

a curatorial vision
for Bjørvika

slow

time



BJØRVIKA

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2 Berin Golonu, Greening the Revolution,

Art Papers, 2008



This satellite image of Bjørvika, the Google Earth bird's eye view, is the primary way in which this site has come to be known, planned and discussed over a considerable number of years by a considerable number of people. In contrast, a curatorial vision for the permanent public art programme for Bjørvika could begin by imagining how Bjørvika might feel from the ground, at different stages of its metamorphosis over the next 15 years, and in turn how artists might help to shape that experience of Bjørvika on the ground.

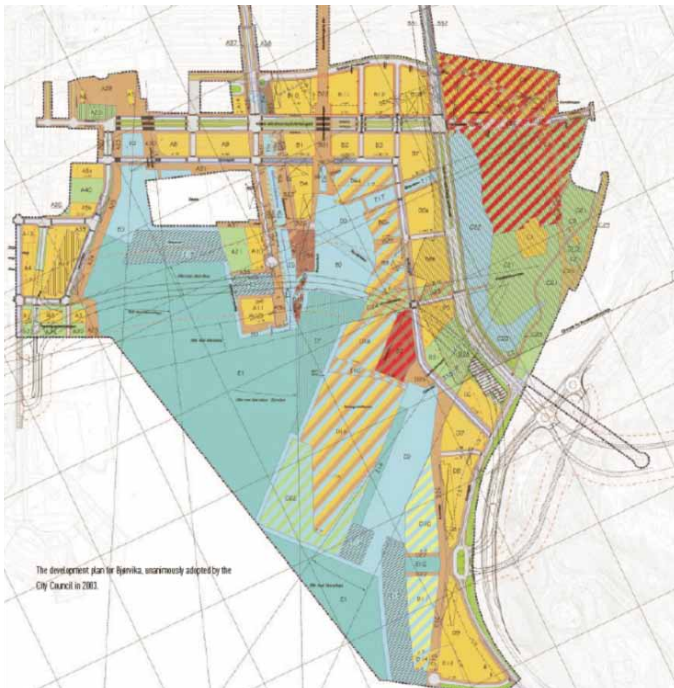
This document responds to a need to articulate a cohesive and inspirational vision for a public art programme which will have a permanent legacy in Bjørvika.

It outlines a set of principles and a potential road-map towards the commissioning of unexpected, remarkable and ambitious art projects for Bjørvika, recognising the specific challenges that this development presents.

The vision is underpinned by a commitment to best practice in public art commissioning: namely, to follow appropriate processes of procurement and delivery to meet shared aims, whilst upholding a commitment to supporting artists to produce outstanding work. The overall aim of this vision is that by 2025, Bjørvika and its environs will not simply be enhanced by a set of artistic interventions, but that artists will have contributed to making Bjørvika an extraordinary place. This document has been developed to form the basis for any future briefing documents to artists and it is hoped might also encourage collaboration across the development.

2.1 Bjørvika

The redevelopment and building expansion in Bjørvika is one of the most comprehensive urban development processes ever to be undertaken in Norway. The primary objectives of the development are articulated in the Bjørvika Resolution as follows:



- Bjørvika shall contribute to developing Oslo as Norway's capital and as an attractive international destination;
- Bjørvika is a key element in reconnecting the city with the fjord;
- Bjørvika constitutes one third of Oslo's total fjord-city potential. It is essential that Bjørvika's waterfront be made accessible to the city's population;
- Bjørvika shall be a lively and attractive place to live, work and visit. The district's development should have a distinctive character, with good functionality, and buildings, streets and outdoor areas should have high aesthetic qualities. The area should provide space for new housing units, cultural features, offices, shops and recreation;
- Bjørvika shall be a sustainable urban quarter. The programme should pave the way for vibrant city life, giving high priority to public transport, pedestrians and cyclists, and with a great diversity of public attractions at street level.

Extensive research has been conducted by the Situations Curatorial Team to fully appreciate the zoning plan for Bjørvika-Bispevika-Lohavn, including an introduction to the re-routing of the E18 highway, a review of plans for the Opera Quarter (formerly Barcode), the Deichmanske Main Library and Munch Museum, the opening up of the Aker River, and phasing of the allmenningene along with a review of the Public Space and Urban Manuals devised by Gehl Architects.

In conclusion, our observations on the key challenges that Bjørvika presents for a permanent public art programme are as follows:

Timeline

Phasing of the development will be dispersed across the site over an extended period of time. This means a comprehensive public art programme with predetermined sites and artists proposed from the outset is unfeasible. As it is, the selection of a specific, single location will have to take account of adjacent development work and a phasing of the selection of sites and artists may well be advisable.

