

# Potential Architecture

Alexander Brodsky  
Sean Griffiths  
Edvine Larssen  
Joar Nango  
Apolonija Šušteršič

curated by  
David Thorp

Art

Systems  
Environment



# PA

Potential Architecture is not an exhibition about the design and construction of buildings. In this instance architecture is regarded as being concerned with the organisation of complex systems, aspects of living environments that are manifested in contemporary art as part of an approach that includes both disciplines. The interdisciplinary exchange between artists and architects has become an increasingly important area of debate and practice. Contemporary artists consider the territory of the built environment as a site redolent with possibility for the exploration of identity, local - global politics and what is sometimes referred to as the poetics of space.

Potential Architecture was always planned for two art spaces: Ambika P3, London where it took place in the spring of 2015 and now, in the summer of 2016, at Tromsø Kunstforening. Its inception is the outcome of my visit to Tromsø in May 2012 and my initial conversations with Joar Nango about the different meanings of architecture and, subsequently, a series of discussions between the artists, Alexander Brodsky (Russia), Sean Griffiths (UK), Joar Nango (Norway) and Apolonija Šušteršič (Croatia) with myself and Hanne Gudrun Gulljord of the Tromsø Kunstforening, that took place at a symposium Potential Architecture at the University of Westminster, London, in April 2014. These

four artists have been joined by the Norwegian artist Edvine Larssen for the second iteration of the project.

Ambika P3 is a 4000 sqm space for contemporary art and architecture, developed from the massive former concrete construction hall at the University of Westminster built in the 1960s. Tromsø Kunstforening is a late 19th century public gallery located in the city with the northernmost university in the world, 1000km above the Arctic Circle. It has never served any other purpose than that of a cultural centre and these days is an important exhibition space for art in Northern Norway with a programme that focuses on recent experimental and contemporary art. These two spaces, while of widely differing characteristics, form a juxtaposition that equates with the practice of the artists included in Potential Architecture. Their dissimilar social and environmental contexts reflect the differences between the artists but also draw attention to their similarities. All share a concern with the way in which art and architecture can function as symbiotic processes in a critical alternative practice.

The specific conditions in Northern Norway have influenced the work of Joar Nango and connect with some aspects of the work of Alexander Brodsky. The arctic environment, sparsely populated, sustaining a deep indigenous culture impinges on Brodsky's

ideas of a DIY low tech aesthetic and recognition of vernacular building as an expression of cultural identity. As an artist/architect who is part of the ethnic Sami population, Joar Nango creates contemporary structures that resonate with the past. He studied architecture and works as an artist producing site specific installations in galleries and public spaces as well as buildings inspired by the creative simplicity and DIY mentality that exists within rural environments in Northern Norway. In addition to projects in printed matter, he has also worked collaboratively on projects that intersect art, design and architecture. Alexander Brodsky first received international acclaim in the 1980s with his utopian and imaginative "paper architecture", which he developed in collaboration with Ilya Utkin. His reconfiguration of reclaimed materials, modest objects, evocative lighting, and use of elemental substances, including oil, clay, sand, and ice, demonstrate his unique artistic vision. Brodsky's work is characterised by a concern with traditional building, using local materials to produce an architecture that celebrates Russian heritage whilst at the same time acting as a critique of the unregulated and corrupt building industry manifested in a huge metropolis. Apolonija Šušteršič's practice is not object oriented, her outcomes take the form of documentation and polemical platforms, case studies of art as an activity in con-

stant shift. Šušteršič makes work simultaneously as a sociologist, designer and city planner in order to reactivate physical and cultural space, a characteristic of Joar Nango's practice too. Sean Griffiths is renowned for a highly idiosyncratic vision of architecture which draws heavily on tendencies in fine art and which critically explores key notions such as space, authenticity, taste and representation, assumptions about which often remain uncontested in normative architectural practice. For Griffiths, such issues are important elements in the production of social and political, as well as, aesthetic meanings in architecture and hence should not remain unquestioned. Edvine Larssen's work is concerned with inseparable conditions of space, structure and human experience. These she combines to create site-specific installations that explore the relationship between people, place and scale. When the first outing of Potential Architecture was taking place in London, Larssen was participating in SALT in Northern Norway, a project that was predicated on the symbolic importance of the traditional structure of the fiskehjelle (fish rack) and its significance in an increasingly vulnerable environment threatened by climate change and global capitalism. As a research fellow at the Norwegian Programme for artistic research at the Art Academy in Trondheim, whose research project is entitled 'Theatrical, but not

architecture. Sculptural, but not sculpture', Larssens' practice fits well into the overarching premise of Potential Architecture.

