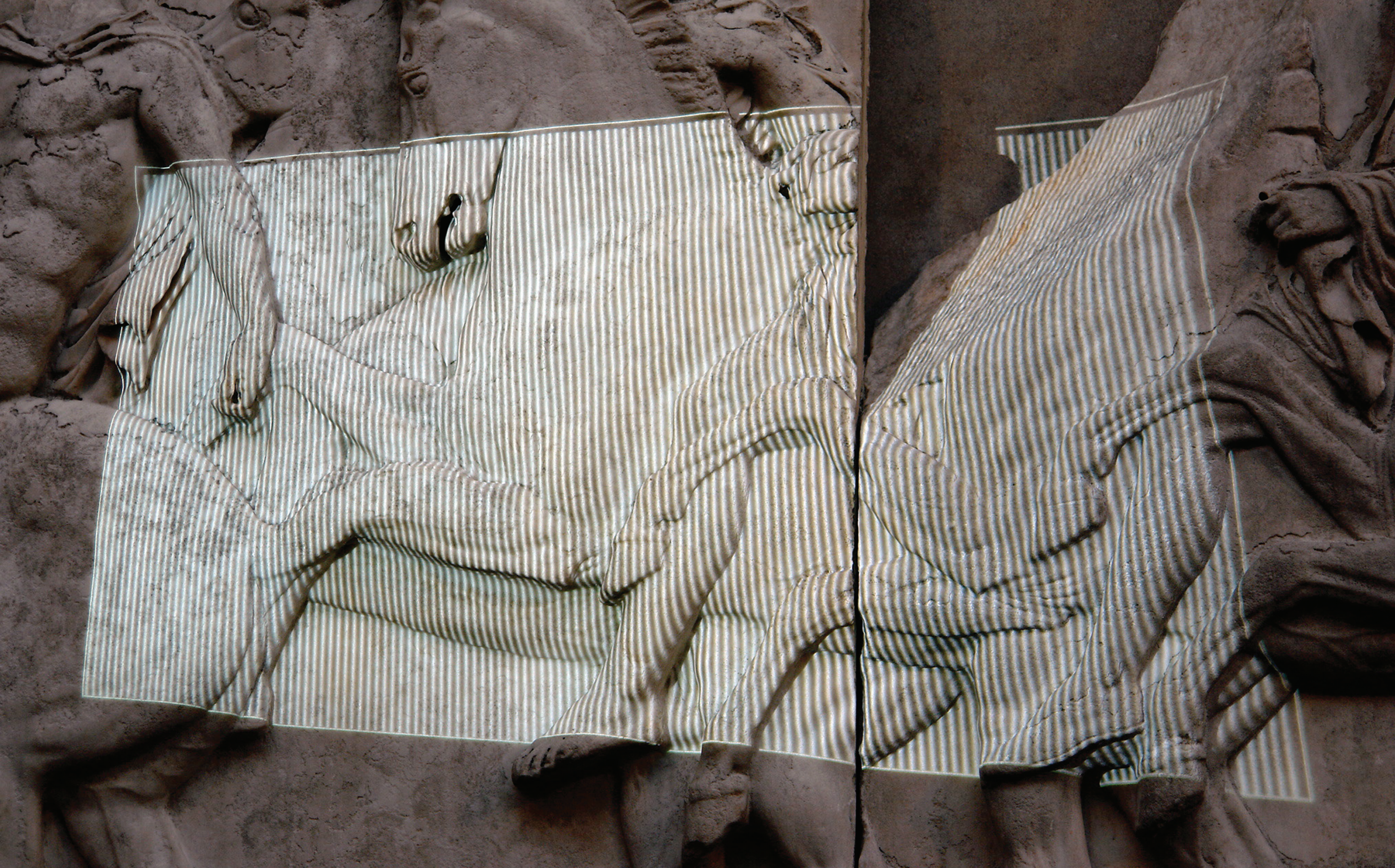
28



29

28 & 29
Scanning the stones in the
British Museum.

30 (overleaf)
Digitally scanning the frieze.



The digital information was exported to Metworks, a 3D digital manufacturers, who used Master CAM software to convert the information into tool paths for a CNC routing machine. This modelled the 3D surface onto high-density foam blocks. The positive relief panels were assembled into storey-high panels by gluing sections together and were then taken to Leicestershire where the company Patterns & Moulds used the high-density foam to make rubber latex casts. The digitally manufactured positive had been converted into a latex negative. [fig.32 – 34]

The pre-cast panels were made by Techcrete in Lincolnshire. The concrete mix was specified to closely match Portland Stone. Each concrete panel was cast with one horizontal and one vertical section of the framing grid attached. Thus the production process beautifully undermined the conventional separation of frame and panel. The panels were cast in sheds but moved outdoors into yards after a few days of indoor curing. They formed long enfilades arranged in rows like a waiting army.

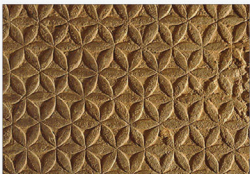
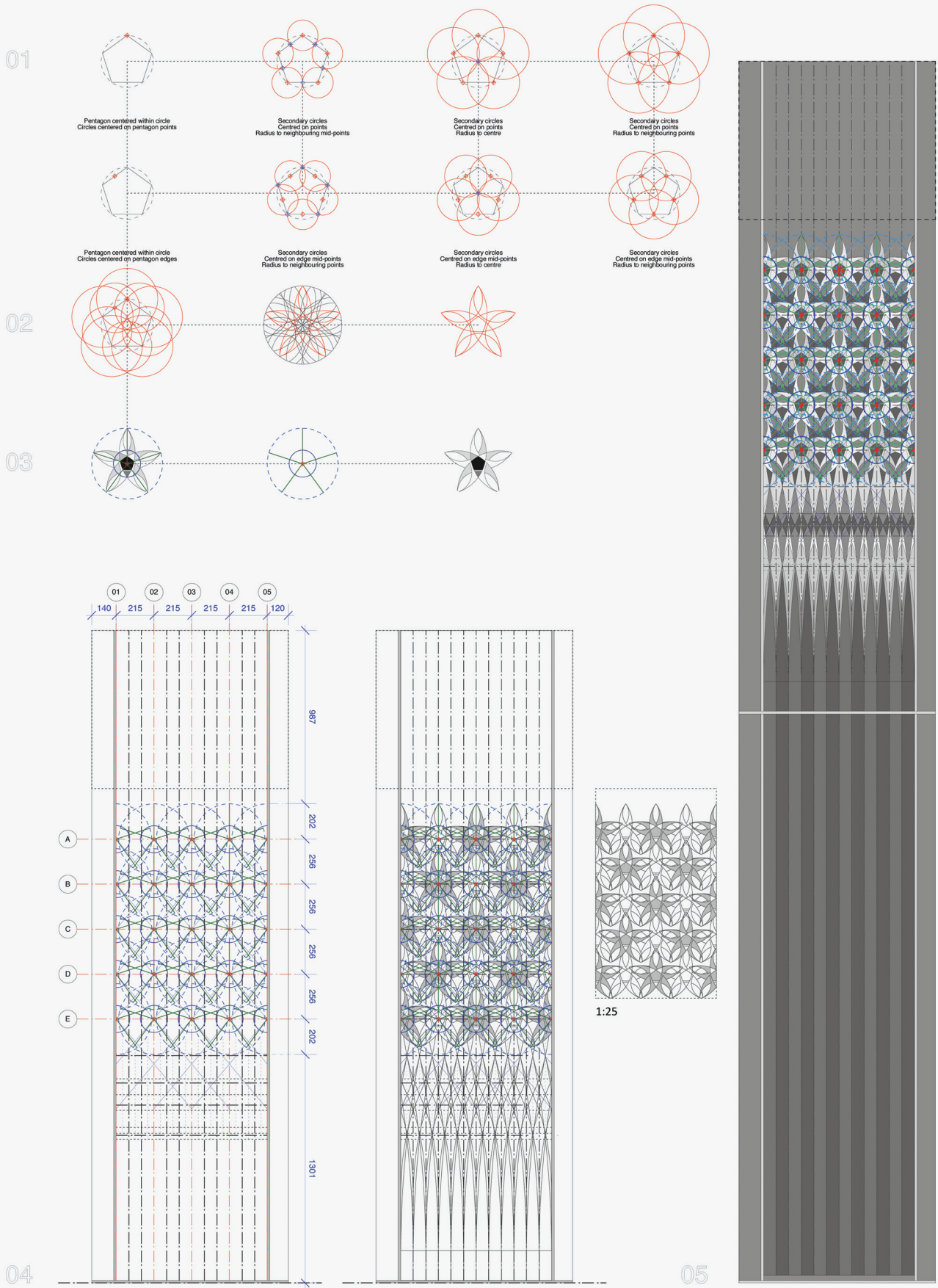
Dissemination

The building itself has been widely reviewed both in the architectural and national press. The research has formed the basis for a refereed journal essay, entitled ‘Peplos’, published in the journal Archithese (2012). The technical research methods developed in this project, using digital media to produce innovative 3D architectural surfaces, are being further developed in a new project for King’s Cross Central, the new development by Argent. [fig.35 & 36]

McLaughlin has spoken on themes of representation and the Olympic project, both in the UK and in the United States as an invited speaker at University of California, Los Angeles:

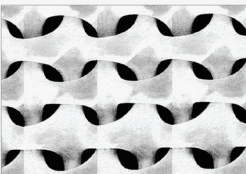
- Níall McLaughlin, ‘Tapestries’, University of Bath (April 2013)
- Níall McLaughlin, ‘The work of Níall McLaughlin Architects’, University of California, Los Angeles (March 2013)
- Níall McLaughlin, ‘Authority’, University College London (March 2011)
- Níall McLaughlin, ‘Figures’, University College London (February 2011)

Capital - Floral Element, 1:20



View of No. 1 Canal Reach Apartments

Looking towards the tallest point of the beak, one can see the relationship between the woven quality of the balconies and the chevron fluting of the pilasters that culminate in a floral abstraction at the Capital.





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The research process relied on the following texts:

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Appendix 1

Related publications by the researcher(s)

pp. 46–51
Niall McLaughlin, ‘Peplos’. *Archithese* (June 2012): 52-57.

PEPLOS

The Dissimulating Façade The ephemeral event of the Olympics mediated to a global audience is mirrored by the buildings of the Olympic village and their surfaces that communicate with the urban public. This thin layer has become the powerful screen to which architecture is often reduced and yet it is still a layer of potentials.

“Irrational thoughts should be followed absolutely and logically.”¹

Author: Niall McLaughlin

In 2007 London won the bid to host the 2012 Olympics. In part, the bid was successful because of a commitment to use the infrastructure of the games to create a new urban quarter. It was important that this great transient event would have a permanent impact on what was perceived as a run-down part of the city. The decision to use the Olympics as a spur to develop an enormous area of the city is a manifestation of a particularly modern condition. This six-week festival, experienced by billions of people on television around the world, was to leave behind a place, which would be the permanent home for a large urban population. The fugitive, flickering event witnessed on countless screens was intended to leave a residue of permanent built form that will frame people’s lives in the future. It must become ordinary, embodied, and close-knit.

The long-term ambition to build a grand new urban realm was naturally telescoped by the immediate requirement to have a working development in place by 2012. The Olympic Development Authority (ODA) exported their obligation to build houses for athletes by employing the experienced private developer Lend Lease to carry out the work. The developer took on the money and time risks and expected to make a profit on their investment of capital and expertise. Naturally they wanted to build the houses as cheaply and quickly as possible in a way that maximised their margins. However, the ODA also wished to promote its own values through the process whereby the development of the Olympic Village would be a shining demonstration of good design in which many young architects could showcase the best of British talent. In light of this, the ODA created an overseeing committee, the Design Review Panel, to regulate the developer’s management of the process so that these values could be guaranteed.²

The Design Review Panel, working with the Architecture Foundation, carried out a competitive selection procedure to choose eighteen architectural practices to design the athletes’ housing. Lend Lease did not want to work with such a number of practices all trying to solve the same problem, so instead they chose four architects out of the group because they had demonstrated previous experience in the large-scale production of urban housing for commercial developers. This small group designed the “chassis” for all 2800 homes in order to produce a standardised internal layout, structure

and services for each of the blocks across the whole 27-hectare development. However, the Design Review Panel wanted to create a greater urban variety as well as a broader range of opportunity for architectural practices, so they insisted on a larger pool being used. In response, Lend Lease instructed their architects to appoint other practices as sub-consultants to design façades for the already standardised chassis.

This arrangement illustrates a coming together of cultural aspiration and rational management. On the one hand, the celebration of athletic achievement is seen to have its correlative in celebratory built form but on the other, the prominence of the development necessitates that it is produced in a way that exposes the final client to the lowest financial risk. It is evident that one aspiration requires a celebration of particularity and difference, while the other leads to a highly normative system of design delivery. Social modernism is characterised by this kind of marriage of capital and social values in which capital is used as an engine for growth but it is moderated to embody social aspirations through legislation, governance and specification. The hobbling of the free operation of capital through legislation in order to protect social values creates a particular working tension in the development of buildings that is comparable to two characters running a three-legged race.

When Glenn Howells, one of the chassis architects, asked us to participate as sub-consultants on his team we accepted. We recognised that the commission to design only the façade of a preordained building core-form offered an opportunity to deal with a very clear example of a condition that is increasingly common in building construction – the separation of design and construction into an abstract system of component tasks and the precipitation of the representative part of architecture onto the thin layer of the building’s perimeter. We were reminded of Kenneth Frampton’s characterisation of a contemporary dilemma.

“Modern building is now so universally conditioned by optimised technology that the possibility of creating significant urban form has become extremely limited. The restrictions jointly imposed by automotive distribution and the volatile play of land speculation serve to limit the scope of urban design to such a degree that any intervention tends to be reduced either to the manipulation of elements predetermined by the imperatives of production, or to a kind of superficial masking, which modern development requires for the



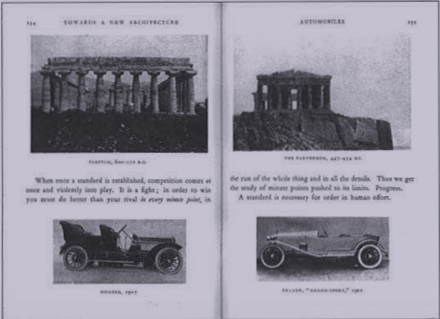
1

facilitation of marketing and the maintenance of social control. Today the practice of architecture seems to be increasingly polarised between, on the one hand, a so-called high-tech approach predicated exclusively on production or, on the other, the provision of a ‘compensatory façade’ to cover up the harsh realities of the universal system.”³

Le Corbusier's Hymn to the Parthenon

There is a new, project management-led, risk-averse culture that is changing the nature of construction in the UK. Innovative forms of procurement put an increased level of responsibility for the completion of construction documents onto the contractor and the specialist. The corollary of this is that the role of the architect in determining the final design, during detailing and construction, is diminished. Buildings are increasingly conceived of as assemblies of approved, manufactured products, rather than individually crafted entities. The diminished new role offered to architects has the effect of distancing them from both the user and the maker. The traditional role of the architect in overseeing the design and construction will be delegated to management specialists, who focus on isolated particles of the whole reality of the building. It is, in effect, the application of Taylorism to the design process.

Taylorism is a broad range of scientific management techniques applied to manufacturing, associated with the nineteenth century engineer Frederick Winslow Taylor who pro-



2

posed the Taylor System. He advocated an analysis of work processes leading to the division of labour into discrete standardised entities that could be completed with maximum efficiency. The role of integrating these tasks belonged to a new echelon of workers known as planners whose job it was to synthesise the divided components into a new unity. It seems clear that the managed division of the architectural conception of the buildings in the Athletes’ Village into a broad master plan, detailed masterplan, followed by chassis, façade and detailed component design, each carried out by different practices and integrated by a team of project managers, represents the promotion of Taylorism from manufacture into design itself.

The ideological aspect of Taylorism was very attractive to an emerging group of avant-garde architects in the 1920s. They saw the systematic organisation of labour in the production of buildings as an essential component of the modern Zeitgeist. Le Corbusier first read Taylor’s *Principles of Scientific Management* in 1917 and gradually became convinced of the rational underpinning of this systematic approach. He advocated that “in order to BUILD: STANDARDIZE to be able to INDUSTRIALIZE AND TAYLORIZE,”⁴ Corbusier, Gropius and others saw it as the architect’s task to conceptualise mechanical and manual processes and synthesise the manufactured particles into meaningful built form. In the Taylorised process Corbusier wrote, “a strange foreman directs severely and precisely the restrained and circumscribed tasks.”⁵ What they did not appear to see was that the same process of division and specialisation could equally be applied to their own activities. The “strange, precise, severe foreman” need not be an architect. Architects with their manifestos, aesthetic cults and liberal training might not be suited to the dispassionate management of a systematic process. Architectural design could itself be divided, specialised and procured at the lowest unit cost for every operation.