Mobility

Pedestrian access is (and will continue to be) limited across the entire site over a considerable period, with the primary destination for visitors being the Opera House over the next two years. The phasing of the development means that access will be restricted during construction periods, particularly around the promenade, and this needs to be considered when planning the commissioning of public artworks and projects. With residential housing being completed in the D1B area in 2010, connections to the Opera House and A10 area become increasingly important, and it may be advisable to consider how connections may be made between the completed Allmenningene between 2010 and 2014, when the Munch Museum is due for completion.

Aspirations

There are some contradictions between the commercial aspirations of the development and the overall objectives of the Allmenningene. Whilst Gehl Architects' design coding for public spaces provides a significant tool and overview for future projects, the design aesthetic across the various building schemes is primarily corporate, with the appearance and potential uses of public spaces somewhat predetermined for business and commercial/retail use. The challenge for the public art programme is to propose projects which encourage an opening up of these public spaces, rather than the integration of design-led elements into a predesigned urban space. Furthermore, as Bjørvika will be primarily a newly built environment, the permanent public art programme must address how to involve and engage visitors and Oslo residents to an unfamiliar area of the city as well as potential workers and residents within the site itself.



Above: Dellbrügge & de Moll, **One fine day, all this will be yours**, Bjørvika, Oslo, 25-27 September 2009

2.2 Overall Bjørvika Public Art Concept

Bjørvika Utvikling AS (BU) has adopted an art strategy for its areas of responsibility across the seven Allmenningene and on the promenade along the waterfront. The Art Booklet, co-edited by Tone Hansen, Per Gunnar Eeg-Tverbakk, Marius Grønning, Therese Staal Brekke and Anne Beate Hovind in 2009, sets out an initial survey of potential public art approaches.

The key principles of BU's art strategy are:

- art in the public sphere should contribute to the creation of a lively and multi-faceted urban environment;
- artworks should contribute to Bjørvika's identity and create a cultural content that will give a sense of co-ownership to the diverse groups of people who will be using the site;
- art should be supported for its own intrinsic value as art.

BU has adopted the following strategic approach to the art strategy;

- BU will promote both permanent and temporary (e.g. Common Lands - Allmannaretten) art projects;
- BU will initiate and establish Kunsthall Bjørvika, an organisation and a platform for art programmes;
- BU will spend a total of 20 million NOK on art, a little more than 1% of BU's investment budget.

Through its art strategy, BU encourages all parties in Bjørvika to work to the same high level of ambition on their art projects, and to allocate a corresponding part of their investment budgets for art, as BU has done. To this end, this vision is proposed as a possible strategic document for consideration by all parties involved in the development public art in Bjørvika.

3 What is public art?

Public Art is a contentious term. The Art Booklet devised for Bjørvika, sets out a range of approaches to public art. For the purposes of this vision, it is important to consider the diversity of forms, projects and approaches that could be considered for Bjørvika.

To some, public art means the involvement or commissioning of artists in the conception, development and transformation of a public space or building. To others, the term refers specifically to the public sphere in which an artwork is encountered, often unintentionally.

Public Art is not a single artform, but rather may be understood as a series of practices that encompass a variety of forms and approaches, temporary and permanent, that engage with the sites and situations of the public realm.

These range from artists' interventions within the design of a building, to landmark sculptural works, from spectacular events to participatory process-based projects. Most recently, an emergence of durational approaches to public art commissioning has given rise to a range of projects through which community involvement and ownership is developed over long periods of time (e.g. Liverpool Biennial Urbanism 09 project in Bootle or New Art for New Urban Areas – Art Plan Tre Kroner led by Kerstin Bergendal in Roskilde, Denmark. However, this is also matched by the rise of the public artwork as event and the integration of performative, short-term approaches into public art projects (e.g. [One Day Sculpture](#), New Zealand; [The Black Cloud](#), Bristol).



Above: **The Black Cloud**, Heather and Ivan Morison, Victoria Park, Bristol, 5 November 2009

4.1 Principles of the vision

This strategy neither prescribes project outcomes nor recommends particular artists, but seeks to inspire a set of ambitions for the involvement of artists within the development of Bjørvika towards the formation of a programme which addresses both the objectives for the Bjørvika development and the Bjørvika art strategy as outlined above.