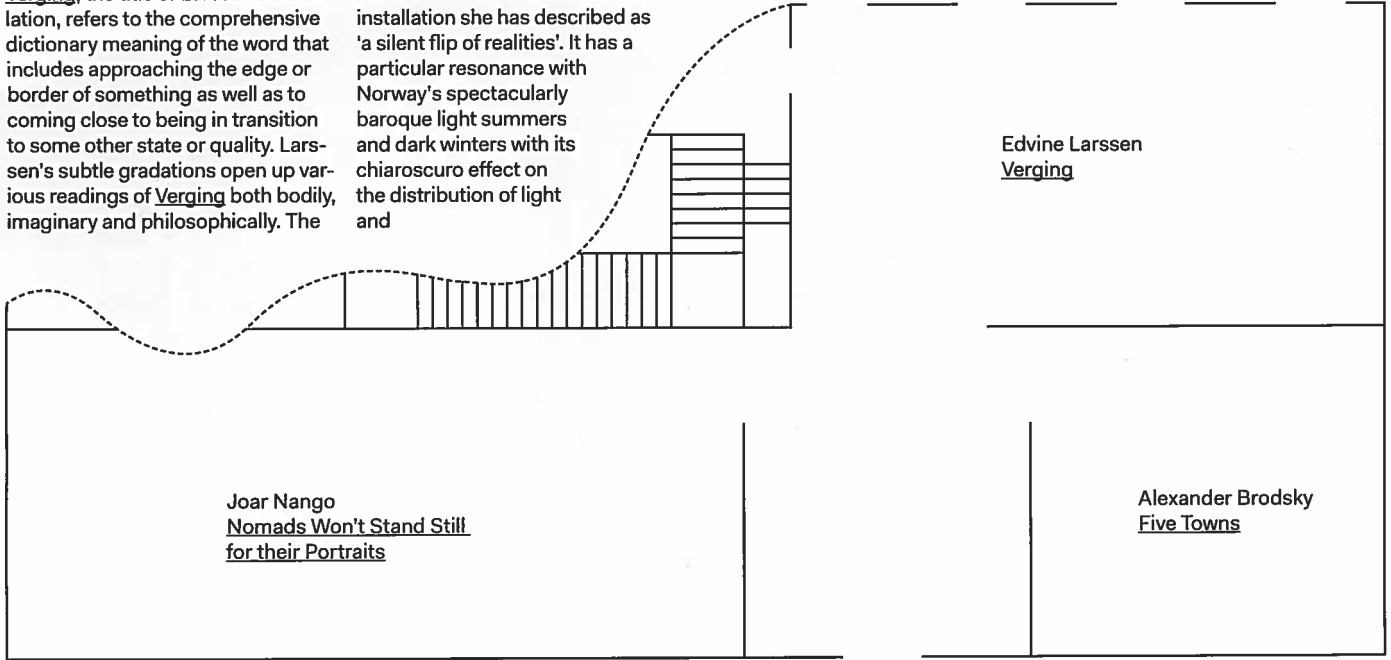
A concern about the relationship between art and society has experienced a resurgence of interest from artists prompting an examination of contemporary art in a new light as mainstream contemporary art practice has expanded to include social engagement. Potential Architecture highlights the growing discourse surrounding the blurring of disciplines between art and architecture and shows what can happen when artists locate themselves at the interface between the two. It opens up a new kind of terrain - less navigated and with a limited exposure to the wider public - where the object still has a function but not as a commodity. It brings together artists from sites around the world, each addressing this issue from a perspective located within the specific conditions of their own immediate environment.

Edvine Larssen Verging

Edvine Larssen's investigations explore the implications of inviting the viewer to become an active participator in the work by navigating her spaces and spending time in the environments they create as she converts space and temporality into materials for creating art works that sit in-between different fields. Verging, the title of Larssen's installation, refers to the comprehensive dictionary meaning of the word that includes approaching the edge or border of something as well as to coming close to being in transition to some other state or quality. Larssen's subtle gradations open up various readings of Verging both bodily, imaginarily and philosophically. The

piece is poetic yet confrontational, it affects the atmosphere of the space in which it sits while physically confronting its audience who cannot avoid its presence and have to move within it in order to fully experience its staging. A sense of 'On stage'—'Off stage' is a recurrent theme in Larssen's work. Her use of outdoor housing panels (commonly known as Baroque Panelling) as the material structure for an interior theatrical installation she has described as 'a silent flip of realities'. It has a particular resonance with Norway's spectacularly baroque light summers and dark winters with its chiaroscuro effect on the distribution of light and

shade. Verging moves its viewers very physically between these realities by creating a fusion between wall, curtain, fence, sculpture, theatre set. Verging was constructed for the first time at NNKS in Lofoten in 2012. It has been re-imagined to fit the specificity of the gallery at TKF.



Sean Griffiths Another Mountain / Another Forest

Sean Griffiths practiced as an architect for many years always extending the possibilities of buildings into areas that encompassed ideas that would normally be understood to sit more readily within the disciplines of installation or sculpture. His new work in Tromsø continues his exploration of the nature of physical encounter between people and architectural constructions by building a labyrinthine structure that creates a sense of enjoyable disorientation for the viewer, while promoting a sense of encounter with the physicality of the work. Griffiths is building (both actually and metaphorically) on an approach he used in Ambika P3 to great effect. There he used the unseen architectural object language of interiors like architraves, door-frames and mirrors, taking the insignificant as the main generator of space and forming negative "ghost" spaces using the sparest of means. In Tromsø he has turned his attention to the outside. To the beech trees that end up as fire wood, the gravel that crunches underfoot on snow covered pavements and the presence of the mountain that can be seen through the gallery windows on the other side of the fjord. In doing so Griffiths continues his investigation into the minimal

quality of the boundary as the piece explores the bare minimum form by which peoples' behaviour is affected by the physicality of large objects in space. Posing questions about the nature of the boundary and the extent to which physical constructions (installations) affect the way we occupy space.