The famous pairing in Le Corbusier’s *Vers une Architecture* of the Parthenon with an automobile invites us to find a common spirit between the conception of this ancient temple and the perfection of a modern wonder of engineering. The Parthenon is a machine for moving the emotions “la machine à émouvoir.”⁶ In his description, they are both products of selection. The car is a systematic assembly of machine-manufactured parts, each optimised by rational processes. The Doric Temple is also an assembly of basic components such

1 West elevation, athletes’ housing, olympic village (Photo: Niall McLaughlin Architects)

2 Le Corbusier’s pairing of the Parthenon with an automobile, *Vers Une Architecture*



Archibald Archer, *The Parthenon Stones in the Queen's Gallery*, 1819
The Parthenon Stones in the Queen's Gallery
Fragments of the Parthenon in the Queen's Gallery (photos 5–9: all by the author)

as columns, entablatures and metopes; they equally have been perfected through a process of selection and specialisation.⁷ Le Corbusier made another drawing of the Parthenon in *Vers une Architecture*. He drew the horizon and the dark silhouette of the Acropolis. The profile of the trabeated form of the Parthenon is set against the luminous backdrop of the sea. It is at the centre of a broad horizontal stripe that passes right across the drawing. This isolated figure is his "pure creation of the mind".⁸ With these images, Le Corbusier strips the Parthenon of its complex authorship, its entanglements in the loam of its origins, its finely negotiated relationships with its situation and its identity as the built manifestation of rituals. He replaces it with an abstract system of parts held up against a generalised idea of nature. For him, the spirit of Taylor and Henry Ford is alive in the Parthenon, "a product of selection applied to an established standard".⁹

Mrs. Coade's Manufactory

By the time Le Corbusier idealised the Parthenon it had become a ruin, stripped of most of its carvings and left isolated amidst the wrecked remains of its previous setting. The arrival of the Parthenon Stones in London, following their removal from the Parthenon under instruction from Lord Elgin, coincided with a crisis in the debate between original figurative sculpture and architectural form. Just as individually commissioned monumental sculpture was disappearing from public buildings, mechanically reproduced casts were becoming more technically sophisticated and more common. The success of Eleanor Coade's *Artificial Stone Manufactory* on the South Bank of the Thames from 1769 onwards is testament to a thriving industry in mechanically produced ceramic stoneware. This change in both cultural attitudes and technical capacity was reinforced and complicated by the writings of JJ Winckelmann, who held that the way for the modern age to achieve greatness was through literal imitation of the Greeks.¹⁰ Joseph Rykwert, observing this phenomenon, suggests that the Parthenon carvings were seen as nonpareil and therefore incapable of improvement.¹¹ He writes: "At the same time, mechanically produced casts were becoming increasingly common and accepted by architects as a near antique surrogate."¹²

Nash's original development of the villas around Regent's Park set the standard, for better or worse, for a form of urban development based on thin housing stock clothed in a scen-

ographic layer using the mechanical replication of antique sculpture in cast-stone and stucco. John Summerson, paraphrasing Rasmussen, describes Nash's villas as "not only a dream of antique architecture" but "just as much a finance-fantasia over risk and profit."¹³ These new developments in urban design, initiated in Paris and London, mark a significant shift in the relationship between building stock, public space and the way in which meaning was represented. They are associated with changes in society emerging from the Enlightenment. New building types were needed to cater for the boom in commercial and administrative activity and they required a form of architectural representation that set them apart from the old idea of the city centred on the court and the church. The wholesale import of an idealised Greek culture and the mechanical replication of its representations was consistent with a culture that linked commercial realism with a desire to emulate a perceived golden age in public life. Here is an early manifestation of the hobbling together of cultural improvement and bottom-line methods.¹⁴

The ease of manufacture of mechanically produced decoration made it accessible for all kinds of house building in the rapid development of London. Redgrave, in his 1851 Supplementary Report on Design for the Great Exhibition, wrote about the "sickening monotony"¹⁵ of decoration produced by machine. His most telling comments relate to the relationship between cheapness and excellence.

"It is this merely imitative character of architecture which so largely contributed to decorative shams, to the age of putty, papier mâché, and gutta-percha. These react upon architecture; and, from the cheapness with which such ornament can be applied and its apparent excellence, the florid and the gaudy take the place of the simple and the true."¹⁶

So, when imitation, produced cheaply, creates "apparent excellence", it is a sham. The queasiness at the heart of this proposition touches a key aporia in the development of Modernism. The period of the Enlightenment and the early Industrial Revolution are characterised by the application of rational systematic thought to the natural and human world. The figurative tapestry woven of images, stories and received truths that was stitched back into a hinterland of ancestral authority and had underpinned society is replaced by abstract reasoning, which does not in itself yield an embodied alternative. What resulted was the sense of a flight into emptiness. In architecture, the agreed external order,

whether religious or natural, which a building could imitate, no longer had implicit authority. This created a tendency for architecture to appeal, not to a fixed external correlative, but to its own materials, processes and procedures. This is how something of apparent excellence can be described as a sham. What it lacks is integrity in how its materials were handled in the process of its becoming. Meaning is something turned in on the thing itself.

A Great Blankness

The design and construction of the athletes' housing was an attempt to express certain dilemmas associated with modern building culture. There is an ideal of a society that draws upon its own local resources to make buildings through shared labour and consequently these buildings manifest the possibilities and limitations of available materials and represent commonly held ritual practices. This persuasive concept was cultivated by Goethe in the late eighteenth century and developed into a coherent system of assumptions by nineteenth century architectural writers like Pugin, Ruskin and Morris. The power of the idea lay in its resistance to the abstract, deracinating character of social modernism, which was beginning to emerge in the Industrial Age from 1800. As the systems of production and consumption became increasingly detached from the lives of ordinary people, the apparent coherence of this preindustrial model was held up as an emblem of resistance. Since the industrial manufacture of goods disrupted fundamental human habits, these newly manufactured artefacts were perceived to be false and, in contrast, works using traditional craftsmanship and natural materials were assumed to have a truth-telling capacity.

These contradictions are often concealed in the twentieth century manifestations of Modernism because the literal attachment to traditional materials and manual manufacture was replaced with an intoxication with industrial techniques. However, many aspects of the original assumptions had been sufficiently internalised that they seemed self-evident and beyond contradiction. The rules and syntax for design with industrial materials contain an older order of assumptions that are rooted in a romantic critique of social modernism. Structural integrity, truth to materials and the built manifestation of place are treasured although they interrupt the free deployment of goods and labour central to social modernism.

Avant-garde architects of the 1920s were enthralled by the scientific analysis of manufacturing espoused by Taylor among others. They believed engineering to be rational and implicitly truth-telling because of its perceived scientific basis. The abstract, dispassionate analysis of materials and labour processes was bound to yield an authenticity in buildings that allowed them to escape the entanglements of historicism. Buried in this ambition was an assumption that buildings and cities produced by rational processes would yield a society amenable to rational management. The romantic assumption that work produced by skilled handiwork from materials that lay close at hand had a truthful quality was conflated onto the new infatuation with engineering

processes and industrial materials. The medieval mason and the modern engineer were both heroic types of their own times, far removed from architects in thrall to aesthetic cults.

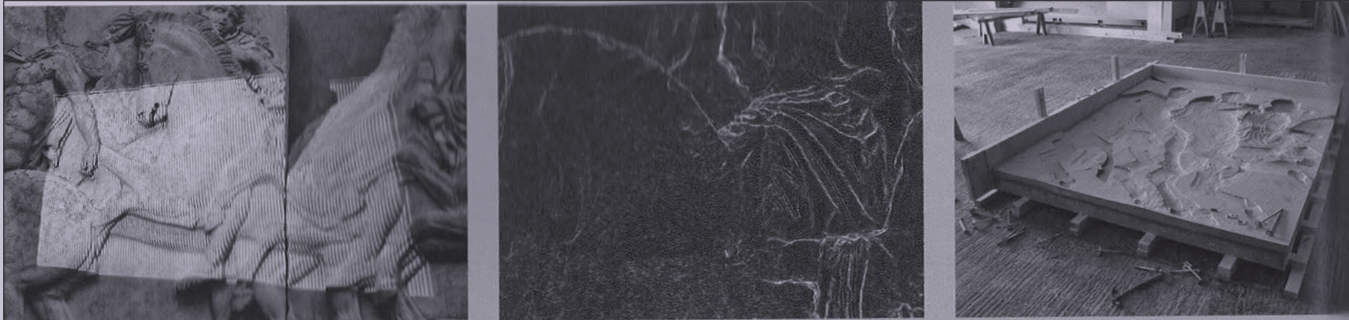
Goethe's figure of the medieval master mason embodies an imagined resolution of two closely interlinked problematic aspects of representation. In the first, architectural representation was conceived as a showing out of the intrinsic properties of construction. The grammar of representation was evolved around a manifestation of possibilities and limits relating to environmental and constructional matters. The advent of new industrialised materials, processes and systems created a crisis because it gradually undermined the natural limits that gave rise to the grain and texture of older buildings. The relationship between built form and constructional limits began to erode. The second crisis belongs to the stability of external representations. The Enlightenment dissolved the fixed external order to which all figurative representations could refer. The shared cosmic, social and political order became fragmented and it was no longer possible for buildings to carry representations that situated them within an indisputable framework. Looking to the future in 1846, Karl Bötticher foresaw a "great blankness."¹⁷

During two decades at the start of the twentieth century, we witness an almost complete abandonment of external figurative representations in favour of a manifestation of the intrinsic properties of construction. Instead, the building form was expected to directly manifest the rational processes and undisguised materials required for its own construction. Perfect transparency became a convention for perfect truth. By telling the truth, they represent nothing other than themselves, but this creates a tautology – I am what I am.

If buildings underwent a crisis of identity, so too did the architect. When Le Corbusier imagined the strange foreman directing tasks, he created a figment to stand for the unspoilt intellect at the empty place of origin, able to speak truthfully about rational processes. The problem is that Le Corbusier was immersed in metaphors. In identifying himself with the strange foreman he embodied these paradoxes. He was both the perfectly rational agent of objective order and the weaver of myths, transparent and yet alive with associations. The instability of the relationship between transparency and meaning was loaded onto the figure of the architect. Le Corbusier did not attempt to resolve this dilemma. Instead he suppressed it by creating an ecstatic synthesis; the truth-telling architect, stripped of figurative baggage, employing only abstract management processes to embody the values of a wider community. This was not sustainable. It is a figure highly vulnerable to the operations of social modernism. Soon enough, the activity of architectural design itself became subject to oversight by managers and planners who made a higher claim to dispassionate analysis.

The Edgeless Carousel

For our Olympic project we chose the dispersed fragments of the Parthenon because they embody these difficulties. Le Corbusier saw the Parthenon as the refined coming together



6 Digitally scanning the fragments of the frieze.
7 The 3D digital scan.
8 The 3D surface routed into high density foam blocks.

The making of the panels

In order to gain consent for the project, we contacted Ian Jenkins, the Keeper of the Stones, at the British Museum. He acknowledged that there was no copyright and arranged for us to get nocturnal access to the Duveen Room, where the stones are kept. I became distracted by one particular horse-man whose hidden leg reappeared behind the horse to show the palm of his foot facing the viewer under the horse's belly. Of course Ian Jenkins knew this foot and its only other partner on the other side of the frieze. Seizing his opportunity, he started to persuade me to abandon my conceptual schemes and to lose myself in the horses. "I know you have lots of ideas Niall, but the people of London will love the horses."

Professor Tom Lomax and Chris Cornish digitally scanned the chosen fragments of the frieze. They used a standard projector to cast gridded and striped patterns onto the stones. A tripod mounted SLR digital camera recorded the patterns crossing over the surfaces. This data was relayed back to the laptop where a 4D Dynamics programme converted it into legible 3D digital surfaces. The scans were pieced together using Rapid Form software.

The files were edited in our office. It was necessary to work out a viable ratio between the depth of the relief and

the surface of the panel. The new panels are ten times the surface area of the older stones but the depth of relief available was the same. We altered the model to get rid of any inward sloping surfaces on the upward-facing edges, to avoid weathering problems.

The digital information was converted into tool paths for a CNC routing machine using Master CAM software. This modelled the 3D surface onto high-density foam blocks. The positive relief panels were assembled into storey-high panels and used to make rubber latex casts – the negative.

The precast panels were made using a concrete mix specified to closely match Portland Stone. Each concrete panel was cast with one horizontal and one vertical section of the framing grid attached. Thus the production process undermined the conventional separation of frame and panel.

Once on site, foam insulation was attached to the back and they were hung using metal brackets. We had little idea what the panels would look like once they were seen on the scale of the building. I arrived for the first time before dawn. As the sun rose, it cast oblique light across the north façade and the array of horsemen seemed to switch on like a projection. An hour later the early sun had moved away and the horses were like faint grey tracings on the concrete.

of separate fragments, honed to perfection by abstract selective processes. For him it was an ancient emblem of a synthesis he imagined could be made possible in a new age of reason. We see the contemporary power of this building, not in its becoming, but in its dissolution. The deep, contingent connections of community and place that allowed this building to emerge and change through generations were broken when it was treated as an abstraction. It was idealised and deracinated all at once and, broken into pieces, it entered the modern age. In their detached state the fragments had enormous power to carry new significations. Siteless, they were endlessly duplicated and used to stand in for an ideal of synthesis in an industrialised society predicated on the precise and calculated separation of things from the mesh of their becoming. The nineteenth century architects, who made London anew, adorned their plain housing stock with gimcrack casts of these antique sculptures, creating an absolute

separation between the intrinsic properties of the construction and a representational system embodying the aspirations of an emerging middle class. "Nothing can be more noble or magnificent and at the same time so absurd" John Soane said of Nash's caryatids on Whitehall Palace.¹⁸

We digitally copied fragments of the cavalry on the stones and arrayed them randomly in a grid formation on the façade of the athletes' housing. By subjecting these figures to the matrix of the grid we intended to suppress their original rhythmic linear organisation. We were looking for a quality of weightlessness, distance, even eeriness, in the way that they hovered between windows, balconies and the ordinary stuff of London apartment life. The Ionic frieze on the Parthenon establishes a clear linear development existing in time with a marked beginning and an end. Our lost troop of horsemen process endlessly, hypnotically, as if on an edgeless carousel. We wanted them to attest to the proposal that

architecture does not need to suppress paradoxes. It can represent them.

The Panathenaic procession was an event dedicated to dressing the cult statue of Athena with a veil called the "peplos". The frieze depicting the procession begins with a man dressing himself and ends with the folding and putting away of the ritual garment. All along the procession people are handling, arranging and adjusting their clothing. At the climax of the event, the goddess Hera extends her arm to hold out her veil.¹⁹ For Semper, the underlying frame of a building is dressed, or bedecked, in a fabric which bears representations of the hidden construction and the ideals of the society that brought it into being. In dressing ourselves, we show what we would like to seem to be. The modern avant-garde conceived of an impossible fictional garment for buildings, it was perfectly transparent so that they could seem to be what they truly are – "off with your coats and be what you seem."²⁰ This denies what Semper knew and what theatre enacts; we make masks and representations and we become what they are.

Architects working today are doubly bound. The fiction of transparency, or honesty, is more and more difficult to sustain in a system where technical demands delaminate the building's materials into increasingly specialised layers and where Taylorised management separates design into discrete particles of expertise. At the same time, there is no stable external order of figures that can claim to embody the ideals of an increasingly attenuated society. I suggest that the contemporary architect must rely on a form of irony in order to practise. Fernand Hallyn describes irony as "a representation of reality whose eventually fictive nature I recognise, but which I decide to employ as if it corresponded to reality."²¹ In conjuring the horsemen on a screen we do not claim that they embody a better, prelapsarian age; in arranging them within a grid we offer no authority to origins or order. Any architect today might ask how to continue making pieces of the world without a common consensus about what that world should represent and the answer might be, in the words of Samuel Beckett, "you must go on, I can't go on, I'll go on."²²

Niall McLaughlin was born in Geneva and educated in Dublin. In 1990 he established Niall McLaughlin architects in London. Since 1993 he has been teaching at the Bartlett School of architecture (UCL) where he currently serves as a visiting professor. He will be a visiting lecturer at UCLA in 2013.

¹ Solomon LeWitt, "Sentences on Conceptual Art", *Art-Language Vol. 1 No. 1* (May 1969), p. 11. From Rosalind E. Krauss, *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths*, Cambridge, Massachusetts 1984, p. 255.
² This was the procurement structure when NMLA were appointed. In the summer of 2008, the public-private partnership between Lend Lease and the ODA ended when Lend Lease was unable to raise the capital, due to problems in the banking market and concurrent doubts about the strength of the housing market. To rescue the project the government stepped in to finance the shortfall, using part of the Olympic Contingency Fund. Source: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/uk/2008/jun/20/olympics2012.politicsandsport>
³ Kenneth Frampton, "Towards a Critical Regionalism", in: *Labour, Work and Architecture, Collected Essays on Architecture and Design*, London 2002, p. 78.

9 The panels casting shadows in oblique light



⁴ Mauro F. Guillén, *The Taylorised Beauty of the Mechanical Scientific Management and the Rise of Modernist Architecture*, Princeton/London 2006, p. 32.
⁵ Le Corbusier, *Towards a New Architecture*, New York 1986, p. 275.
⁶ English translation in: Le Corbusier, *Towards a New Architecture*, New York 1986, p. 211.
⁷ Richard A. Etlin, "The Parthenon in the Modern Era" in: Jenifer Neils (ed.), *The Parthenon, From Antiquity to the Present*, Cambridge/New York 2005, p. 376.
⁸ Le Corbusier, *Towards a New Architecture*, New York 1986, p. 218.
⁹ Ibid., p. 133.
¹⁰ Barry Bergdoll, *European Architecture 1750–1890*, Oxford/New York 2000, p. 15.
¹¹ Joseph Rykwert, *The Judicious Eye: Architecture Against Other Arts*, London 2008, p. 73.
¹² Ibid.
¹³ John Summerson, *Georgian London*, Harmondsworth, Middlesex 1978, p.185. Summerson is quoting Rasmussen's description of the Adelphi in *London, The Unique City*, Harmondsworth, Middlesex 1960.
¹⁴ Barry Bergdoll, *European Architecture 1750–1890*, Oxford/New York 2000, pp. 43–44.
¹⁵ Richard Redgrave, "Supplementary Report on Design" in: *Reports by the Juries*, London 1852, from: Harry Francis Mallgrave, *Gottfried Semper: Architect of the Nineteenth Century*, New Haven/London 1996, p. 202.
¹⁶ Ibid., p. 203.
¹⁷ "The principle of Hellenic and Germanic Architecture and its Relevance to Contemporary Architecture". Speech given by Karl Bötticher on 13 March 1846, celebrating the anniversary of Schinkel's birthday.
¹⁸ Joseph Rykwert, *The Judicious Eye: Architecture Against Other Arts*, London 2008, p. 391.
¹⁹ Sue Blundell, "Parthenon Frieze to star in the London Olympics", in: *Classical Association Newsletter*, June 2012
²⁰ Friedrich Nietzsche, "Untimely Meditations", from: Daniel Breazeale (ed.), *Cambridge Texts in the History of Philosophy*, Cambridge 1997, p. 84.
²¹ Fernand Hallyn, *The Poetic Structure of the World: Copernicus and Kepler*, Translated by D.M. Leslie, New York 1993, p. 21.
²² Samuel Beckett, "The Unnamable", in: *The Three Books*, New York 1994, p. 418.

