

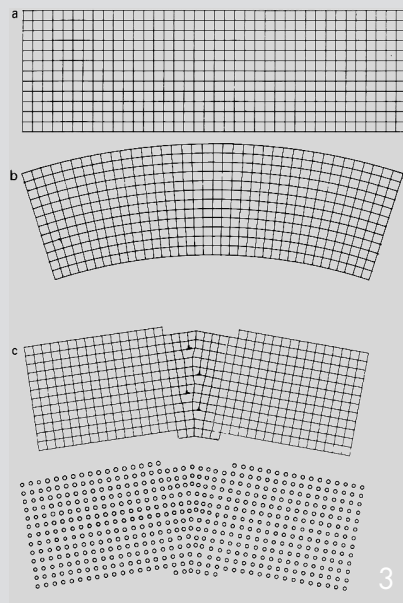
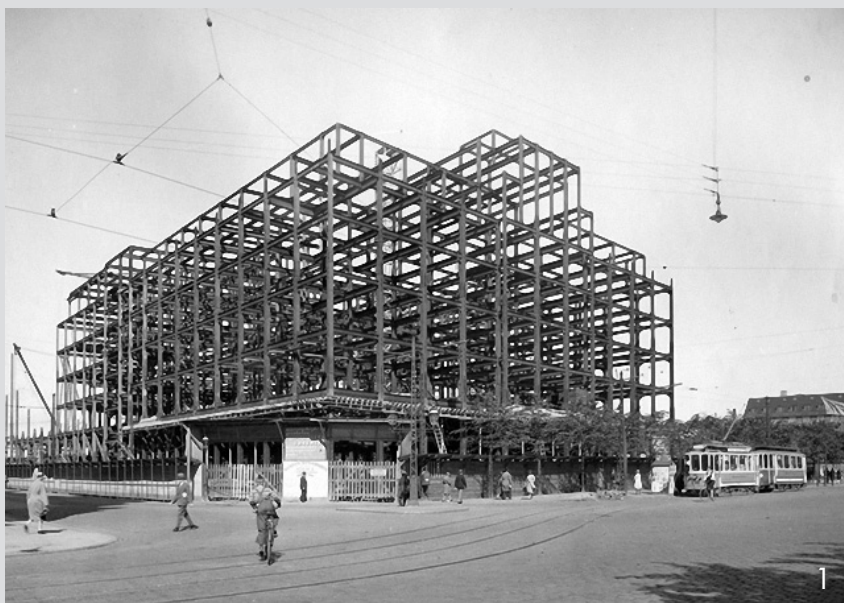
Vesterport – Metal and Structure

By Ola Wedebrunn

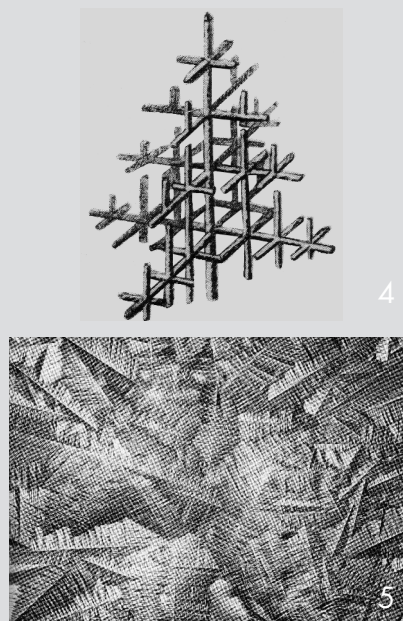
THE British metallurgist Cyril Stanley Smith emphasized the interdependence of science and art. His research and reflections on the sense of materiality is a lifelong experience where *A Search for Structure* is the noteworthy title of a book of essays published in 1992. Smith emphasizes the value of practical experience and the experience of sense as an engagement with matter. He certainly makes an impact when it comes to the concern for matter and material, referring to structure as

aesthetics as well as technology and to objects of art as well as to science. No doubt this point of view is valid also when it comes to studying architecture and practical, social and philosophical possibilities of matter.