The principles of the Bjørvika permanent public art programme are:

- To support the creation of remarkable forms of public art in Bjørvika which contribute to the life of the area, supporting Oslo's ambition to be a world-class city and Bjørvika's ambition to be engaging and accessible to all;
- To build on Bjørvika's existing cultural and environmental assets and to be sensitive to the specific social, economic, climatic and geographic conditions of Oslo;
- To suggest, but not prescribe, the use of public space throughout Bjørvika, with a particular emphasis on the promotion of non-commercial activity;
- To respond sensitively to the aspirations of the developers and potential tenants, whilst also taking into consideration the needs and desires of visitors and Oslo residents from other parts of the city, especially the East;
- To promote orientation to and around the harbour, engaging new visitors to the area;
- To create meeting and talking points which contribute to the ongoing and progressive identity of Bjørvika;
- To be committed in the long-term to sustainability.

4.2 Background ideas and case studies

"The right to the city is far more than the individual liberty to access urban resources: it is a right to change ourselves by changing the city. It is, moreover, a common rather than an individual right since this transformation inevitably depends upon the exercise of a collective power to reshape the processes of urbanization. The freedom to make and remake our cities and ourselves is one of the most precious yet most neglected of our human rights."

David Harvey, *The Right to the City*, 2008

Within a global context defined by speed and 'time poverty', the Slow Movement can be seen to be growing as a counter-cultural movement, promoting better connections between people and place through such initiatives as Slow Food, which seeks to encourage the enjoyment of regional produce and traditional, organically grown foods, in the company of others and Slow Travel, which advocates the use of sustainable travel methods and shared hospitality. This counter-cultural movement offers alternative ways of thinking about a waterfront development on the other side of a global recession.

Art programmes within the context of urban regeneration programmes such as Bjørvika's Common Lands (devised by curators Karolin Tampere and Åse Løvgren) are increasingly promoting the imagining of alternative ways of living through utopian and critically discursive projects, but what if Bjørvika took this one step further? What if the proposition for Slowness was not just a utopian gesture but became the principle objective of the Bjørvika public art programme? Public use of the Opera House roof in Bjørvika is already a strong indicator of the desire for spaces in which slow activities – walking, climbing, meditating, protesting, contemplation and picnics – can take place at the mouth of the fjord on the edge of the city harbour. It is a physical space that produces a social space. In considering the viability of such an option, the following aspects of slowness might be considered as points of inspiration for the commissioning of artists and projects for Bjørvika.

4 Gathering Points

4.2 Aspects of Slowness continued



4.2.1 Samling

Organised gatherings and meals have begun to achieve increased popularity across the globe operating as mini-festivals, often without a commercial agenda e.g. [The Big Lunch](#), a UK-based nationwide event on 19th July 2009, developed by the [Eden Project](#), to bring people together to share lunch publicly. Other 'Samling' projects include those which set out to reclaim public space, creating car-free spaces e.g. [Paris Plage](#) (a month-long beach along the Seine) and [Breakfast on the Bridge](#) which involved 6,000 people enjoying breakfast on Sydney Harbour Bridge (above).

These projects can be seen to have emerged from both [Reclaim the Streets](#) and the Slow Movement, but can also be viewed within the history of artist projects for which the potential of social encounter is characterised by convivial rituals of hospitality e.g. Gordon Matta Clark's [FOOD](#) (1971), Lee Ming Wei's [The Dining Project](#) (1995), Rirkrit Tiravanija's [Untitled, \(Still\)](#) and Lucy and Jorge Orta's [Dans Le Meme Panier](#) (All in One Basket) (1999) and [70 x 7 The Meal](#) (on-going). Given the particular climatic conditions of Oslo, it is proposed that such collective gatherings or communal meals might be developed by an artist/artists/architects within a specially designed structure or area, which would respond to the seasonal changes throughout the year, possibly being combined with **Pavillon (4.2.3)**.



4.2.2 Dugnad

Aligned with what we might term **Samling**, have been the growth of allotment and urban agricultural projects which promote the reclamation of parks, back and front gardens and urban spaces for collective gardening projects.