Appendix 2

Related writings by others

Journal articles

pp. 54–59
Alice Willoughby, ‘A Race Against Time’. *ADF Architect Data File* (Nov 2012): 22-28.

pp. 60–61
Eleanor Young, ‘London 2012 Olympics’. *Architecture Ireland* (Aug 2012): 32-33.

pp. 62–67
Oliver Wainwright, ‘Olympians’ Village Politics’. *Building Design* (Jan 2012): 8-13.

pp. 68–72
Graham Bizley, ‘Classical Good Looks’. *Concrete Quarterly* (Sept 2011): 4-7.

pp. 73–76
Rob Gregory, ‘Athletes’ Village Block N15’. *Architectural Review* 229.1370 (Apr 2011): 82-85.

pp. 77–78
Richard Waite, ‘Elgin Marbles for 2012 Olympics Unveiled’. *Architects Journal* (Feb 2011): 10-11.

Newspaper articles

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Edwin Heathcote, ‘Good Intentions’. *Financial Times* (24 Feb 2012).

pp. 80–81
Dimitris Rigopoulos, ‘London Advertises Itself with a Parthenon’. *Kathimerini* (7 May 2011): 2.

Online reviews

pp. 82–89
Hugh McEwen, ‘East is East: The Athletes Village and the Elgin Marbles’. NFTU *Notes From The Underground* (2 Aug 2012): www.nftu.co.uk/2012/08/02/east-is-east-the-athletes-village-and-the-elgin-marbles

pp. 90–91
Sue Blundell, ‘The Parthenon and the Olympics: Parthenon Frieze Stars in the London Olympics’. *Classical Association News* (June 2012): <http://sueblundell.com/page8.htm>



A race against time

A tight schedule made the construction of the Athletes' Village for the 2012 Olympic and Paralympic games a tough challenge, but the result will bring lasting benefits to a deprived area of east London, as Alice Willoughby explains

In 2002, Fletcher Priest had a plan. A masterplan. The plan was to redevelop a large area of Stratford, creating a new London district. The masterplan tied in with the re-designation of Stratford station as Stratford International and formed part of, then Mayor of London, Ken Livingstone's London Plan, which had identified east London's development and expansion as both desirable and necessary.

"And then this strange Olympics thing came along," says Jonathan Kendall, partner at Fletcher Priest and alongside Arup Urban Design, and landscape architects West 8, author of the

Stratford City Masterplan.

The plans for Stratford formed a key part of the 2005 Olympic bid. What is now the Athletes' Village, with the focus on redevelopment of a deprived area, sustainability and best-practice in urban design, is one of the major factors responsible for the UK's success in securing the 2012 Olympic and Paralympic games. It will house all of the sportspeople and their support teams for the duration of the competition. Kendall is remarkably sanguine about having his deadlines more than halved, and the project being not only in the public eye, but the

'Due to the size and speed of the project, the precast concrete façades were sourced simultaneously from various locations throughout Europe'



focus of global attention: "It's great to have critical mass, and it's great to have a significant day one. Doing it all in parallel, incredibly quickly, isn't ideal. But it's quite an incredible thing to have been a part of."

The change of plan doesn't mean that the Stratford City development suffered a false start. On the contrary, it means that 'London's newest centre', a 73-hectare site in total, initially providing 2,818 properties in 63 blocks, around 11 courtyard plots, will be ready for habitation a full seven years earlier than the projected notional 2020 completion date. By then, it will have already played a central part in the London 2012 Olympic Games.

The 8- to 14-storey blocks will soon be fitted out with partitions to define the spaces required during the Olympics: in 'Games-mode' there are no kitchens, and the blocks are temporarily interconnected. Later, the blocks will be retrofitted and remodelled as homes ready for domestic occupation in at the end of 2013.

"The UK is ahead here," Kendall tells me. "A lot of our predecessors have waited until after the games to deal with future of venues, but the legacy company is well established."

What the legacy represents is a huge boost for London's anaemic housing market: even in the pre-Olympic days, the plan was to provide a mix of one-, two-, three- and four-bedroom homes, and the projection is that more than 10,000 people will be housed there. To date 1,379 affordable homes have been sold on 999-year leaseholds to Triathlon Homes, an approved affordable homes provider. A further 1,439 homes 'pepper-potted' throughout the development, are available for sale or rent. Outline planning consent to build another 2,000-2,500 on site has been granted.

Though he's modest about his own achievements, Kendall seems in awe of the project: "You don't normally get that translation from masterplan to building at this scale in this country. Things are more often built at that colossal scale in China, or the Middle East, but for the UK this is quite phenomenal."

Continued overleaf..

'The variety is motivated by both the visual impact, and the need to source from different suppliers'



A remarkable project requires unique solutions, and these were commonplace on the site. Working alongside Fletcher Priest and Lend Lease, the Olympics Delivery Authority (ODA) was overseeing the project, and they were, as a group, responsible for the bases and the piling for each of the buildings.

Paul Hartmann, the ODA's project sponsor, is on hand to explain what was required: "We had a reconstituted crushed aggregate concrete specially designed for the project by the concrete provider to meet sustainability targets, and we had our own rail head developed in the Village to bring in the concrete."

Due to the size and speed of the project, the precast concrete façades were sourced simultaneously from various locations throughout Europe. "We couldn't just go to one manufacturer," Hartmann tells me. "We just didn't have the time, and we needed to minimise risk in procurement."

All façades are high-performance, with an energy efficiency rating of 80 per cent. The project directors became so expert in the Code for Sustainable Homes Level 4, they helped the government to rewrite some of the regulations. A rigorous benchmarking process was in place for each stage of the build.

"For each material, we developed a prototype and a benchmark in the factory and signed that off. Everyone knew what to strive for. It was a vanguard in sustainability," says Hartmann.

Note the use of the past tense. When I spoke to Jonathan Kendall and Paul Hartmann on one of 2011's unseasonably warm winter days, the project is almost complete. They are in a due diligence phase, and concentrating on the finishing touches such as railings, just one of Hartmann's nods to London's typical architecture. "We borrowed from London: we have almost traditional park gardens and squares. Importantly for London, the town houses, at the base of each block, have their own front doors, and private gardens."

Hartmann is enthusiastic about the London-style features of the Athletes' Village, but it is the other aesthetic features of the buildings that have drawn most attention. He explains: "We created a site-wide palette of textures, colours, and of materials." During the bidding process, the constraints of the design brief offered to the 12 successful architectural firms were well-publicised, but according to Hartmann, those firms selected have responded well to the challenge: "What we've ended up with is

Continued on page 27...



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'This project has demonstrated flexibility, drive and determination'



an amazing response to a restricted but controlled brief, and it's not a riot of different colours and materials."

With 63 blocks, there was a compelling argument for restraint. The external finishes are many and varied: from a faithful reproduction of the Elgin marbles via black architectural bricks; terracotta and vitreous enamelled panels, to the replication – in concrete – of Portland stone, complete with the seashell shapes. The variety is motivated by both the visual impact, and the need to source from different suppliers.

Kendall says: "Everyone was trying to hit the sweet spot in the middle between too much repetition, and too much chaos". They achieved this by setting up a design board. They organised a series of review meetings, allowing the architects of neighbour-

ing buildings to respond to the context by comparing virtual views side by side.

Throughout our meeting about building the Athletes' Village, I had been expecting to hear two words. It is testament to the project planning that it is only the recollection of arranging those meetings that makes Hartmann finally utter the words I was expecting to hear: 'logistical nightmare'.

The enormous project clearly faced huge hurdles – not least finding funding amid global economic turbulence. At the most uncertain time, Kendall tells me, there was a point where everyone was working with a shadow client, trying to anticipate an incoming client to protect their opportunities. And in 2005 despite their clear focus on retail, there was a time when

Continued overleaf..

28



Westfield owned the whole project, although the ODA has been the landowner throughout.

Finally a client emerged from the shadows and the vehicle companies were sold in August 2011 to Delancey and Qatari Diar. The £557 million deal for the purchase, future development and long-term management of the Athletes' Village included six undeveloped plots with outline planning consent. The potential is for this development to transform the area.

Hartmann says: "We've done everything within our powers to make it an incredible living experience for all people,

especially families."

Kendall is characteristically optimistic about the impact. "Stratford is one of the most deprived areas of the UK," he says. "The whole area has been through this massive post-war cycle, and it's been stuck in that situation for quite some time. The ripple effect is going to be a factor in the success."

This project has demonstrated flexibility, drive and determination, and completed a formidable first lap. It will be interesting to see what it has got left in the tank, because this is clearly an endurance event.



LONDON 2012 OLYMPICS NIALL MCLAUGHLIN ARCHITECTS HENEGHAN PENG ARCHITECTS

BOXING WELL ABOVE THEIR WEIGHT - IRISH ARCHITECTURE AT THE OLYMPICS

by Eleanor Young

Irish boxer Katie Taylor helped make women's boxing an Olympic sport. And at London 2012 her fight brought home gold to Ireland. Taylor is just one of the many Irish who have contributed to London 2012. In architecture two particular projects stand out for their Irish roots. heneghan peng designed the oversized bridge that carried the main crowds into the Olympic Park in East London from its office in Dublin. And the most striking – and politically charged – of the façades of the Athletes Village was dreamt up by UCD-trained Niall McLaughlin.

heneghan peng first came to international prominence when, as a very young practice, it won the open competition for the Grand Egyptian Museum against hundreds of practices and international 'starchitects'. The shortlisting by the Olympic Delivery Authority for FO6, as the bridge is romantically called, has given heneghan peng more than a foothold for further UK projects including a new school of architecture in Greenwich, just a few miles away from the bridge. While the venues are the cover starts for London 2012 the Lea Valley in which most of them have been built was brownfield and light industrial land until just a few years ago. Bridges were vital for both the games and the future regeneration in a zone dissected by canals, a river, power lines and railway tracks. Thirty bridges have been created in all. But FO6 in the centre of the park is the most interesting dealing with topography that leaves the Olympic Park 6m higher than its waterways. heneghan peng signed up to the masterplan concept of creating a 'continuous landscape'. But getting the sense of flow for Olympic crowds needed generous dimensions – for the 16 weeks of the Olympics the bridge will be 54m wide. The decks are conceived as a festive confetti strewn over the bridge and are covered in a multicoloured material made from recycled running shoes.

In structure, and in its future life, the bridge is actually two 6m wide bridges joined on the diagonal – 'Z' in plan over Carpenter's Lock. The bridges will lead to an amphitheatre stepping down to the water and park. This space is all literally under wraps at the moment but Heneghan Peng are not going to allow there to be a gloom under the bridges. The kinked-section and stainless steel surface ensure there will be light and reflections enlivening the undercroft.

The long term 'legacy' design was all written into the planning permission, along with a second set of panels to be added to the bridge. But Roisin Heneghan of heneghan peng is less clear about the practice's own role in transforming the bridge after London 2012. Up to construction the practice was very closely involved.

Then they took on the role of design advisors to the ODA (it is in stark contrast to the process at the Egyptian Museum where the practice has been all but sidelined). The London Legacy Development Company may however take a different approach.

That was the obvious danger of the Athletes Village enterprise. It all started so promisingly for architects. There was a high profile international architectural competition. But as details emerged two complexities put off some of the practices: a pairing scheme of smaller and larger practices and the limited scope for architectural input. The layouts, structures and grids were already set out with different internal configurations for housing the 17,000 athletes and for eventual conversion into 2,818 homes. Architects were essentially limited to designing a façade. Niall McLaughlin however took this brief on with the inventiveness that marks out projects like his houses at Clontarf and Goleen. Working as a sub consultant of Glenn Howells Architects, and to a 'chassis' designed by it, he came up with the rather cheeky sampling of one of the most controversial classical icons of our time; the Elgin Marbles. Originally part of the Parthenon in Athens the Marbles were brought to Britain in two hundred years ago. Their ownership is still contested. Swiss-born architect Bernard Tschumi even called for their restitution to Greece to a home in the New Acropolis Museum which he designed partly for them and other elements of the Parthenon frieze.

Five scenes were selected from the marbles. County Dublin-based Techcrete precast the concrete panels which are used as a 'dressing' for the building leaving the frame still expressed. Considering the politically and commercially cautious Olympic Development Authority it seems surprising that this should have got the go ahead. But in the uncomfortably-dense chasms of the Athlete's Village their character and style throw less inventive façades into relief.

These two projects just hint at the Irish involvement in delivering London 2012. It was not just at the architectural level. Estimates suggest that Irish firms won Euro200 million worth of work from Olympic Development Authority contracts and both Heneghan Peng's bridge and the Athletes Village were supported by Irish contractors. It is indicative of the international nature of architecture and, to a lesser extent, construction. Architectural culture is now truly global. A very Olympic value.

1. Niall McLaughlin's façade has to work for both the athletes and for the East London community that will make this their home in the future
2. The shimmering underside of Heneghan Peng's FO6 with the Arcelor Mittal Orbit (left) and Olympic Stadium beyond

BUILDINGS: ATHLETES' VILLAGE



From the north-west, the Athletes' Village presents a cliff face of beige concrete cladding systems.

PHOTO: ANTHONY CHARTERIS/ODG

Olympians' village



Provided the prisoner of war camps are a good standard and the barbed wire removed, I see no objection to their use for housing the athletes," wrote one civil servant to the organising committee of the London Olympic Games — in 1948.

Not called the "austerity Olympics" for nothing, the last time London hosted the games saw athletes housed in a motley collection of makeshift dwellings, 4,000 competitors scattered over 30 sites across the city in a strategy of make-do-and-mend writ large. Lodgings ranged from RAF camps to nurses' hostels, school halls to college dormitories, as well as a sprawling field of rickety wooden huts in Richmond Park — originally built to accommodate army recruits and refurbished at a cost of £35,000.

Two generations later, the sporting circus has returned, this time accompanied by a swollen coterie of 17,000 athletes and officials. In the intervening years, the two-week festival of amateur sport has mutated into a professionalised tool of urban regeneration. Host cities compete not for the glory of the games, but for the chance to leverage exceptional amounts of public and private funding to build an entirely new urban quarter.

So it should come as no surprise that, while 1948 saw the hasty removal of barbed wire and the re-roofing of cabins, the London of 2012 should boast a £1.1 billion purpose-built "village" — hemmed in by miles of electrified fence.

Village is a rather misleading term for what is in fact a 27ha grid of concrete blocks, between eight and 12 storeys tall, that stand huddled together in the north-eastern corner of the Olympic site. Bor-

This outcrop of housing reads as an alien chunk airlifted in from a Spanish suburb

dered to the east by the gully of the overground rail line, and to the south by the deep, open-cut box of Stratford International station, the development sits like a gleaming citadel, securely severed from its surroundings. Viewed from every angle — from the streets of Leyton to the east, from the decks of the Westfield shopping centre to the south, from the undulating mounds of the Olympic Park to the west — the village presents an abrupt cliff face, a forbidding wall of beige.

But, as with every building in and around the Olympic site, appearances are deceptive: this outcrop of high-density housing, which reads like an alien chunk airlifted in from a Spanish suburb, is the first fragment of a much bigger plan. It is a plan that stretches almost 300ha across the Lower Lea Valley, and will take the next 30 years to materialise, on the biggest tabula rasa development site in Europe. So how to judge a new piece of city whose context has yet to appear, and will not do so for some time?

The present reality is best explained by a brief reprisal of its origins. These date back to the mid-1990s and an ambitious plan by Chelsfield and Stanhope to transform this vast swathe of abandoned rail lands into Stratford City, a "new metropolitan ►

politics

London 2012's Athletes' Village far outstrips the makeshift facilities of the last century, but the need to beat the clock has taken its toll, writes **Oliver Wainwright**

BUILDINGS: ATHLETES' VILLAGE

ATHLETES' VILLAGE SITE PLAN



1. Denton Corker Marshall
Building N1
Residential units 288
Retail space 450sq m facing public realm

2. Lifschutz Davidson Sandilands
Building N2
Residential units 298
Retail space 250sq m

3. Patel Taylor
Building N3
Residential units 297
Retail space 585sq m
4. Patel Taylor
Building N4
Residential units 290
residential units
Retail space 585sq m

5. Glenn Howells (west block), Panter Hudspith (east block)
Building N7
Residential units 318

6. DSDHA
Building N9
Residential units 120
Retail space 478sq m
7. Eric Parry Architects
Building N10
Residential units 281
Retail space 450sq m
Office space 440sq m

8. Penoyre & Prasad
Building N11 — Polyclinic multi-purpose health facility
Community facilities 1500sq m
Health facility 3200sq m

9. AHMM
Building N12 — Chobham Academy. Scheduled to open
10. CF Møller Architects
Building N13
Residential units 185
Retail space

11. Lifschutz Davidson Sandilands (north block), Haworth Tompkins (east block)
Building N14
Residential units 201

12. Glenn Howells (west block), Niall McLaughlin (north block), Piercy Conner (east block)
Building N15
Residential units 298
Retail space 6 ground-floor units

13. DRMM
Building N26
Residential units 242
Retail space 400sq m

centre" of homes, offices, retail and leisure, clustered around the international station. Designed by Fletcher Priest, Arup and West 8, it was the biggest planning application London had ever seen, of a scale and ambition that would surely never be realised. The Olympic bid — which came along in 2005, once this masterplan had already gained outline permission — proved a catalyst. Weaving a landscape of leisure around a new urban hub, the Olympics and Stratford City made a marriage of convenience, each used to justify the viability of the other. But this hurried public-private pairing had the fatal effect of dramatically compressing the programme: from a 30-year phased strategy to a frenzied gold rush for 2012.