From this point of view scale and time is relative. Matter and meaning are open to changing views, visions and structures. When it comes to matters of architecture, metal is well known as cladding, brackets such as hinges, hooks, locks, handles and monumental doors. The tradi-



124



tional metal of architecture is a material of objects such as casted columns and ornamental details, and only in a modern context metal is an idea of architecture.

Metal is often considered as a source for an *Art of Structure*, as a concept of iron and steel from the distribution of space to the construction of diagrammatic forces of bridges and the structural precision of skyscrapers. Architecture of metal becomes a visual art as cladding of metal like aluminium sheets that cover the Chrysler Building structure, and as car structures swept in metal sheets.

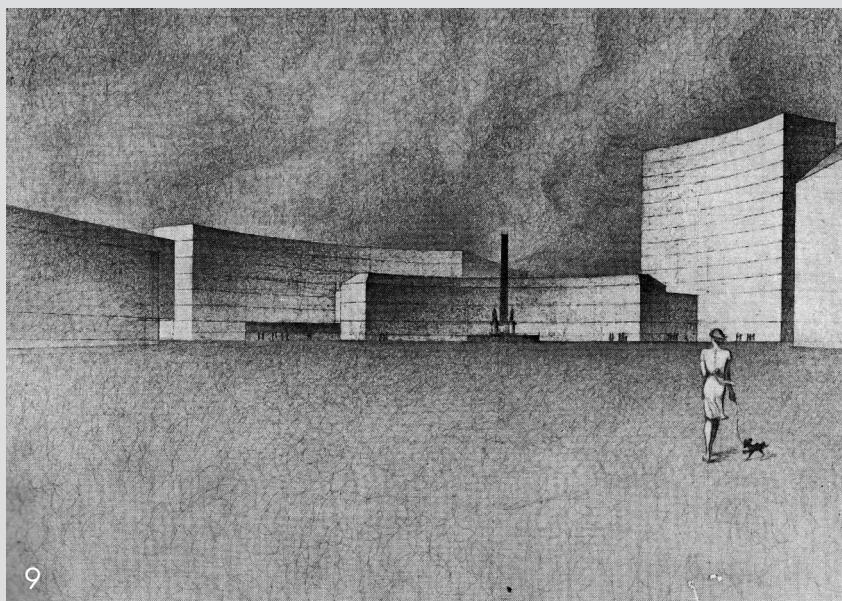
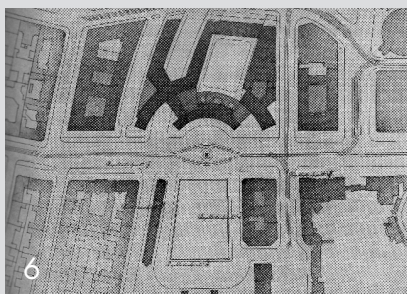
Vesterport

The office building *Vesterport* was built in a new won area in the neighbourhood of the central station of Copenhagen. The site was the west gate of the former city

wall, where an obelisk celebrating liberty had been raised in the 18th century. This became – and still is – the most dynamic spot in the city, close to the town hall and the amusement park named Tivoli.

The skylines of many European cities like Copenhagen are characterized by the punctured sky of weathered copper towers of churches and town halls.

This is a reason for the design of *Vesterport* as a copper-covered ziggurat and skyscraper, with a stepped tower, balconies and a neon-light banana of *FYFFES* at the very peak. The copper façade underlines the structure of the building. And the light and neon advertisement of the façade use the combination of metal structure and cover that makes the façade an elaborate interface of climate and communication.



THE British metallurgist Cyril Stanley Smith emphasized the interdependence of science and art. His research and reflections on the sense of materiality is a lifelong experience where *A Search for Structure* is the noteworthy title of a book of essays published in 1992. Smith emphasizes the value of practical experience and the experience of sense as an engagement with matter. He certainly makes an impact when it comes to the concern for matter and material, referring to structure as aesthetics as well as technology and to objects of art as well as to science. No doubt this point of view is valid also when it comes to studying architecture and practical, social and philosophical possibilities of matter.

