

Opinion | LETTER

The 'Starchitect' Stereotype

SEPT. 30, 2013

To the Editor:

Articles like “A Star Architect Leaves Some Clients Fuming” (front page, Sept. 25) shouldn’t make us architects defensive about our work. It gives a deserved death blow to the “starchitect” and all the unhelpful stereotypes that come with it.

But it should make us upset that it is the one of the few ways in which architecture gets on the front page of The New York Times. Now is not the time to debate whether Santiago Calatrava’s excesses are ultimately worth their irresponsibilities; it is time for us to make known that the starchitect model is old school and irrelevant.

The image that architecture is done by a single genius has never conformed to reality, but particularly in today’s practice — relying as it does on extended technical expertise — it is ridiculous to attribute the design to a single genius. Likewise, the work of the architect does not rest in the singular building, despite the way the work of starchitects is presented.

The building in today’s practice is only the tip of the design expertise iceberg. We architects can do better, but most of us have long since moved beyond the Calatrava model.

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New Haven, Sept. 28, 2013

The writer is an architect and assistant dean of the Yale School of Architecture.

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