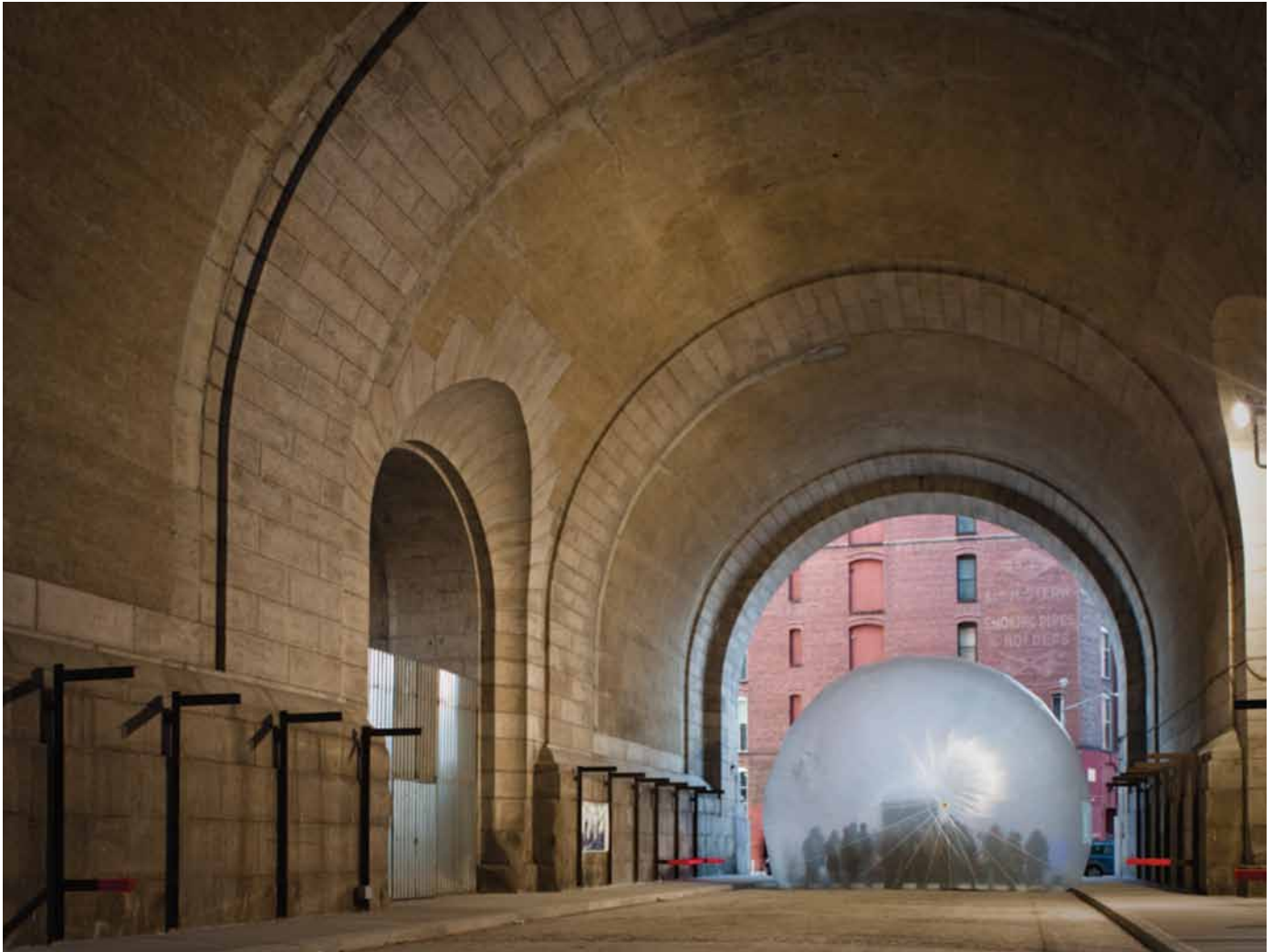
Exemplary projects include Amy Franceschini's [Victory Gardens](#), in which a plot of land in front of San Francisco's City Hall was developed in collaboration with Slow Food Nation. This programme began as a utopian proposal and has now become a pilot project that supports the transition of backyard, front yard, window boxes, rooftops and unused land into food production areas. This project was also the inspiration for the Obama's reclamation of portions of the White House garden for growing food in 2009.

Fritz Haeg's [Edible Estates](#) project has also achieved international recognition and in 2007, an edition of this project was commissioned by Tate Modern for the exhibition "[Global Cities](#)" in collaboration with Bankside Open Spaces Trust (BOST). There are numerous other examples of projects such as Dott07's [City Farming](#) project in Middlesbrough and Jeremy Deller's [Speak to the Earth and it Will Tell You](#) in Muenster. For a useful survey of such projects see Berin Golonu, [Greening the Revolution](#) (Appendix 2).

Once again, such projects would need to be developed for Oslo's specific climatic conditions. Dugnad is suggested as a mode of collaboration, rather than a dedicated 'allotment' project, and would involve the participation of a dedicated partner to build ownership for the project.

