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LETTERS

LETTER OF THE WEEK

Cleverness isn't good to live in

If sarcasm is the lowest form of wit then wit is certainly the lowest form of architecture. When will the likes of OMA understand that clever-clever form-making does not necessarily make experientially satisfactory architecture? — its De Rotterdam building (*Buildings* December 6) being a catastrophically typical case.

I'm sure everyone was very pleased with themselves at the office crit, looking at the dinky 1:500 model, but the experience of vast buildings has almost nothing to do with that of their miniature representation.

Ellis Woodman's Morandi comparison expresses this perfectly — the resonance of making the small seem monumental in a painting simply becomes a nightmare if you actually do it for real — and playing knowingly with solid, void and imbalance isn't going to help one bit.

**Simon Gill
London SW6**

Put the focus on Lubetkin's work

The announcement that the Lubetkin Prize is to be scrapped (*bdonline* December 9) is sad, but not entirely surprising. The award's association with the architect's original achievement and aspirations seemed to be becoming increasingly tenuous.

"Lubetkin" is not a brand name for adding prestige regardless of application. His legacy would be better served by conscientious stewardship of his surviving works and wider understanding of his aims and ideals.

**John Allan
London N8**

Remembering Mandela in 1990

It was with great sadness that we at Alexander Sedgley learned that Nelson Mandela passed away.

To focus on his plight back in 1990 BD ran an international competition called Freedom Square, which was to be a 24-hour event to be held in Trafalgar Square. Our winning submission was unrealised as Mandela was released prior to the event taking place.

This early competition win has always been near and dear to the practice — maybe it would be worth considering it to be reactivated as a positive event to celebrate his life and all he achieved.

**Stephen Alexander
London SE10**

Seven bridges for seven boroughs?

As an architect who once helped locally to highlight the importance to Battersea — and indeed London as a whole — of the survival of Albert Bridge and the retention of the old buildings of Battersea Square, both threatened with demolition, I was naturally very interested in the important issues raised in Owen Hatherley's bold article (*Opinion*



Catastrophically typical?: OMA's De Rotterdam building.

December 6) contrasting local needs with those of a more central London.

While there can be no doubting the highly romantic appeal of the proposed Heatherwick "tree-lined" bridge, one has to question the value of it — together with perhaps its potentially very high maintenance costs — compared to the costs of what could be seven-and-a-half other, more utilitarian, albeit potentially equally visually attractive bridges that could be constructed instead in other places that are probably in much greater need.

Certainly I believe this to be so in making stronger links between Battersea and Fulham, and I am sure that there are other and more local politicians — similarly concerned about the quality of "their patch" — who should have bridges named after them.

**Peter Deakins
London SW11**

Southbank brief is unworkable



FCBS's revised plan.

The hapless architects of the most recent of the many failed attempts to "release the value" of the sites of the Queen Elizabeth Hall and Hayward Gallery are only responding to an impossible "brief": to fit a grotesquely inflated amount of generic accommodation, its use obscure beyond perhaps offering massive new spaces ideal for attracting a share of the corporate entertainment business (*News* December 6).

The culprits are the current Southbank board and artistic director Jude Kelly, who appear to understand nothing but pound signs. Filling the space south of the Festival Hall every weekend with street food stalls doesn't seem to contribute much except vibrant, diverse touristic footfall.

But I'm not holding my breath that anyone, including DCMS minister Maria Miller, is listening. Perhaps English Heritage with its "£5 million funding boost" for her "new vision for strengthening, protecting and promoting England's heritage for the public" could draw the issues to her attention?

**Christopher Woodward
London NW1**

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