To complicate matters, ownership of the Stratford project also changed hands, split between two Australian giants. Westfield took on the retail and leisure component — choosing to deliver the "town centre" as an inward-facing covered shopping mall — while Lend Lease acted as development manager for the housing, happily leaving financial responsibility with the publicly funded Olympic Delivery Authority as the credit crunch hit. With the two parts critically separated by the gaping slice of the international rail cut, and each in the hands of a different private interest, the idea of an integrated "city" was abandoned before it had even begun.

A question of scale
This compromised, convoluted history is very much in evidence on the streets of the Athletes' Village



9. Chobham Academy by AHMM

today. There is something peculiarly diagrammatic about the place, a sense that comes not only from the repetitive grain of perimeter blocks — each around 100 x 80m extruded to 10 storeys — but from the gestural boulevards that sweep between them. You can almost read the big red arrows on the design and access statement, indicating the visual axis to the Velodrome, the north-south corridor to the shopping mall, the east-west route from Leyton — axes that terminate in Canary Wharf and the Shard respectively, tying this rootless place into the macro network of grands projects.

All very well on the planners' tick-box analysis, but there was clearly little attention paid to what kind of spaces these grand moves would create. The route from Leyton means going from a fine grain of terraced houses, through an industrial backland, across a

railway gully and into this Hausmann world of avenues framed by marching white facades. The journey south to the town centre, meanwhile, ends in a mountain of steps, topped by the gates of a shopping mall.

"We would have liked to

In comparison to the plastic-clad towers along Stratford High Street, the village blocks are of exceptional quality, built with durability and generosity

improve these connections, but our boundaries had been set in stone," says Greg Deas, chief architect at Lend Lease, who describes the design process from 2007 as one of tweaking and adjusting within the "straitjacket" of the existing plan. The original vision for the village had apparently taken Maida Vale and Notting Hill as its inspiration, a reassuring image for the bid, but one that bears little semblance to the reality. Instead, Deas says that the modern developments of Hammarby in Stockholm and Bercy in Paris provided the model — perimeter blocks, variously sliced up along their southern edges to allow sunlight in and views out.

Now built, each plot in the village follows this sensible logic, organised with a slab to the north, a wing either side, and a series of three "pavilions" to the south, connected by glazed winter gardens. The lower three floors are devoted to "townhouse" maisonettes, whose first floors open on to private back gardens and a shared courtyard to the rear, while apartments are stacked above, each enjoying an unusually large balcony. This arrangement allows for front doors on to the pavement, with parking concealed beneath the podium courtyards, and goes some way towards making proper residential streets. Spaces for corner shops and other essential facilities are also provided, strategically placed facing main routes and squares, where they will probably work and not remain boarded up, as they have in the new developments along nearby Stratford High Street. In comparison to ▶



1. N1 by Denton Corker Marshall



6. N9 by DSDHA



3. N3 by Patel Taylor



4. N4 by Taylor Patel



5. N7 by Panter Hudspith



10. N13 by CF Møller



12. N15 by Niall McLaughlin



11. N14 by Lifschutz Davidson Sandilands



2. N2 by Lifschutz Davidson Sandilands



13. N26 by DRMM



7. N10 by Eric Parry

BUILDINGS: ATHLETES' VILLAGE

the flimsy, plastic-clad towers there, the buildings in the village are of exceptional quality, built with a durability and generosity absent from most equivalent speculative and affordable housing in this country.

The streets themselves are conceived as tree-lined avenues, with a planted central reservation and some integrated parking, but the blocks' height dictates they must be broader than feels comfortable. Ranging between 20-30m, with large stretches of planting in between, there is little sense of enclosure, of buildings edging streets and squares. It is more like space, punctuated by buildings. A finer grain could have achieved equal densities — along the lines of Venice, for example — and it is regrettable that the colossal scale of the site intimidated the designers into reaching for the broad brush, especially as the coarse resolution of the outline plan quickly became that of the detailed plan.

"There was no time to go back to outline planning," says Tim Urquhart, development director for the village at Lend Lease, explaining the pressure to begin piling before designs had been fixed. "The 2005 permission was incredibly restrictive, so we had to find a formula you could apply across the site, without constraining the design outcome."

This formula consisted of a standard type — or "chassis" — to which a group of 17 architects, chosen by an Architecture Foundation competition, would be invited to apply a dressing. An internal design review board was set up, driven by the vocal Ricky Burdett, which, fearing a lack of consistency, established a series of design guidelines.

"We were looking for a continuity of palette, a sort of melding between buildings," says Paul Hartmann, project lead at the ODA and chair of the panel, describing regular meetings where composite elevations of neighbouring blocks were discussed. "We didn't want it to turn into a zoo." Developed by Fletcher Priest and Patel Taylor, these principles set out the idea of articulating the bottom, middle and top of the blocks, as well as dictating the ratio of glass to wall (part of achieving Code for Sustainable Homes Level 4) and the use of pre-cast concrete cladding in shades of stucco and stone.

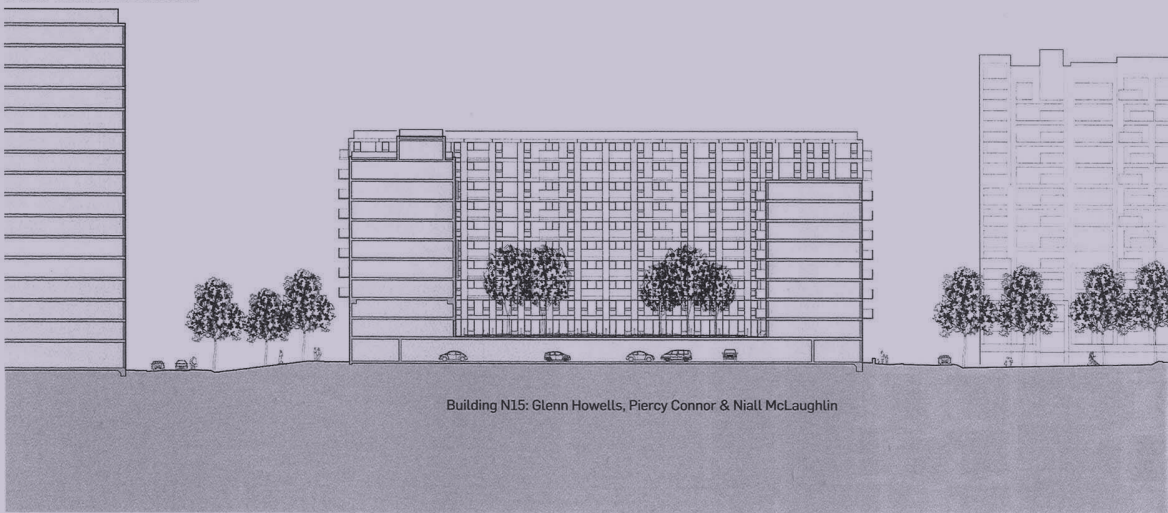
"It was quite an open process of seeing what the architects thought the rules should be and assimilating them into a common language," says Glenn Howells, one of the first architects appointed. "The objective was to create a landmark place, rather than a series of landmark buildings."

A threat or a challenge?

Walking around the village, it is fascinating to see how the different practices have responded to this curious situation, some managing to bend the rules more than others. The more successful buildings have embraced the blunt realities, turning what could be a reluctant compromise into something that celebrates the peculiar circumstances.

"It's going to be a cliff face, we thought, it should be the most beautiful cliff face in London," says Deborah Saunt of DSDHA, whose striking, white, flat-iron building in the centre of the village delights in its brute, blank aspect. Inspired by the chalk seams that run beneath the site, it has a hewn,

COMPOSITE ELEVATION



DRMM's plot N26 features extruded, ceramic-clad blocks facing on to low-rise mews housing to the east of the site.

3D scans of the Elgin Marbles are hung in a grid with horses galloping across the elevation

mineral quality. Layers of tapering balconies form fissured crags across its facade, positioned in response to the planned 30-storey tower by Ian Simpson across the way — one of the more ambitious proposals, along with Make's twin towers, which have not materialised.

DSDHA was perhaps lucky with its site, drawing formal novelty from the triangular plot. Elsewhere, the orthogonal type has been executed with varying success, but perhaps most compellingly by Niall McLaughlin.

"I was very interested in the principle of the facade being delaminated from the building's core form," says McLaughlin. "Usually it's something one tries to

swim against, to retain a sense of 'authenticity', but here we decided to embrace it." His facade, which clads the northern wing of block N15, relishes in its repetitive, factory-produced nature, refusing to stagger, offset or modulate the panelised system — tricks resorted to by

others in a vain attempt to relieve the monotony. Instead, McLaughlin has focused his attention on the panels themselves: 3D scans of the Elgin Marbles, cast in computer-milled moulds, and hung in a regular grid with horses galloping across the elevation.

"I like the idea of setting Ruskin's conception of the craftsman against the absolute Taylorism of the construction process," he says. "Through digital reproduction, these deracinated stones are now doubly lost."

While Saunt and McLaughlin's buildings are driven by conceptual positions that turn the realities of the project to their advantage, the less successful blocks try desperately to evade the situation.

The buildings that face on to the village's central grassy mound, now christened Victory Park, appear to have buckled in awe of this prospect. In an attempt to dissemble their bulk, the two 80m frontages by Patel Taylor are articulated as a lumpy collection of bits. The three bays of block N3 are apologetically carved up into a series of six volumes of different height, each held in a white frame and broken down with a dancing concoction of vertical coffe-coloured bands, traversed by a syn-copated litter of balconies.

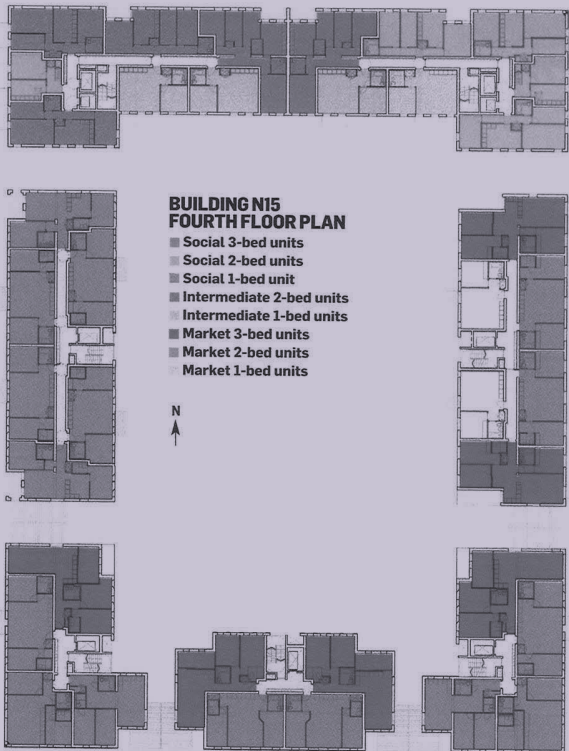
Sobriety versus display

To the west, meanwhile, Panter Hudspeth has followed suit — no doubt egged on by the design

review board — with stacked bar-codes of brick slips, offset in pre-cast concrete casing. Its fussiness is brought into focus by Glenn Howells' sober white wing to the west, which opts for a simple reinterpretation of Georgian proportions in a single material.

"Throughout the development of the village, the debate was always about sobriety versus display," says Frank Duffy, who has chaired the Stratford City Design Review Panel since its inception. "I think, on the whole, sobriety won out."

He sees this as a good thing, relieved by the lack of appliquéd colour — Eric Parry's bizarre enamelled panels, which hang from the balconies of N10 like beach towels, apparently slipped



through the net — although he does admit to a nervousness about the similarity of the buildings. "Maybe there should have been a few more Niall McLaughlins," he adds wistfully.

I am inclined to agree. For although the design code is broken in places, including DRMM's dark grey stripes of extruded ceramic cladding and CF Møller's refreshing use of monolithic brick, the overall effect is of a group of buildings that has been progressively assimilated through collective review, watered down into an inoffensive vanilla soup.

The real test of the village will not come until March 2013 at the earliest, when the 2,818 homes are handed over to Qatari Diar and

Delancey — which bought the development in a joint venture for £557 million, along with the rights to build out the six remaining plots with up to 2,000 more flats — while the 1,379 affordable units will be handed over to Triathlon Homes. The plan is to rent rather than sell the homes, which bodes well for both maintenance and the formation of a viable community.

The forthcoming legacy neighbourhoods, planned to be built in phases from 2014, already appear to have learned valuable lessons from the village. In Chobham Manor, the first phase to the immediate north, there is new emphasis on low-rise family housing, reinterpreting the London vocabulary of terrace, mews and

square in a welcome move away from the swaggering blocks of the urban renaissance. And, when the Mayoral Development Corporation is formed on April 1, there is at least hope that there will finally be a form of joined-up strategic intelligence to unify these plans, from Hackney Wick, through the brave new world of the park's "legacy communities", to the next phases of Stratford City, and the hinterlands of Stratford, Maryland and Leyton. Whatever grows up around it, the Athletes' Village will always stand as the formative kernel, a hasty monument to high-quality housing, but a quality that was accelerated, codified, standardised, reviewed and resold into a strangely empty place.

A legacy rooted in local heritage



Chobham Manor will be the first legacy community to be developed.

The Olympic Legacy Communities Scheme, submitted for planning in September 2011, covers 64ha of the park where five new neighbourhoods are to be built over the next 20 years: Chobham Manor, East Wick, Sweetwater, Marshgate Wharf and Pudding Mill.

In contrast to the high-density perimeter blocks of the Athletes' Village, these forthcoming districts favour a lower-rise grain, drawing inspiration from London's heritage of terraced housing and mews streets, with a strong emphasis on family housing, which makes up 40% of proposed units.

Three new schools — two primary and a secondary — will support the neighbourhoods and the surrounding area along with Chobham Academy, which sits just next to the Olympic Village and will open in September 2013. Other amenities include nine nurseries, three health centres and 12 multi-purpose community spaces, which could be community centres, libraries and gyms.

1 Chobham Manor This will be the first neighbourhood developed after the games. Now in for outline planning, Chobham Manor will contain family homes, with wide, tree-lined avenues intersecting narrower mews streets and green squares. The area continues the grid of the Athletes' Village, preserving viewing corridors to the Velodrome.
2 East Wick Extending the "creative vitality" of Hackney Wick, East Wick will be a new hub of businesses, shops and community facilities. Linear residential terraces are proposed along the park edge to provide an inhabited



LEGACY MASTERPLAN

- | | |
|-------------------|----------------------------|
| 1 Chobham Manor | 6 Athletes' Village |
| 2 Eastwick | 7 Stratford International |
| 3 Sweetwater | 8 Westfield Stratford City |
| 4 Marshgate Wharf | |
| 5 Pudding Mill | |

frontage, in reference to London's tradition of parks overlooked by houses.
3 Sweetwater Sited to the north-west of the main stadium, Sweetwater — named after the former sweet factory on the site — will be a low- to mid-rise family neighbourhood of terraced housing and apartments. Framed by two waterways, it will also host a primary care centre, nursery, primary school and an Idea Store.
4 Marshgate Wharf Covering beneath the ArcelorMittal Orbit, Marshgate Wharf is the most atypical of the neighbourhoods, continuing the high-density perimeter block typology of

the Athletes' Village to form a "metropolitan gateway" to the park. A large proportion of the ground floors will be given over to waterside shops, restaurants and cafés, catering to the area's role as a visitor destination.
5 Pudding Mill Sited at the confluence of rivers and canals to the south of the park, Pudding Mill has an industrial character and is made up of irregular parcels of land framed by rail lines, viaducts and underpasses. Development will provide a range of unit types, balancing the demands of the residential population with those of its creative and industrial uses.



Chobham Manor will consist of a low-rise grain of terraced streets.

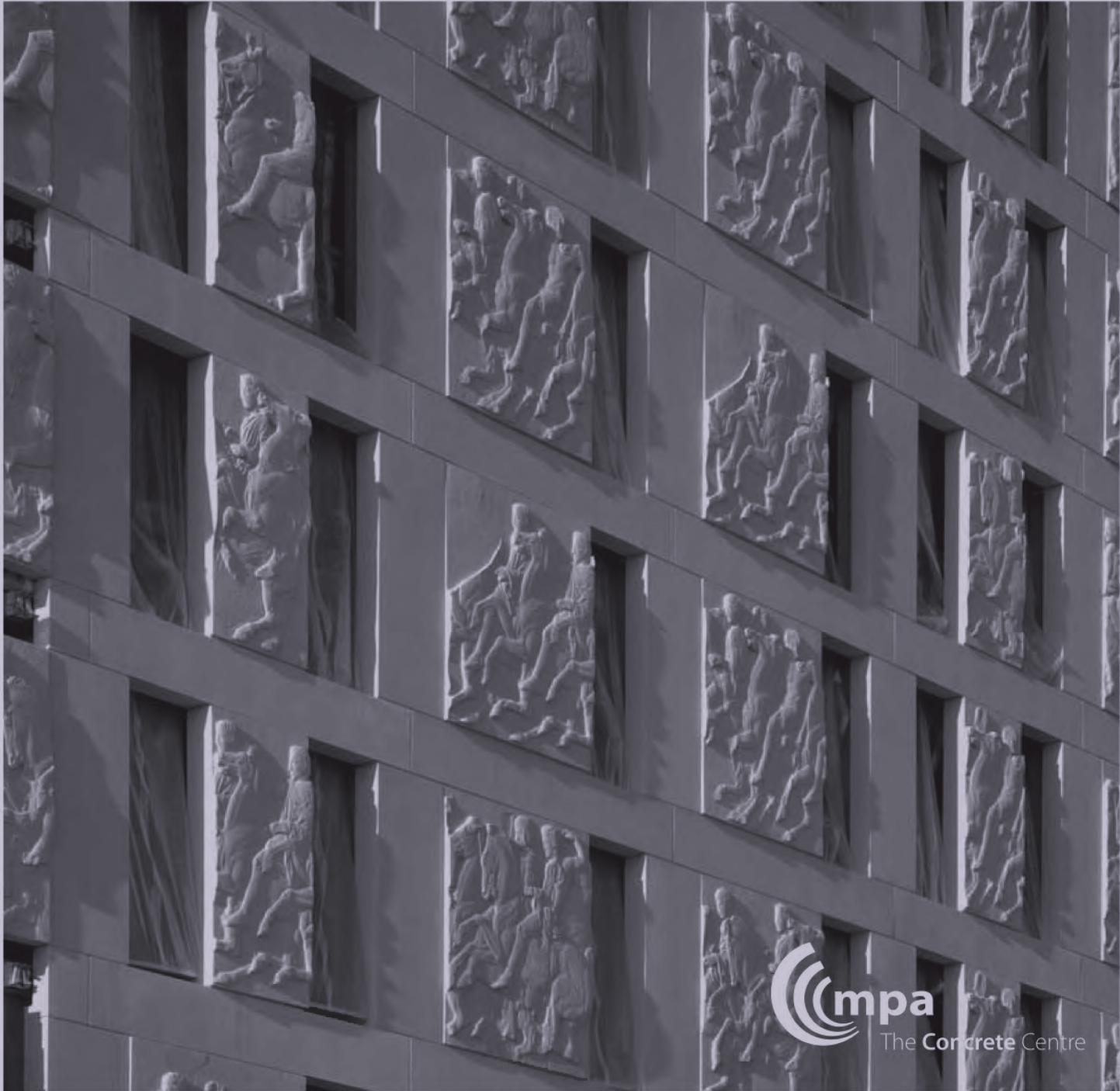


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BIG FRIEZE
What are the Elgin Marbles doing on a housing block in London's Olympic village?

