Press release

January 2014
Brillembourg & Klumpner, Empower Shack
February 15 to May 10, 2014
Opening on Friday, February 14, 6-8 pm
Löwenbräu Areal, Limmatstr. 270, 8005 Zurich

Can art and architecture lend a voice to segments of the population that go unheard? With over 50 million people and the largest economy on the continent, South Africa shines as a source of relative stability and prosperity in its region. Yet economic inequality remains high. For more than 7.5 million people, life is lived amidst the rudimentary conditions of one of the 2,700 informal settlements spread across the country. The Empower Shack team was established by Alfredo Brillembourg and Hubert Klumpner as a response to conventional housing approaches, which they believe are unsustainable and painstakingly slow in meeting the immediate needs of the vast majority of South Africa's urban poor.

For Brillembourg and Klumpner, focusing on the urban poor does not necessitate an impoverished architecture. The project was conceived in the spirit of an alternative development reality already beginning to percolate through the townships of South African cities. A reality that moves beyond outdated prejudices against informal settlements to recognize the value of in situ upgrading, and the promise of working intelligently and creatively with residents to unlock existing potential. Through the simple act of allowing the possibility of a second floor – going vertical – the Empower Shack prototype creates additional livable space within the urban environment, new prospects for commercial activity, and a path towards controlled densification.

With the Empower Shack project and exhibition, Brillembourg and Klumpner share their vision of a genuine collaboration between architects, artists, private enterprise and slum-dwellers. What began as a design and build workshop supported by Swisspearl, which aimed at developing an affordable and sustainable shack prototype for Cape Town's Khayelitsha township, evolved into a more ambitious project to devise and implement design innovations for rapid and incremental shack upgrading on an urban scale. Brillembourg and Klumpner believe art has the potential to open up new spheres of action. This exhibition is not only an exporation of the living conditions within South African informal settlements – by combining art and architecture, they seek to communicate their position to a broader public and identify partners who will join them in helping to address the challenges faced by township residents. The first built prototype was constructed in Khayelitsha in December. To realize their broader vision, another 63 shacks require upgrading within the context of an improved spatial plan. With your help, they hope to achieve the necessary funding to transform the area into a scaled-up model for the future.

With Empower Shack, Brillembourg and Klumpner reinforce their vision for practical, sustainable interventions in informal settlements around the world. They and their team frequently exhibit internationally in venues such as Kassel (2004), MoMA (2010), the Cooper Hewitt Design Museum (2012), AEDES (2013), the Triennale of Lisbon (2013) and the 13th Venice Biennale of Architecture, where they were awarded the Golden Lion in 2012. Through artistic and didactic presentations, they issue a call to arms to their fellow architects to see in the informal settlements of the world a potential for innovation and experimentation, with the goal of putting design in the service of a more equitable and sustainable future.

For further information please contact Björn Alfers (b.alfers@presenhuber.com) at the gallery or Daniel Schwartz daniel.schwartz@arch.ethz.ch / press@u-tt.com (+41 (0) 78 642 4414) at the ETH Zurich.

Parallel shows: Andrew Lord, on Carson mesa   Opening hours: Tuesday to Friday, 11 am – 6pm
                   February 15 to May 10, 2014   Saturday, 11 am – 5 pm
                   Opening on Friday, February 14, 6-20 pm   Or by appointment
                   Löwenbräu Areal, Limmatstrasse 270, 8005 Zurich

                   Oscar Tuazon, A Home
                   January 17 to Mach 8, 2014
                   Maag Areal, Zahnradstr. 21, 8005 Zurich