

Riviera Buzz: *Michel Cova, you are a scenographer of international renown. As an artist and theatre professional, what do you think of the project to demolish the National Theatre of Nice (TNN)?*

Michel Cova: I am revolted by this demolition project. My job is to build new theatres or improve existing ones. I obviously cannot accept the destruction of a theatre except in cases of absolute necessity if the building is in danger of collapse, which is not the case here. And if it were, it is common practice to rebuild, and often in the same place. It is not only a building that is destroyed but a communal building with its history, memories and shared emotions. And also the ghosts of many artists who watch over this place of creation. You can't disrupt all that with impunity.

Why would the TNN and the Acropolis be torn down but not the MAMAC? What will happen to the garden behind the TNN? What will happen to the Nucéra library?

The TNN and the MAMAC (Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art) are one and the same building, designed by the same architect and built at the same time. One is set in the void of the other, one is intended for the expression of the performing arts, the other for the presentation of works. The whole expresses and possesses a strong symbolism.

It is criminal to destroy part of this work. It is also a very serious infringement of the heritage rights of the architects and their beneficiaries. This is why Martine Bayard, the late architect's daughter, is totally opposed to the destruction of the theatre. This is also the main reason for the creation of *Association de Défense de la Promenade des Arts-Yves Bayard*, an association that defends Yves Bayard's entire body of architectural work. And this is further why the local architects' union is opposed to it.

As for the architects, be they renowned like Jean Nouvel or Marc Barani, or less well-known, they are limited in the expression of their profound disagreements with a community that remains a potential client.

The question of maintaining the Nucéra public library has been raised since it became known that the Tête Carrée, which houses the administration of this place, is going to be emptied of its occupants in order to be "open to the public"! This idea still shows the total lack of architectural

culture of the person presenting it: this building, inspired by a sculpture by the Niçois artist Sosno, is also the work of Yves Bayard, and is the first example of inhabited sculpture, a concept developed by Yves, and subsequently developed by other prestigious architects.

A theatre associated with a museum of modern art, a library adjacent to the museum, and an inhabited sculpture whose gaze is directed towards a nearby congress centre. It is rare to find such coherence between four buildings built on the same plot of land. This ensemble is part of Nice's 20th century architectural heritage. The destruction of even one of these buildings also destroys an important part of it.

Is there a solution to create an additional green space without demolishing the theatre?

The additional space resulting from the demolition of the theatre represents less than 2% of the green corridor. It should be easy to find a large garden elsewhere in the city of Nice, a garden with soil adapted to planting tall, shade-producing trees. This is not the case here, on the concrete slab that covers the river. The proof is that the landscaping concept that has just been retained by the City Council, is absolutely not an urban forest - which is impossible to achieve on a concrete slab - but a garden space partially bordered by trees, just like the current Coulée Verte. And it is yet another sloping concrete slab that replaces the theatre!

The deception is clear. There is no need to look for any ecological reason or justification in the choice to destroy the theatre. Let's remember the all too short Irina Brook chapter - the answer is found there: Nice City Hall has very little affinity for living culture.

Why would the French Government support this project?

The current Minister of Culture [Roselyne Bachelot] and the current Mayor of Nice [Christian Estrosi] were part of the same government and claim to be friends. But this is not enough to explain the Ministry of Culture's support, while experts with the competence to appreciate the real quality of the building (the state of the building and its ability to produce and host shows!!), are totally opposed to its destruction. A more reliable explanation can be found in personal ambitions on the eve of presidential and then legislative elections that will precede the creation of a new government.

Are there still ways to stop the Mayor of Nice?

Only the judicial option remains. As well as pressure by the people of the *département*: petitions, demonstrations of support...

We are working on this within the framework of our association, with the support of all the other political groups, from the left to the extreme right.

What would be the advantages or disadvantages of this project for the Niçois?

The project is set to destroy the TNN and the Acropolis, two of the largest and most important cultural and event venues in the Nice agglomeration, at the same time. The Opéra [which has been tapped to host certain plays] is already completely overwhelmed. For at least five years - five seasons! - the city of Nice will not hold congresses, will not mount any major concerts, will only be able to do small theatrical productions that are not worthy of the fifth city of France. This lack of culture cannot be not be made up for. A whole generation, already a victim of the pandemic, will not experience any real cultural activity. As for "Nice, European Capital of Culture"... forget it.

It is also necessary to talk about the costs. Financial and environmental. Staggering. To be paid by the same unfortunate generation.

The project is highly unpopular among the vast majority of Niçois. Why does the City government refuse to listen to them?

The City government listens to its fellow citizens, but not to its constituents. During municipal council sessions, opponents have their microphone cut off; a petition by more than 3,500 people is suspected to be fake; and the public opinion poll is based on only eight information panels in the library that present the *Coulée Verte* extension project, but without mentioning the destruction of the theatre and Acropolis. Thus, only a few hundred people gave their opinion on a project that was truncated and stripped of its most important elements - elements that are now the basis of the inhabitants' protest. Lies, omissions, contempt for opponents and artists...

Thank you, Michel Cova!