STAR WITNESS
A new courthouse in Portugal makes a compelling case for the simple elegance of concrete

NOW IN COLOUR ...
David Chipperfield builds a fortress in pigmented concrete on Wakefield's waterfront



BUILDING STUDY | OLYMPIC ATHLETES' VILLAGE



CLASSICAL GOOD LOOKS

Niall McLaughlin Architects has taken the Olympics back to their roots by cladding one of the housing blocks in the 2012 athletes’ village in friezes cast from the Elgin Marbles. Graham Bizley finds out how – and why ...

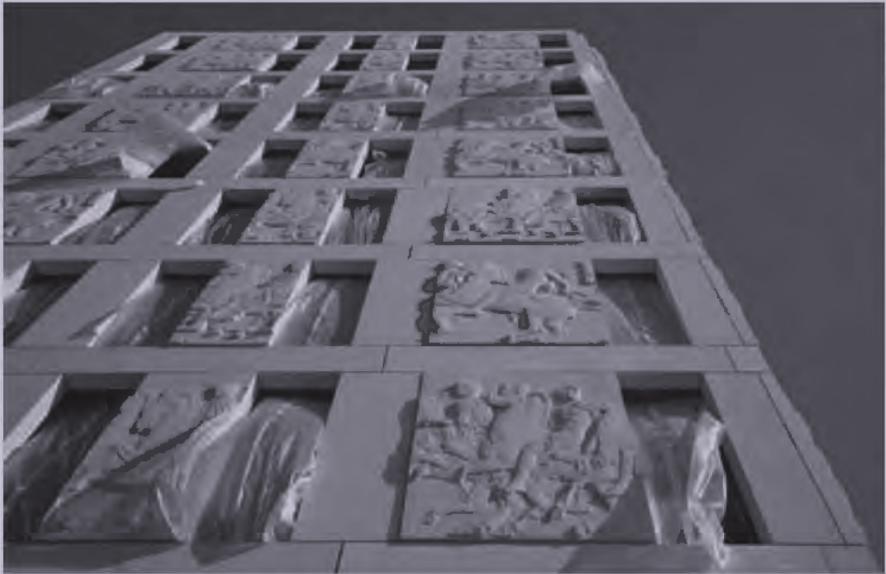
Carved by Greeks, blown up by Venetians, transported to England by Lord Elgin and the subject of heated debate ever since, the sculptures of the Parthenon have had a traumatic history. But for a residential block at the London 2012 Olympics athletes’ village, they have been part of a creative rather than a destructive process. Sections of the frieze have been digitally scanned, made into moulds and cast in concrete to clad the building in a bold attire of light, shadows and movement.

The athletes’ village is a residential development on the east side of the Olympic park that will provide 17,230 beds for competitors and officials during the Games, before conversion into 2,818 flats, half of which will be affordable. Most of these will be in 10-storey courtyard blocks, the first now nearing completion. The scale is unusual – more like something you might find in continental Europe than in London, where tall housing development has generally been limited to widely spaced slab blocks or towers.

So far, 16 architectural practices have been appointed to work on the village, ensuring variety across the 60 buildings. As part of the Olympic Delivery Authority’s commitment to include emerging talent, a number of up-and-coming practices have designed facades for buildings planned by more established names. To some, the idea of designing only the facade of a building overseen by others would be abhorrent. Niall McLaughlin however has seized the opportunity to experiment with precast concrete. “With a cast material you can very accurately lift detail off other things, like in brass rubbing,” he says.

Working on a base building by Glen Howells Architects, McLaughlin has indulged his interest in Gotfried Semper’s theory of dressing (bekleidung), according to which the origins of architecture are thought to lie in the cloaking of a frame with woven hangings as protection against the elements.

The theme of the Parthenon frieze is a procession towards the Acropolis that took place every four years in ancient times as part of the Great



Photos: Niall McLaughlin Architects

Panathenaic Festival. This also included sporting games, so the analogy with the modern Olympics is apt. But McLaughlin plays down this obvious reading and points instead to the iconic status of the Elgin Marbles and the different processes involved in their production. “The Parthenon stones were made in a particular place at a particular time. Their deracination and constant re-idealisation has made them into something else – something iconic that people recognise, like a picture of Elvis.”

On the building the elevations have been composed so that the relief panels appear to be the infill between smooth-cast column and beam elements of a trabeated structure. “We wanted to design facades that would express in a very direct way the frame behind,” McLaughlin says. Despite this apparent clarity, the panels are actually made in various different larger forms with false joints in places. McLaughlin revels in the variety of the

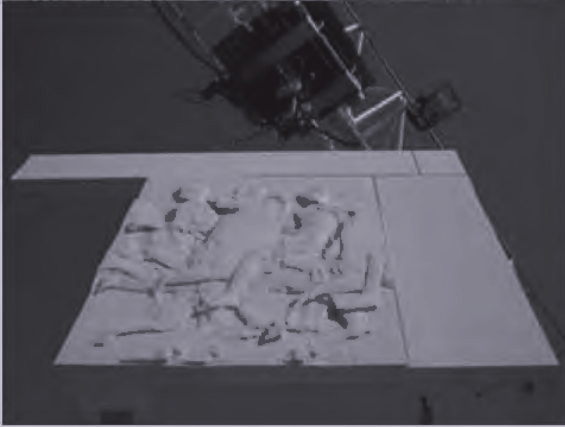
ABOVE
The reliefs are always projected in front of the adjacent smooth panels

BUILDING STUDY | OLYMPIC ATHLETES’ VILLAGE



LEFT
Negative glass-fibre-backed rubber moulds were made of five sections of the frieze

BELOW LEFT
The panels were cast in a variety of large forms, with false joints in places



PROJECT TEAM
Client Olympic Delivery Authority
Facade architect Niall McLaughlin Architects
Lead architect Glenn Howells Architects
Contractor Bovis Lend Lease
Precast concrete subcontractor Techrete
Historical consultant Dr Ian Jenkins, senior curator – Ancient Greece, British Museum
3D scanning Chris Cornish (sample and hold), Tom Lomax
Positive relief machining Metropolitan Works

precast elements, likening it to the juxtaposition of order and difference in Sol LeWitt’s 122 Variations of Incomplete Open Cubes.

Five different sections of the frieze depicting horses were chosen for the relief panels with the help of British Museum senior curator Ian Jenkins. These sections were scanned digitally while the museum was closed one night by Tom Lomax of the Slade School of Fine Art and Chris Cornish of 3D filming company Inition.

Positive “plugs” were then cut out of a polyurethane model board using a 5-axis router at London Metropolitan University. Using a 5-axis rather than a 3-axis machine allowed the board to be undercut, as a sculptor could do working by hand, which meant the strong shadows of the original are more accurately reproduced. After the initial scanning, the process was managed by specialist precast contractor Techrete.

Negative glass-fibre-backed rubber moulds were made, two from each plug, to allow the concrete casts to be created more quickly. Five different-sized panels were cast from each mould by fixing a temporary stop-end, making a total of 25 panel types. To achieve a white finish, the concrete incorporates white cement with a

white Malaga Dolomite aggregate and buff sand from Gloucestershire. The choice of colour is ironic considering the various attempts in the 19th and 20th centuries to “restore” the Elgin Marbles to their assumed original white – the stones would in fact always have had a honey-coloured patina.

The panels are fixed using stainless-steel brackets with tolerance for adjustment in three directions (see drawing). According to Techrete production manager Henry Clifford, the process on site was very carefully planned: “The panels were delivered in a sequence so they could be lifted straight off the trailer on to the building in a single operation.”

A random number generator was used to order the panels on the elevation and there is just enough variety that the repetition is not apparent. The reliefs are always projected in front of the adjacent smooth panels, expressing the primacy of the construction system over the decoration, but they are cut abruptly at the panel edges so the horses seem to jostle in a continuous procession across the facades. By embracing the restrictions of the brief, and the possibilities of precast concrete, McLaughlin has produced a work of dignity and joy. **Graham Bizley is a director of Prewett Bizley Architects**

Fixing the frieze

A prosaic housing block at the athletes’ village in east London has been brought to life by a sculptural facade of precast concrete panels decorated with reliefs based on the Elgin Marbles. The 10-storey building will contain 113 flats in a new residential community on the edge of the Olympic park.

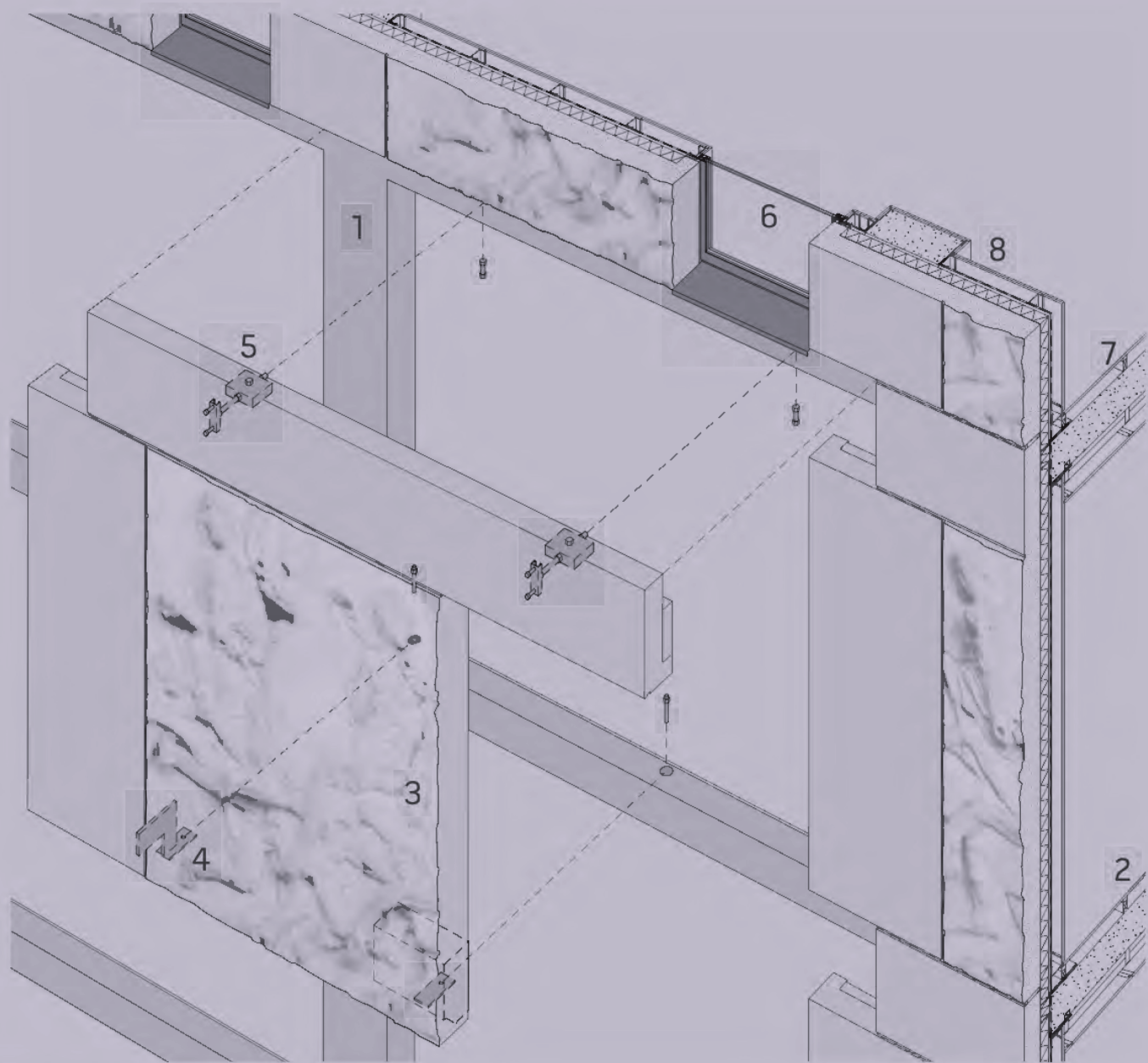
The structure is an in-situ reinforced concrete frame consisting of 500 x 250mm columns around the perimeter with two central cores. The 225mm flat floor slabs are post-tensioned to eliminate the need for down-stand beams, thereby maximising the floor-to-ceiling heights.

The precast concrete panels span the full storey height and are fixed top and bottom into the floor slabs via stainless steel brackets. Where space permits, a concrete corbel was cast into the back of the panel to transfer the load down to the floor. In tighter spaces where fixings were required next to columns, for example, a narrower stainless-steel bracket was cast into the rear of the panel. A 75mm-diameter hole in the floor slab allows tolerance to locate each bracket with a stainless-steel dowel which was then glued in place.

At the head the panels are restrained using precast concrete subcontractor Techrete’s own adjustable fixing. Metal channels cast into the panel and the soffit of the slab allow adjustment in three dimensions; 20mm recessed joints between panels allow for up to 8mm of incremental movement. Adjacent panels are pinned together with stainless-steel dowels.

Insulation was pre-bonded to the precast panels prior to installation. Internally a metal studwork frame supports a plasterboard lining that wraps around the columns.

- | |
|---|
| 1. Structural frame
500 x 250mm in-situ reinforced concrete columns at nominal 4m centres. |
| 2. Typical floor
15mm tongue-and-grooved particle board floor.
75mm void with acoustic battens at 600mm centres.
225mm post-tensioned in-situ reinforced concrete floor slab.
165mm ceiling service void.
Taped and jointed 12.5mm plasterboard ceiling on proprietary suspended hanger system. |
| 3. Cladding panels
Precast concrete panels with cast relief on some faces.
20mm shadow gaps between panels, allowing for a maximum of 8mm incremental movement. |



DETAIL: CUTAWAY SECTION THROUGH TYPICAL BAY

Joints sealed from both sides with rebated mastic bead. 20 x 10mm false joint recesses within panels. Stainless-steel dowels between adjacent panels. EPDM (ethylene propylene diene monomer) membrane bonded to rear of panels behind joints. 90mm rigid insulation fixed to rear of panels.

4. Lower fixings
Concrete corbel cast into rear of cladding panel carrying dead load where there is sufficient space. Stainless-steel fixing bracket to locate corbel bearing on floor slab. Stainless-steel brackets bolted to channel cast into rear of cladding panel where space is insufficient for the concrete corbel. Brackets fixed with stainless-steel dowels resin-glued into 75mm-diameter, 100mm-deep holes in slab.