From this point of view scale and time is relative. Matter and meaning are open to changing views, visions and structures. When it comes to matters of architecture, metal is well known as cladding, brackets such as hinges, hooks, locks, handles and monumental doors. The traditional metal of architecture is a material of objects such as casted columns and ornamental details, and only in a modern context metal is an idea of architecture.

Metal is often considered as a source for an *Art of Structure*, as a concept of iron and steel from the distribution of space to the construction of diagrammatic forces of bridges and the structural precision of skyscrapers. Architecture of metal becomes a visual art as cladding of metal like aluminium sheets that cover the Chrysler Building structure, and as car structures swept in metal sheets.

Vesterport

The office building *Vesterport* was built in a new won area in the neighbourhood of the central station of Copenhagen. The site was the west gate of the former city wall, where an obelisk celebrating liberty had been raised in the 18th century. This became – and still is – the most dynamic spot in the city, close to the town hall and the amusement park named Tivoli.

The skylines of many European cities like Copenhagen are characterized by the punctured sky of weathered copper towers of churches and town halls.

This is a reason for the design of *Vesterport* as a copper-covered ziggurat and skyscraper, with a stepped tower, balconies and a neon-light banana of *FYFFES* at the very peak. The copper façade underlines the structure of the building. And the light and neon advertisement of the façade use the combination of metal structure and cover that makes the façade an elaborate interface of climate and communication.

Introducing the Modern

Vesterport might be considered as the first major modern building in Copenhagen. Both technically, aesthetically as socially it introduces modern architecture in the



city. Technically, by the use of wrought iron, prefabricated industrial building parts such as steel framed prefabricated windows. Aesthetically, by a functional architecture with no ornaments, a rational structural grid of plan and a façade designed with an advanced use of neon-light advertisement. Socially, the program of the building introduced a flexible system to rent offices of different size, providing central services of secretariats, conference facilities and more. The building integrated with the social life of the city with elegant shops facing indoor streets and elevator lobbies that took the visitor to fashionable restaurants like the roof top Ritz with long balconies facing the main.

The site of *Vesterport* is developed as part of a veritable downtown in relation to the station and around *The Liberty Memorial*. As an arrival point to Copenhagen the station is the most dynamic node of the city. This is the gate for the main road from western Denmark, by train the airport is only 12 minutes away, and the bridge to the city of Malmö in Sweden can be reached in less than a half an hour.

This is a conscious scenario where *Vesterport* is counterbalanced with the *SAS Hotel* and the *Liberty Memorial* is the central character. Still, *Vesterport* is a landmark in itself, shaped as an almost crystalline character deriving from the original construction with pyramidal shape, the steel grid and structure referring to the character of metal. Thus the structure adapts to the site with an almost dynamic elasticity. The iron construction reflects the rationality of mechanic precision and speed. It is a challenge to traditional building technology. It introduces another sensibility of the city. Steel structure makes both social and technical changes a reality. It is a concept of an inhabited structure rather than a programmed building. This is possible because of the radical and renewed adaption to production and process, of construction, of material engineering. Metal architecture and the structure of steel is a challenge to construction regulations and to properties of production. The concept of structure introduces a sense of relativity of building. Instead of traditional walls it involves elements of statics that challenge the conventional

Figure 1. Construction of the Vesterport, City Archive of Copenhagen Museum

Figure 2. Completion of the Vesterport construction, City Archive of Copenhagen Museum

Figure 3. Plan schemes

Figure 4. 3D drawing of metal structures from *A Search for Structures* by Cyril Stanley Smit

Figure 5. Photo of metal structures from *A Search for Structures* by Cyril Stanley Smit

Figure 6. Location plan drawing by IB Lunding, from the *City Architect*, 1956

Figure 7. Detail of entrance neon sign

Figure 8. Weathered copper clad facade with original steel framed windows from Critall

Figure 9. Perspective seen from Central Station. Drawing by Ib Lunding, from the *City Architect*, 1956

Figure 10. Contemporary photo with The Liberty Memorial

Figure 11. Roof neon sign detail

Figure 12. Plan and section of Vesterport