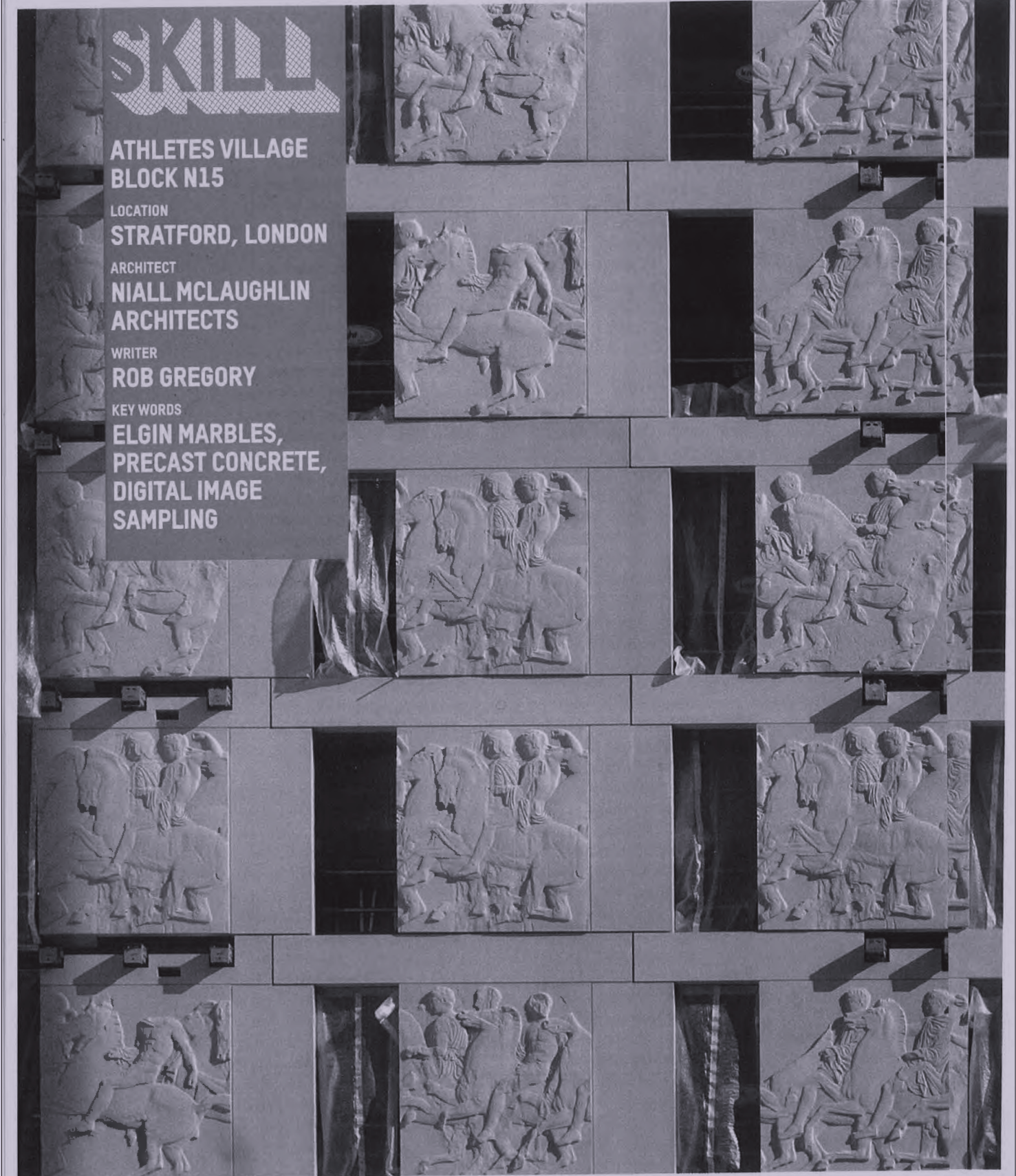
5. Upper fixings
Stainless-steel fixing brackets to restrain cladding panels to floor slab. Brackets bolted to galvanised steel channels cast into underside of floor slabs and to rear of cladding panels, allowing for vertical and horizontal adjustment.

6. Window
Inward opening PPC (polyester powder coated) aluminium window frame mounted on galvanised steel bracket fixed to floor slab. Window restrained to reveals of precast concrete panel with M8 bolts in six locations. Double-glazed sealed unit. PPC pressed aluminium cill fixed with clips to top edge of cladding panel. Painted MDF blind box above window.

7. Floor edge
Continuous 90-minute proprietary mineral-fibre fire stop and acoustic barrier between slab edge and rear of cladding panels. Insulation board to be installed locally after sealing of cladding panel joints.

8. Internal lining
100mm-wide proprietary light-gauge galvanised-steel studwork frame fixed to floor slabs at top and bottom. Two layers of 12.5mm plasterboard taped and jointed with paint finish. Air-tightness and vapour control membrane wrapped over outside of metal studwork frame and taped to columns and floor slabs.

Detail drawing by Graham Bizley



Facadism. Skinning up. Call it what you will. There has been much debate about the processes involved in the design and construction of the London 2012 Athletes Village. While the Olympic Delivery Authority and Lend Lease's intention was legitimate in their ambition to involve practices with varying levels of experience, the notion of pairing up established and up-and-coming practices, banded as either small, medium or large firms, to work on the design of single buildings put some architects off.

Beyond the prestige of working on the Olympic site, what fulfilment could there be in designing the skin for an otherwise anonymous residential block by someone else? And how would an architect with any design ambition generate meaning from being asked to work in this way? Some architects, however, did accept the challenge and are soon to see the fruits of their collaborations. Niall McLaughlin, for instance, through constraints imposed on him while working as a sub-consultant to Glenn Howells, saw the opportunity to do something unlike anything his practice had done before.

Howells, a contemporary of McLaughlin's, with a much larger practice, was given responsibility for two plots that comprised 498 residential units. He invited Niall McLaughlin Architects and Piercy Conner Architects to work with him on the facades and at their first design team meeting gave them the simplest of briefs. As McLaughlin recalls, Howells stated that neither team should dare to produce a syncopated facade, effectively vetoing the sort of slippy-slidy window layouts that have become the ubiquitous answer to cladding nondescript commercial and residential interiors.

Although tongue-in-cheek, this instruction encapsulated concerns held by many critics that the whole process could see the village becoming little more than a parade of over-stylised, thinly veiled attempts

to dress up, disguise or ameliorate these buildings' potentially monotonous frames, or chassis. Built to strict functional briefs for both the athletes and their future mixed-tenure residents, the design of the residential chassis across the site has a degree of consistency that some designers would inevitably want to break down through expressions of their own creativity. McLaughlin, however, did the opposite, using what he refers to as the abstract and normative characteristics of both the design and procurement processes, and the resulting structure of the building as the starting point for the generation of his facade in an approach that if anything exaggerates and plays on abstraction and repetition.

For him, this project was a rare opportunity to focus on the themes of architectural representation and decoration, which he relished, having spent time researching the history and significance of the screen in architecture through the writings of Gottfried Semper and Karl Bötticher.

Recalling Semper's assertion that the origins of monumental architecture lay in the bedecking of the festival scaffold with emblems of the festival tradition, the challenge for McLaughlin was how to provide a facade that not only expressed the structuring of the building and its interior spaces, but that would also perform a representative function for a wider public.

'We had the image of Sol LeWitt's *122 Variations of Incomplete Open Cubes* in our minds from the beginning,' he says. 'With its endless variations, set within a grid, every single one of them is different, and you feel as though it is trying to communicate something to you.'

In describing the trance-like state that this image induced, McLaughlin sought to replicate this sense in a facade that would appear to be communicating order. In reality, however, as with Sol LeWitt's piece, when you try to seek out where the order lies, all you find is more

variation, and the oscillation between order and variation becomes part of the building's communicative function. But what mode of decoration would he take? Having eliminated the idea of working with artists on a series of specifically commissioned pieces, why did he eventually decide to sample the Elgin Marbles?

'Well,' he says, in anticipation of what will no doubt become the most obvious reading of the building, 'the last thing I want is for people to think it is to do with representing the origins of the Olympics. At one stage, I thought we might go and look at Olympia, but I didn't like that idea, because there is too simple an equivalence between the origins of the Olympics and this site.

For me, it is all about the origins of architectural representation and my own fascination with these particular stones and their deracinated state.'

Tracing the Parthenon sculptures' eventful history over two millennia, he goes on: 'There is a sense to me of the Elgin Marbles being fragmented and lost. They were made under the eaves of a particular building at a particular time by particular people, with a particular set of meanings at that time,' he says. Yet as history tells us, that was just the start and through their eventful life, they have come to mean so much more today.

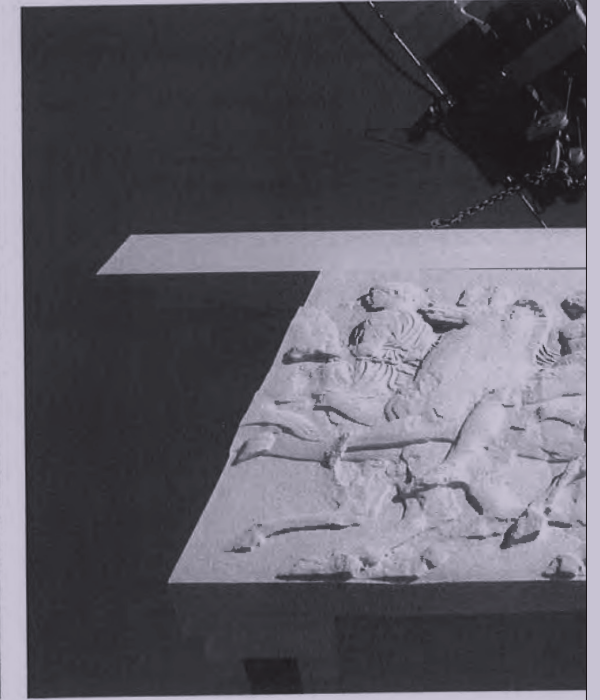
'Damaged by volcanic ash, burnt in a fire, defaced by Christians, robbed of their metal by Turks, blown up by Venetians in a bombardment, the Marbles were taken down by Lord Elgin, sunk in the ship on the way back to England, recovered by sponge divers, brought back to one of the most polluted cities ever on earth and covered in sulphur dioxide,' muses McLaughlin.

He was fascinated by the way in which the marbles have constantly changed state and have constantly been re-idealised, right up until Lord Duveen's attempt in the 1930s to make them white again (when of course they were never white in the first place) in some sort of —

NIALL MCLAUGHLIN ARCHITECTS ATHLETES VILLAGE BLOCK N15

THIS PROJECT WAS A RARE OPPORTUNITY TO FOCUS ON THE THEMES OF ARCHITECTURAL REPRESENTATION AND DECORATION

Previous page, main picture: Under construction, the precast concrete relief panels sit amid columns and beams of the principal long facades
Top right: The north elevation shows the random disposition of variant panels
Above right: McLaughlin and his team were given one night to capture the digital information in the British Museum
Centre right: Metropolitan Works created the medium density fibreboard reproduction using a 5 axis router
Bottom right: A latex mould was made for each of five subject stones, from which five variant panels were produced by masking the mould into 950mm, 1200mm, 1650mm, 1800mm and 2200mm widths
Middle: Final insulated cast panels and beams are craned into place
Far right: As a result of the re-sampling, some panels create irregular exposed edges that cast delightful shadows






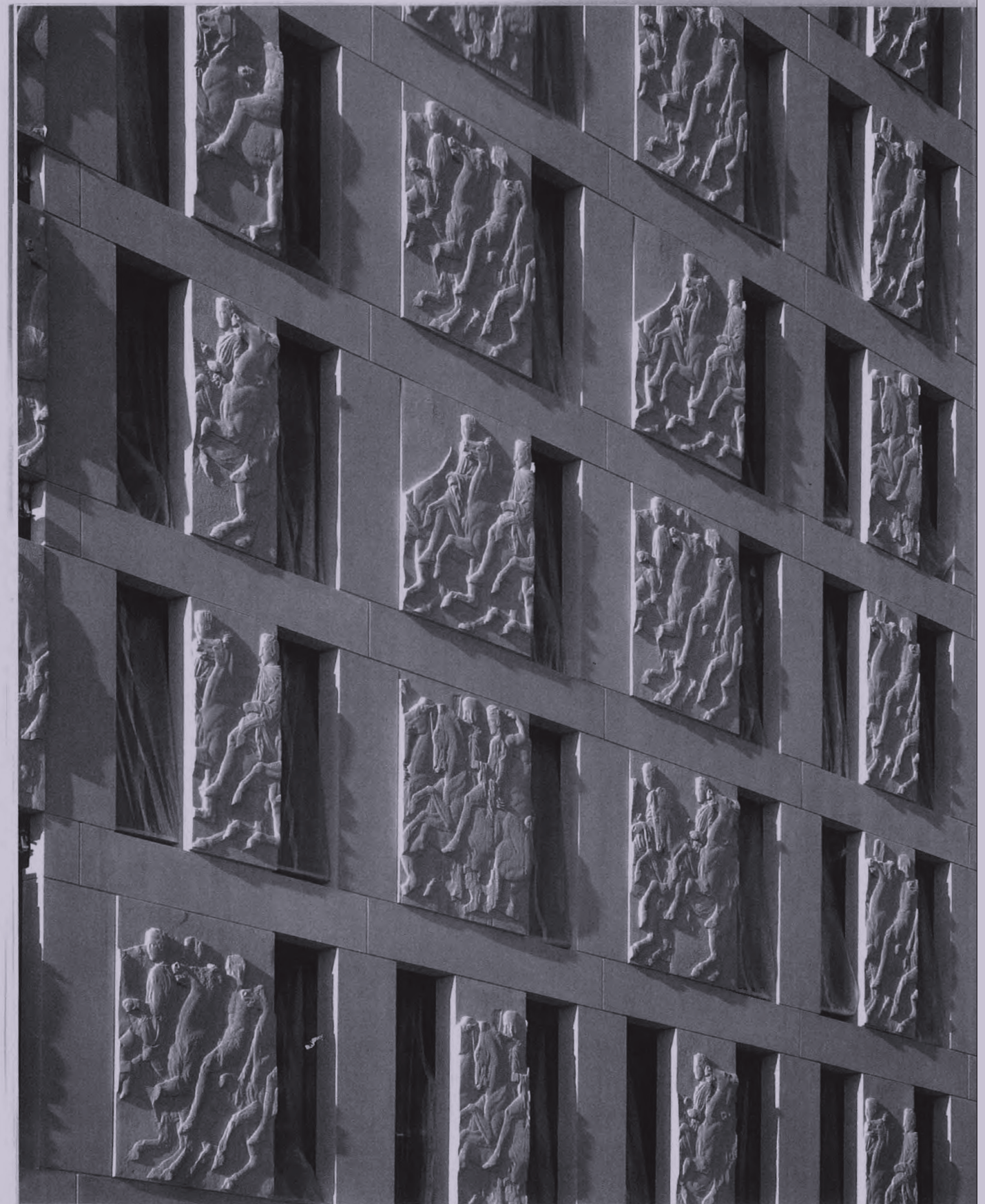
ideological drive that in fact damaged them further in the process.

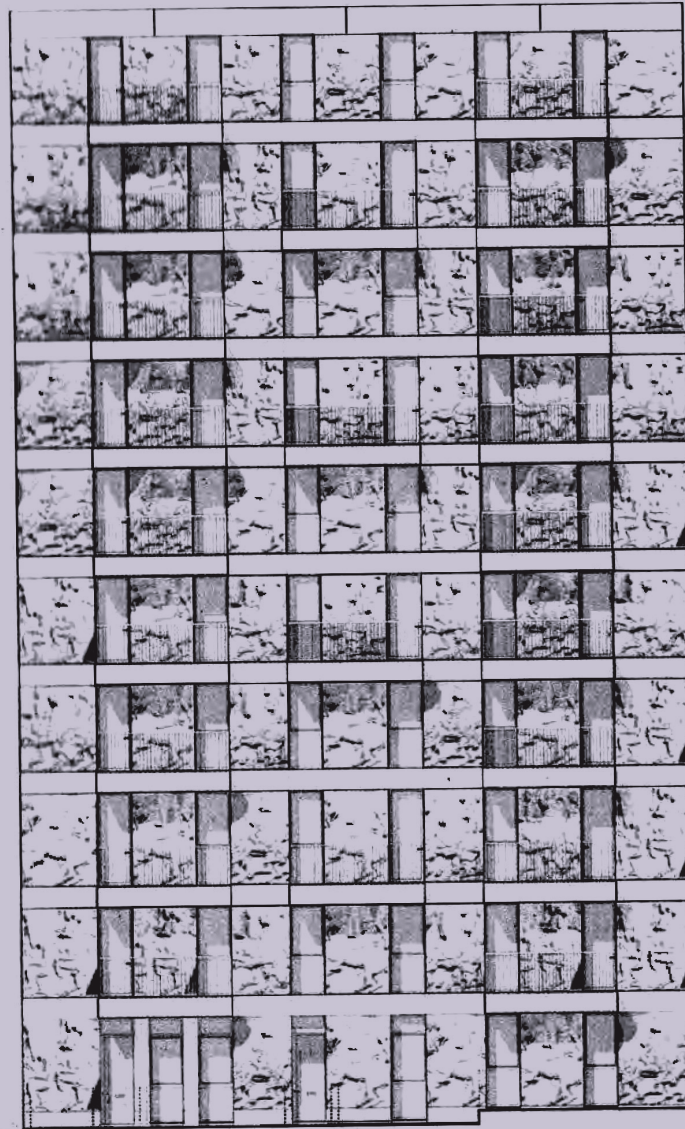
Beyond their physical meaning, the subject matter of the stones held significance for McLaughlin, which led him to choose five carvings that were more theoretically related to the notion of representation, including the presentation of the sacred peplos to the goddess Athena. In the end, however, it was a clandestine conversation with senior curator Ian Jenkins late one night in the British Museum that finally helped him to decide.

While McLaughlin's colleagues Chris Cornish of Inition and Tom Lomax of University College London were busy capturing the vital digital imaging data on the other side of the room, Jenkins turned to McLaughlin and said, 'I know you have all these theoretical ideas which are very interesting, but really it's all about the horses. The people of London will love the horses, look at their rhythm, look at the repetition.'

With that the decision was made. McLaughlin redirected his colleagues to five different stones that would be the basis for the 25 variant panels required to clad the building. From the digital files, the next stage was to produce the 2200 x 2200mm medium density fibreboard reproductions, using Metropolitan Works' 5 axis router, which in turn were used to make the latex moulds from which Techrete would cast the final panels.

With five different-sized panels cast from each mould, in 950mm, 1200mm, 1650mm, 1800mm and 2200mm widths, the panels were backed with rigid insulation before being craned onto Howell's chassis. Once installed, the delightful effect of light falling across the panels was revealed as the relief cast its shadow on the flat concrete frame. The image was timeless, but strangely familiar. Yet re-sampled, unordered and placed at random, using an algorithm based on the velocity of particles entering the atmosphere, there is much more to McLaughlin's Marbles than meets the eye. 





Elevation

0 2m

AJ 03.02.11

FIRST LOOK

'Elgin Marbles' for 2012 Olympics unveiled

The AJ can exclusively reveal these images of Niall McLaughlin Architects' soon-to-complete Athletes Village scheme in the Olympic Park, east London.

The 10-storey building features a precast concrete cladding system replicating the Parthenon Marbles, also known as the Elgin Marbles, wrapped around an in-situ concrete 'chassis' designed by Glenn Howells Architects.

The practice created five different panels, based on scans of the Ancient Greek bas relief currently housed in the British Museum. Produced by Techcrete, these panels have been cut in five different ways, effectively creating 25 panels which have been arranged at random on the exterior of the 113-flat scheme.

The project was developed through the Olympic Delivery Authority's (ODA) Design and Benchmarking process.

Back in 2008 the ODA chose a variety of established and up-and-coming practices to work on the 2,818 flat development which will be converted into homes after the London 2012 Games.

Other firms also working on the village include Denton Corker Marshall, dRMM, DSDHA, Panter Hudspith Architects, Patel Taylor and Piercy Conner Architects.

Richard Waite



11

Good intentions

In the second of three architectural reports on London 2012, Edwin Heathcote explores the Olympic Village

The last time London hosted the Olympics, in 1948, the athletes were housed in former military hospitals and prisoner-of-war camps, student halls and a bunch of tents in Richmond Park. This year the 17,000 athletes will find themselves in a fortified city. London's huge Olympic Village is grossly misnamed. This is a chunk of serious city poking its head and shoulders above the low-lying brick terraces of east London and it will be the most significant element in the Games' legacy.

This is housing on the scale and density that architects and planners have been demanding for decades: a single developer ensuring a coherent, intelligent and compact urbanity. It is the kind of unified development that has proved impossible since the end of the big postwar municipal building programmes – programmes whose widespread social failure has tainted the reputation of large-scale urban intervention ever since.

The original masterplan by Fletcher Priest, Arup and landscape designers West 8 for developer Lend Lease attempted to imbue the place with the scale and feel of expensive London districts – very dense but very classy. In this it has failed completely. Instead the result resembles a tranche transplanted from a Spanish or Swedish suburb, a piece of impeccably modern townscape with solid blocks, quality public space and facilities, and generous landscaping. It has a very fine school, designed (by architects AHMM) around a central drum in a cheery retro-modernist style. It has shops, streets, green spaces and a town centre. Unfortunately, though, that centre is isolated in the big ugly box of Westfield, Europe's largest urban shopping centre.

That removal of commercial street life might cause this to become an Alphaville, with the appearance but not the vitality of genuine urbanity. It's difficult to judge while it's still under construction, and

This is housing on the scale and density that architects and planners have been demanding for decades

while it's still in Olympics rather than "legacy" mode. But the tall, beige buildings seem to be creating deep beige canyons, and even with the balconies, courtyards and a smattering of shops and planting, it is difficult to see this as an integrated and buzzing city quarter.

Despite these reservations there are many things to cheer. One of the few good arguments for hosting the Olympics at all was that a development of this scale achieved at this speed – and with coherence – is impossible without the impetus of the big deadline. The design guidelines applied to things like the ratios of windows to wall, balconies to give all apartments access to outside space, a material palette of cast concrete panels that eschews whacky colours or nasty cladding. This, with the commissioning of a range of relatively young (although also relatively safe) architects, has created an ensemble of carefully articulated buildings. Some inhabit the dull end of the commercial spectrum, others look serious and interesting.

The most striking building is by one of London's under-praised talents, Niall McLaughlin. He sheathes his block in casts of the Elgin marbles, made by electronically scanning the real marbles at the British Museum. The panels run around the whole height of the building, their shallow relief passing in and out of sharp shadow and creating a feeling of movement and depth. Simple balconies, with bands of concrete indicating floor and ceiling levels, create a particular modernist aesthetic – a bit reminiscent of Rome c1935, a comparison that will always raise the problematic associations of Fascist architecture.

Regardless of these echoes, this is a powerful and beautiful building that poetically evokes the ancient Greek origins of the Games, as well as the controversial London location of the Elgin marbles; it is a building intelligently located in time, event and place.



Origins Niall McLaughlin's blocks at the Olympic village, with casts of the Elgin marbles

Steve Bates

There are 2,818 flats built so far, with another 2,000 to come. Eric Parry's central-European-inflected block is solid and urbane. Its bright abstract balcony fronts introduce a rare flash of colour – they were painted by Parry himself after a budget cut precluded any commissioned art. The building's cutaway corner and chunky mass recalls the solid urban blocks of Barcelona. Other notable buildings in the village include DSDHA's sharp 14-storey block with its strikingly angular balconies, CF Møller's solidly Scandinavian composition and dRMM's elegant terrace of three-storey houses.

The model imposed on the architects is the perimeter block: apartments and houses wrapped around a central green courtyard. That the blocks are arranged in a grid sliced through by diagonals reinforces their European quality. Their scale negotiates the chasm between the hideous burgeoning commercial towers of east London, which rise out of the raggedly redeveloped post-industrial landscape, and the dense rows of Victorian terraces that give the surrounding areas their neighbourhood character.

If the legacy of the Olympic Village is to be compared to that of other big events, however, there is good and bad news. The public infrastructures left over from the Great Exhibition of 1851 (Albertopolis, the area containing South Kensington's

museums, the Albert Hall and Imperial College) and, a century later, the Festival of Britain (the Festival Hall and, ultimately, the architecturally adventurous South Bank complex) make the civic legacy look weak. A more accurate comparison might be with White City, built for the 1908 Olympics, an area that remains a hopeless mess (not helped by the city's other massive Westfield shopping centre).

The Olympic Village was bought last year by Qatari Diar, the Qatari sovereign-wealth fund's property arm with developer Delancey, for £557m. This has left the taxpayer with a bill for £275m, a huge public subsidy for a private estate. This is a place of good intentions but it is one that encapsulates the contemporary trend for the privatising of profit and the socialising of loss.

In that, it is as perfect a snapshot of a moment as was the self-improving South Kensington. Perhaps the Olympic Village will retain its current feel of a high-security gated enclave, perhaps it will grow into a piece of real London, or perhaps its blocky grid will prove successful and begin to inform the streets around it. The cliché has it that London is a collection of villages. This is entirely wrong: London is a city of districts, big, sprawling quarters with poorly differentiated edges and centres that are nevertheless each radically distinct. Perhaps, then, this new bulky non-village fits right in.

MORE ONLINE

For Edwin Heathcote's report on the sporting architecture of London's Olympics, visit www.ft.com/life-arts/design

Το Λονδίνο διαφημίζεται με Παρθενώνα

Του ΔΗΜΗΤΡΗ ΡΗΓΟΠΟΥΛΟΥ

Σατανικά έξυπνος ο κ. Νάιαλ Μακ Λόχλιν. Η απόφασή του να «ντύσει» ένα κτίριο του Ολυμπιακού Χωριού των Αγώνων του Λονδίνου (σε 447 ημέρες από σήμερα) με παραστάσεις από τη ζωφόρο του Παρθενώνα και ειδικότερα το τμήμα που βρίσκεται στο Βρετανικό Μουσείο θα ανάψει πιθανότατα φωτιές και στην Αθήνα και στο Λονδίνο.

Στο ελληνικό υπουργείο Πολιτισμού οι εικόνες με τα προκατα-

Ο αρχιτέκτονας Νάιαλ Μακ Λόχλιν θα «ντύσει» κτίριο του Ολυμπιακού Χωριού με αντίγραφα παραστάσεων από το τμήμα της ζωφόρου που βρίσκεται στο Βρετανικό Μουσείο.

σκευασμένα ανάγλυφα πάνω σε ένα κτίριο που για λίγες ημέρες θα φιλοξενήσει αθλητές και στη συνέχεια πρόκειται να μετατραπεί σε μια κανονική πολυκατοικία του ανατολικού Λονδίνου είναι σχεδόν βέβαιο ότι θα προκαλέσουν την «έκπληξη» (για να το θέσουμε κομπάζ) πολλών αρχαιολόγων και μη. Ο αρχιτέκτονας Μιχάλης Φωτιάδης (ο Έλληνας συνεργάτης του Μπερνάρ Τσουμί στο νέο

Μουσείο της Ακρόπολης) που μας επισήμανε το δημοσίευμα είναι έντονα επικριτικός: «Τι να προστεθεί στον εκχυδαισμό της κλασικής τέχνης;». Αλλά και σε πολιτικό επίπεδο το γεγονός ότι ως μοναδική πηγή έμπνευσης καταγράφονται τα «Ελγίνεια» δημιουργεί σύγχυση.

Γιατί και το Βρετανικό Μουσείο δεν θα πρέπει να αισθάνεται ιδιαίτερα ευτυχισμένο με το τελικό αποτέλεσμα και τις υποδηλώσεις του αρχιτέκτονα. Αν διαβάσει κανείς με προσοχή τη συνέντευξη του αρχιτέκτονα του κτιρίου, κ. Νάιαλ Μακ Λόχλιν στην υψηλού κύρους βρετανική επιθεώρηση διεθνούς αρχιτεκτονικής Architectural Review όπου το κτίριο παρουσιάζεται σε τέσσερις σελίδες, θα διαπιστώσει διακριτικές αιχμές του κ. Μακ Λόχλιν υπέρ του επαναπατρισμού των Μαρμάρων. Σαν ο Βρετανός αρχιτέκτονας να βάζει το θέμα των Μαρμάρων από την πίσω πόρτα...

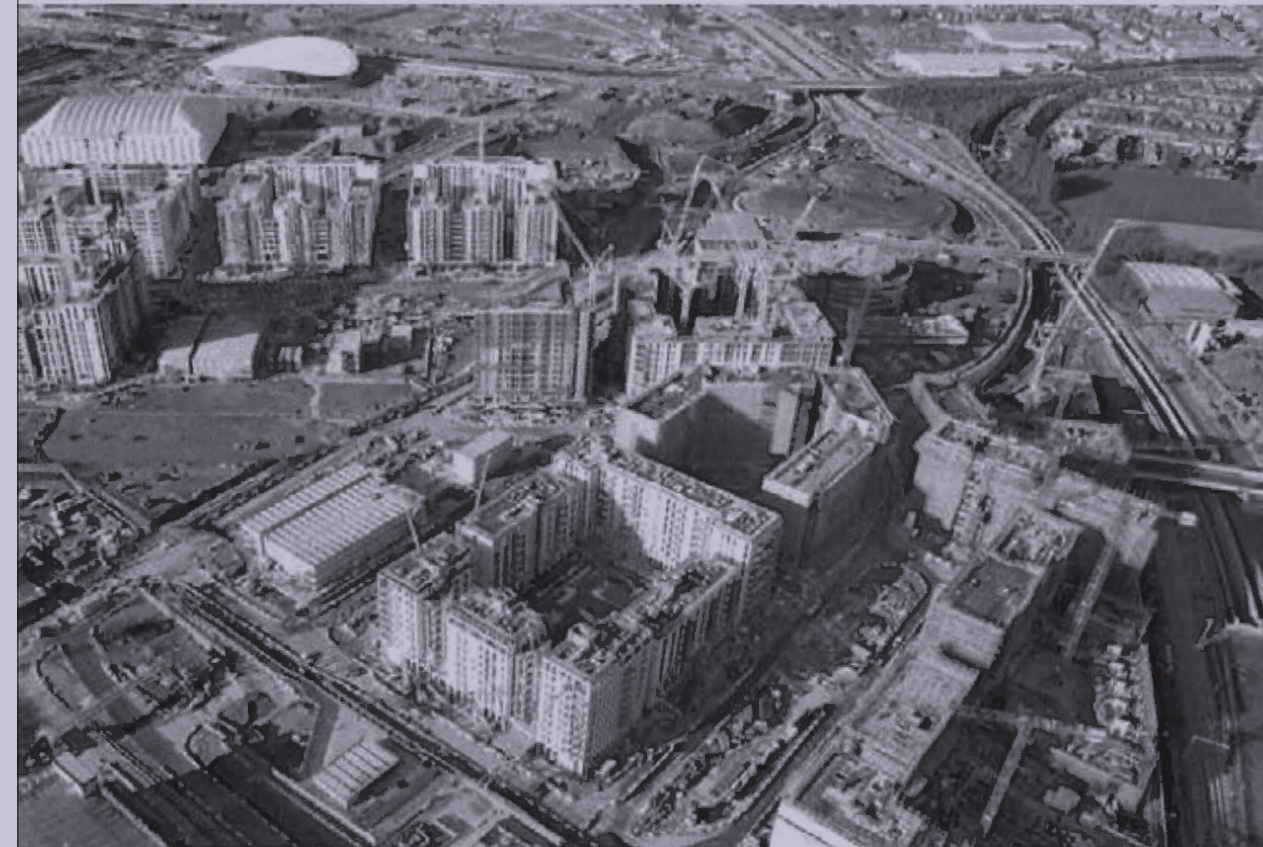
«Λοιπόν», εξηγεί ο αρχιτέκτονας, «το τελευταίο πράγμα που θα ήθελα να σκεφτεί ο κόσμος για ό,τι έκανα είναι πως προσπάθησα να αναπαραστήσω τις ρίζες των Ολυμπιακών Αγώνων. Κάποια στιγμή, σκέφτηκα ότι ίσως θα έπρεπε να ταξιδέψω μέχρι την Ολυμπία αλλά τελικά δεν μου άρεσε πολύ η ιδέα γιατί είναι απλόχερο να συγκρίνεις την αρχαία Ολυμπία με το Ολυμπιακό Χωριό του Λονδίνου. Για μένα το πιο ενδιαφέρον είναι οι ρίζες της αρχιτεκτονικής αναπαρά-



Αεροφωτογραφία του περασμένου



Οι τοίχοι καλύπτονται με προκατασκευασμένα ανάγλυφα λίθων μπετόν.



Δεκεμβρίου από το υπό κατασκευή Ολυμπιακό Χωριό στο ανατολικό Λονδίνο.



ευσασμένα ανάγλυφα λίθων μπετόν.

στασης και η δική μου αγάπη για αυτά τα πολύ συγκεκριμένα μάρμαρα και το ζήτημα του εκτοπισμού τους». Και συνεχίζει: «Κατά τη γνώμη μου σημαίνει κάτι, ότι τα Ελγίνεια Μάρμαρα αποσπάστηκαν και χάθηκαν. Εγιναν για ένα συγκεκριμένο κτίριο, μια συγκεκριμένη εποχή από συγκεκριμένους ανθρώπους, με πολύ συγκεκριμένες νοηματοδοτήσεις για την εποχή τους». Ο φιλελληνικός οίστρος του Νάιαλ Μακ Λόχλιν δεν έχει τέλος. Αναφέρεται στις καταστροφές που υπέστησαν κατά καιρούς τα Μάρμαρα του Παρθενώνα, εκτοξεύοντας ενδιάμεσα πικρόχολα σχόλια για τις βρετανικές ευθύνες: «Ηρθαν σε μια από τις πιο μολυσμένες πόλεις του κόσμου», μιλώντας για τη μεταφορά τους στο Λονδίνο ή σημειώνοντας τις προσπάθειες του Λόρδου Ντούβεν να

τα λευκάνει ενώ «φυσικά τα Μάρμαρα δεν υπήρξαν ποτέ λευκά».

Αλλά για να φτάσουμε στις τελικές επιλογές αποφασιστικό ρόλο έπαιξε μια συνομιλία του αρχιτέκτονα με τον Ιαν Τζένκινς, επιμελητή του Βρετανικού Μουσείου επί σειρά ετών. «Το ξέρω πως έχετε όλες αυτές τις θεωρητικές ιδέες που παρουσιάζουν μεγάλο ενδιαφέρον, αλλά πραγματικά νομίζω θα πρέπει να δώσετε έμφαση στα άλογα. Οι Λονδρέζοι θα αγαπήσουν τα άλογα, κοιτάξτε τον ρυθμό τους, κοιτάξτε την επαναληπτικότητα». Ο Μακ Λόχλιν συμφώνησε αμέσως γνωρίζοντας πολύ καλά πόσο μέσα στην αγγλική παράδοση είναι τα άλογα. Και επέστρεψε στους συνεργάτες τους στο University College London με την πρόταση που τελικά υλοποιείται.

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East is East : The Athletes Village and the Elgin Marbles

Author:



hughmcewen

Tags:

2012 acropolis architecture athens british design elgin greek London marbles museum olympics parthenon sculpture

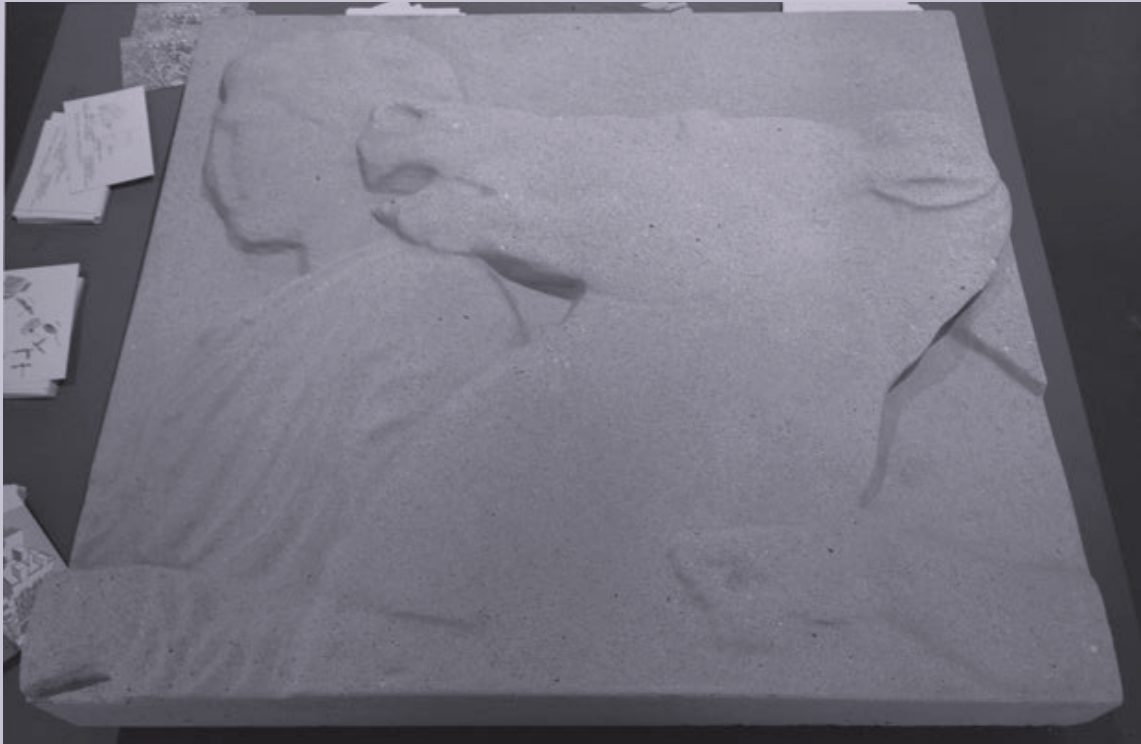
Recommend 35

Once the dust from the Olympics and Paralympics has settled, the Athletes Village will be transformed into East Village. Hosting over17,000 athletes and team officials during the Olympic Games, the Village will be converted into 2,818 residential units including 1,379 affordable homes. The athletes currently sleep in the homes of future owners, fulfilling the site’s own mantra of ‘Beds for athletes, homes for Londoners’. And what homes they are, with beautifully differentiated envelopes and the Lea Valley Park on their doorstep. Meanwhile, with athletes from all 205 competing countries in the village, a worldwide community is sure to identify these individual blocks as home for the next month.



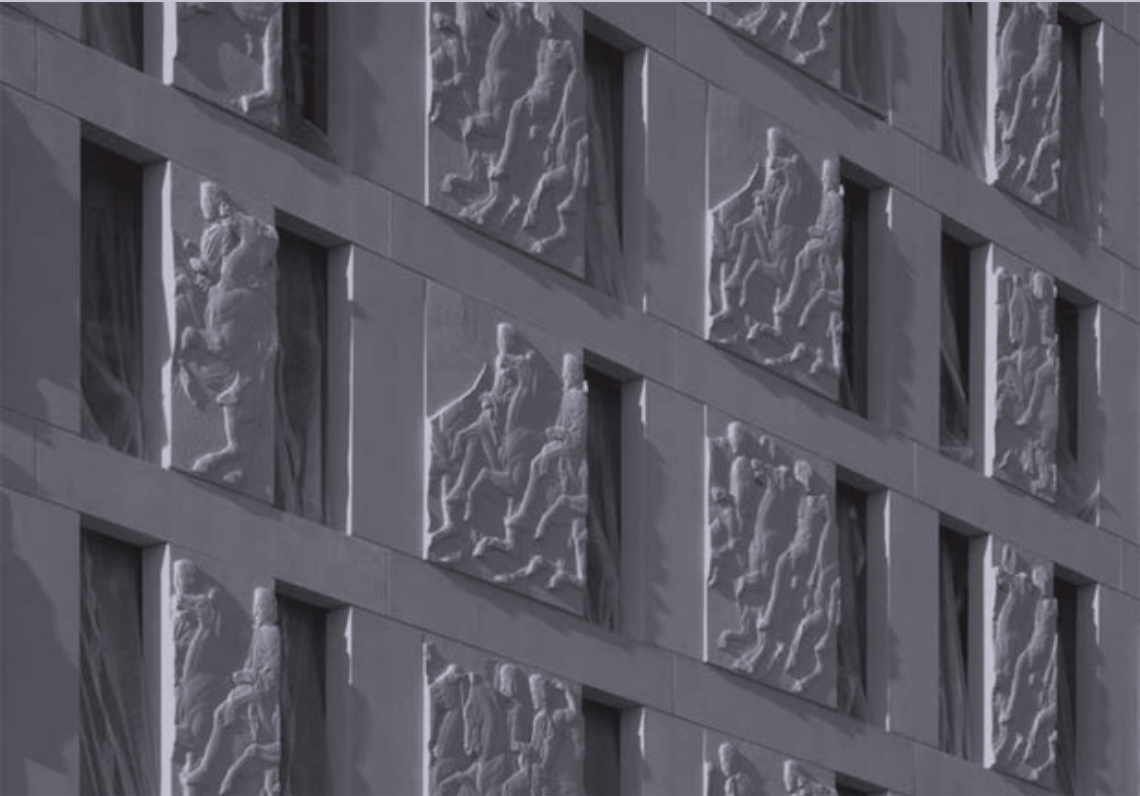
The Athletes Village (above) and East Village (Below)

One piece of this differentiation caught my eye in particular. Down at the Building Centre on Store Street, there was a slick exhibition of what the Village will be like after the games. New London Architecture, in association with Delancey, put on the exhibition ‘East Village – a lasting legacy for London’ from the 13th to the 31st March to showcase the architectural and design excellence of the village set within the broader context of the transformation of East London (1). Here models of the entire proposal sat alongside descriptions of the area, drawings from the architects and materials for the buildings themselves. Right in the middle of them all was this:



Niall McLaughlin Architect's Concrete Panel

It is a section of the Parthenon Marbles, also known as the Elgin Marbles, that has been reproduced in concrete by Niall McLaughlin Architects. The sculpted Marbles originally graced the walls of the Parthenon in Athens. Built nearly 2,500 years ago as a temple dedicated to the Greek goddess Athena, it was for a thousand years the church of the Virgin Mary of the Athenians, then a mosque, and finally an archaeological ruin (2). These recreated panels, meanwhile, have been wrapped round the façade of a base building by Glenn Howells Architects to clothe one of the blocks in the Athletes Village.



Niall McLaughlin Architect's Facade

The Marbles are a site of extreme architectural controversy. Sculpted by Greeks, blown up by Venetians, given away by Ottomans and shipped to England by Lord Elgin, they have been the subject of heated debate ever since (3). The position of the Greek culture ministry is understandably nationalistic, and is replicated in the UK every time a ‘British masterpiece’ might be sold off to a private buyer. They request the return of the marbles to Greek ownership and display.



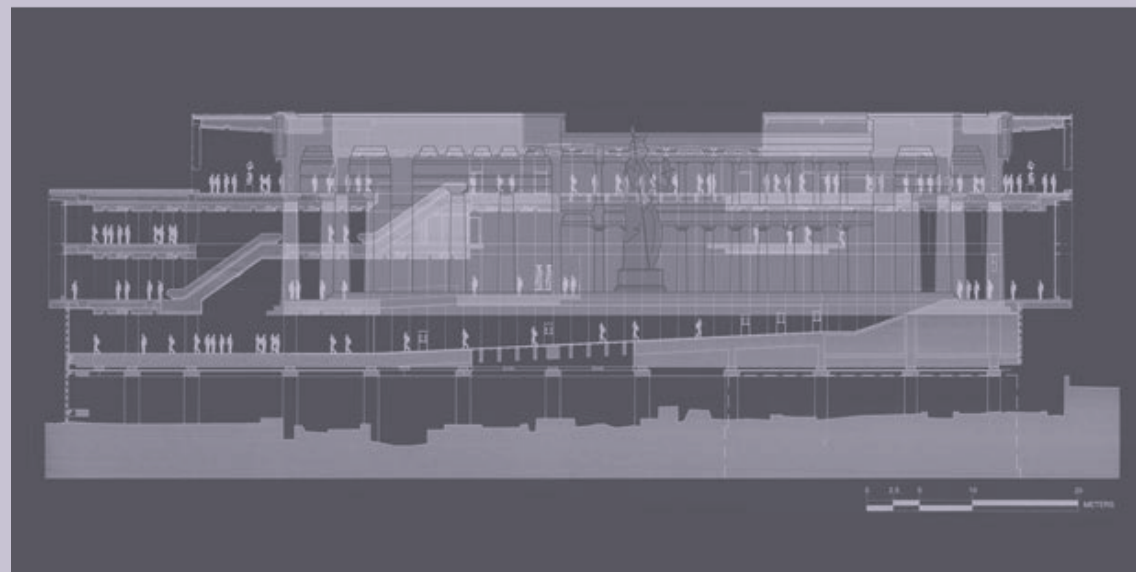
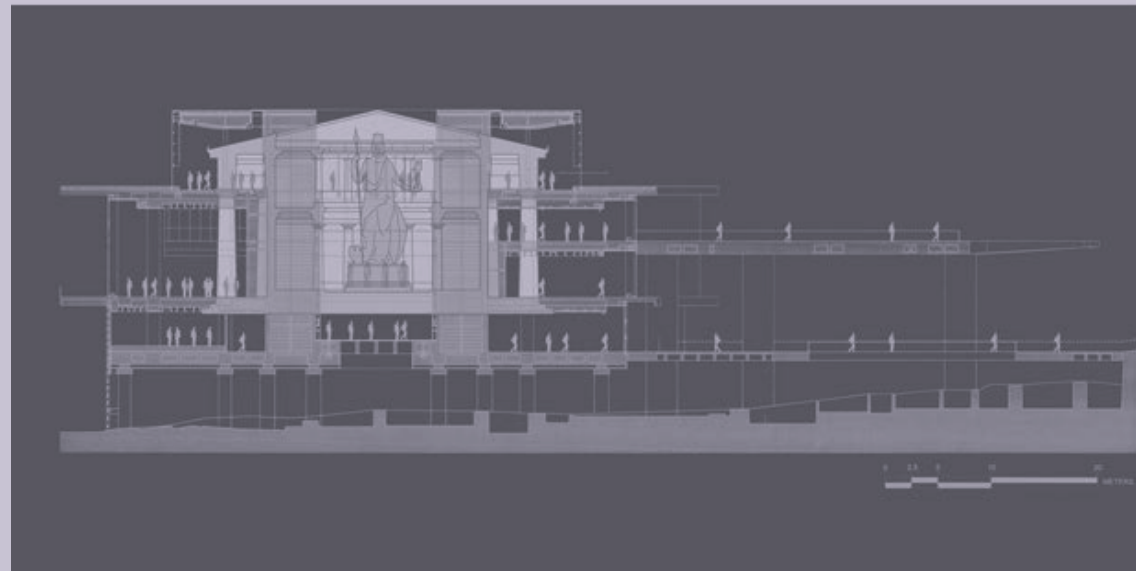
The Acropolis Museum



The location and orientation of the museum

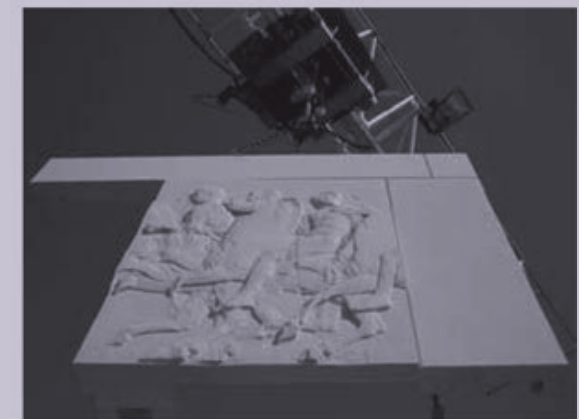
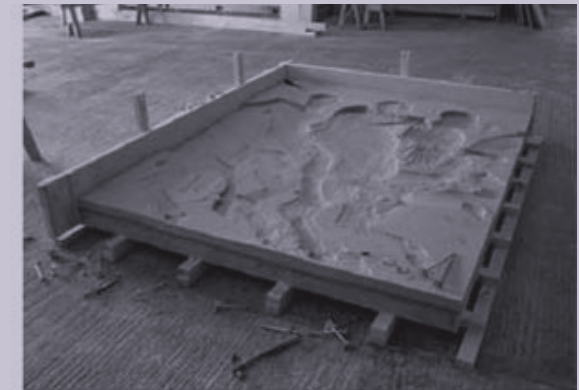
This international wrangling has even found architectural form in the Acropolis Museum by Bernard Tschumi Architects. The top floor of this building is angled to sit in the same orientation as the Parthenon and has a frame inside to hold the surviving pieces of the Marbles in the same relationship as they would have been on the original building. Those pieces of the Marbles that are currently held by the British Museum, Louvre and other international museums are represented with plaster replicas, awaiting their return.





The marbles in the same relationship as on the Parthenon

The arguments that the British have used for not returning the Marbles are many and varied. Originally it was stated that they had been legitimately transferred into British ownership from the rulers of the country. While Greece went through turbulent political periods it was argued that that the sculptures were being safeguarded from potential damage. In more recent times the argument has become more obtuse. The British Museum now states that the Marbles are of such global significance that they should be shown in a free, internationally visited museum and seen in context with a worldwide selection of anthropological items.



Casting the replica marbles

This is a much more interesting argument, which the use of the casts on the Olympic Village wholeheartedly supports. It really states that the marbles now exist in the public realm. As Niall McLaughlin explains “The Parthenon stones were made in a particular place at a particular time. Their deracination and constant re-idealisation has made them into something else – something iconic that people recognise, like a picture of Elvis.”

That the argument the British Museum has for retaining the Marbles hinges on the worldwide distribution of their image, seems somewhat oxymoronic. How can they possibly be owned by the world, when they are very obviously retained in London? Even traditionally insular, nationalistic treasures, such as China’s Teracotta Army, have found themselves on world tours to allow as many people as possible to appreciate them. Maybe the Marbles should go on a world tour of their own. Perhaps they should be exhibited in a newly created international museum between Greece and the UK.

In any case, the British Museum might learn something from the games, that even though the Olympics originated in Greece, they are now worldwide because of a sense of personal ownership each time they move. The British have not owned the marbles for very long, and they should see themselves as just part of a long line of their guardians. Just part of a global tradition. The athletes might well appreciate the concrete replicas of the Marbles while they occupy East Village, but they know they are only one of a whole timeline of incumbents of the Olympic Park.

(1) <http://drmm.co.uk/news/east-village/>

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PARTHENON FRIEZE STARS IN THE LONDON OLYMPICS

Sporting motifs from ancient Olympia were popping up everywhere in the run-up to the Summer Games of 2012. But how did the sculptures which once decorated a temple over a hundred miles from Olympia fit into this picture? Earlier in the year I put this question to architect Niall McLaughlin, whose tribute to ancient Greece’s best known landmark will soon be on view to the new occupants of East London’s Olympic Village. Some of the Parthenon Frieze’s celebrated horsemen were embedded in the facade of one of the phalanx of new housing blocks which were constructed for visiting athletes.

Not the real things, of course. McLaughlin replicated five panels from the Frieze in the precast concrete cladding attached to one of the 60 buildings in the site’s residential zone. Digital scans of the Frieze were created in the British Museum, and the five panels produced on this basis were then cut in five different ways. So in effect 25 different versions of the horsemen are to be seen riding in random groups around the white expanse of concrete which enfolds the frame of the building.

In the Frieze itself the horsemen occupy roughly one half of a religious procession whose dynamic progress visibly unites different sections of the Athenian population. Prominent among them are the well-toned young riders who embody the splendour of the city’s political and military identity. These men are not being presented to us as athletes, and they certainly have no connection with the Olympic Games. So why did they put in an appearance in London’s Olympic Village?

“I wasn’t interested in any literal connection with the Olympic Games,” Niall McLaughlin told me, “but in the broad area of how a specific culture, place and time become endlessly recycled and idealised.” As some of you will know, the controversy among art historians about the exact significance of the horsemen is seemingly endless as well. McLaughlin has no axe to grind here, but he does harbour a romantic inclination to side with the eminent art historian

John Boardman, who famously did a count of the Frieze’s riders in order to convince us that they represent the 192 heroised Athenians who died at the battle of Marathon. This may not be entirely plausible, McLaughlin admits. But for him the idea is a fertile one. “I see the cavalry as a kind of lost troop, ceaselessly, rhythmically marching, but lost in the world.” In their new position in London’s East End they will signal to passers-by a notion of fractured wholeness. “The Parthenon Sculptures are more lost and better known than anything else I can think of,” the architect says. Their original narrative may have been broken up, but they continue to create new meanings in a variety of locations and contexts.

The housing blocks in the Olympic Village were produced in a systematised fashion, with one set of architects responsible for the basic structures, and another (including McLaughlin) for the concrete skins that were wrapped around them. This is not a way of doing things that normally appeals to architects, but McLaughlin seems to have relished the process. For him the replicated panels speak not just of rhythm and repetition, but also of the significance of the materials we have created to cover essential frameworks. McLaughlin is an admirer of Gottfried Semper, the 19th century German theorist who traced the origins of Greek temple architecture to the practice of draping screen-like fabrics over wooden supports in the course of religious festivals. A model for this might have been found in the more everyday habit of clothing and concealing the human body. With this in mind McLaughlin points out that the procession in the Frieze includes a “vesting horseman” in the centre of the western section, and the boy who is folding the cloth in the centre of the eastern panels. In his office, he tells me, the architects’ private name for their project was Peplos.

This is a response which delights me. The presentation of a specially woven peplos to the goddess Athene was the ultimate object of the Panathenaic procession, which most people identify as the scene depicted in the Frieze. And clothing is a theme which is present along its entire length. In the Frieze we see people who are handling, arranging and in general adjusting their clothing, starting with the young man at the west end who is tying on his sandal, and culminating with Hera in the east, who dramatically holds out her veil. The Athenians seem here to be involved in a perpetual process of refashioning and reinventing themselves as they prepare to honour their goddess with a brand new garment.

Niall McLaughlin’s sensitivity to the multi-layered themes of the Parthenon Frieze is very impressive. What I also find striking is the way in which his design exploits the interplay of horizontal and vertical elements present in the original building. In the Parthenon, as in other Greek temples, the horizontal flow of the colonnades is punctuated and pinned to the ground by the vertical thrust of the columns which they contain. In the 10-storey housing block, conversely, the vertical emphasis is tempered by the incessant horizontal motion of Niall McLaughlin’s Parthenon riders.

Now the Olympic Games are over the 2818 flats in the housing complex are to be occupied by tenants paying a mixture of affordable and market rents. Lucky people – personally I cannot think of many things nicer than coming home every evening to a troop of timeless Athenian horsemen.

With warm thanks to Niall McLaughlin, of Niall McLaughlin Architects, for the designs and the conversation.



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