4 Gathering Points

4.2 Aspects of Slowness continued



4.2.3 Pavillon

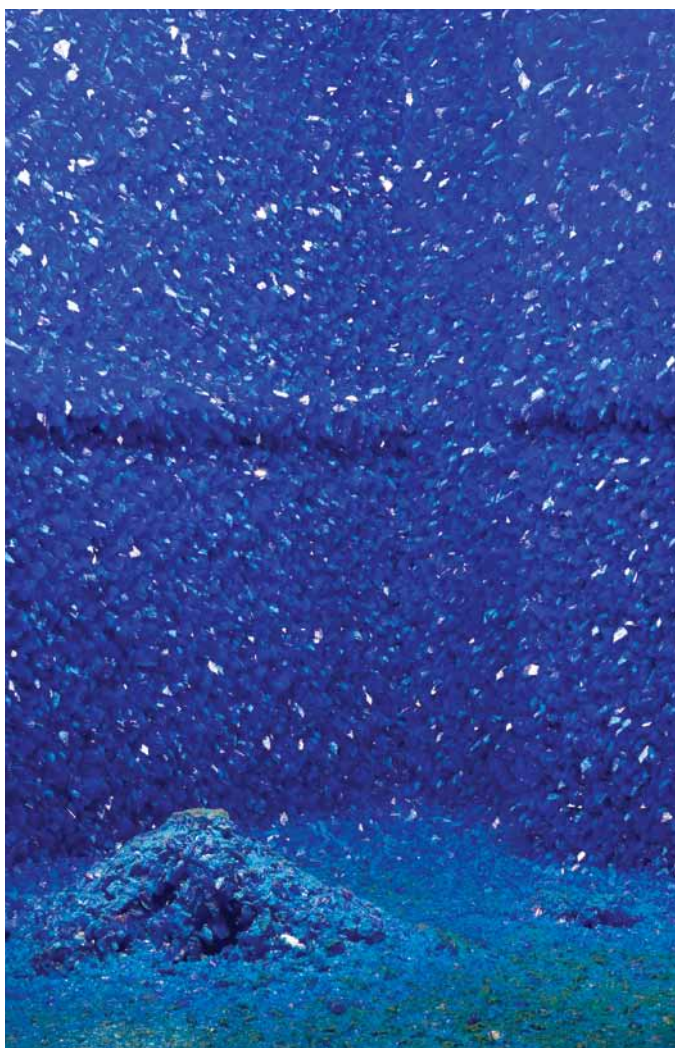
The pavilion, a historically significant component of parks and festivals, has in recent years enjoyed resurgence in architectural and art sectors as both a locus of community activity, performance and as a remarkable and engaging sculptural form in itself.

Notable recent projects include Heather and Ivan Morison, *The Black Cloud* (Victoria Park, Bristol, 2009) and *I'm So Sorry* for Tatton Biennial and the exhibition "Radical Nature", Barbican, London and Shigeru Ban, Paper Theater (Amsterdam, Holland, 2003).

Raum Labor's *Kitchen Monument* (left) is a mobile sculpture which has two states of being. The zinc sheetclad sculpture can be extended into public space by a pneumatic bubble that transforms it into a temporary collective space. Its broad spectrum of uses includes a banquet hall, conference room, cinema, concert hall, ballroom, dormitory, boxing arena and steam bath. Other notable projects include the Serpentine Gallery's series of temporary pavilions commissioned to renowned architects located on the Gallery's lawn for three months in London, hosting a series of public talks and events at the park.

4 Gathering Points

4.2 Aspects of Slowness continued



4.2.4 Vekst

In contrast to the event-based character of **Samling** and **Pavillon**, **Vekst** is an aspect of slowness which is durational, which changes over time, rather than through a set of events around which people might gather.

SEIZURE was Roger Hiorns' first major sculptural project within an urban site, and it marked a radical shift in scale and context in his work. The artist encouraged the growth of an unexpected crystal form within a low-rise late-modernist development near the Elephant & Castle in south London in 2008. 75,000 litres of copper sulphate solution was pumped into the council flat to create a strangely beautiful crystalline growth on the walls, floor, ceiling and bath of this abandoned dwelling. After the project opened,

151 - 189 Harper Rd became a site of pilgrimage. Every day hundreds of people made their way across the capital to this anonymous council flat near the Elephant & Castle.

Unlike conventional environmental art approaches, such as the work of Andy Goldsworthy or Dan Harvey and Heather Ackroyd, Hiorns approach has particularly relevance for the permanent public art programme at Bjørvika because of its particular interest in transforming an urban site through a material which continues to transform itself.

Slow time

a curatorial vision for Bjørvika

4 Gathering Points

4.2 Aspects of Slowness continued



4.2.5 Eng

Distinct from the collective urban farming impetus of **Dugnad (4.2.2)**, is the cultivation of wild areas of land within urban environments. This applies to the transformation of formally landscaped areas through a mass area of agricultural use or wild planting.

Notable art projects which correspond with a notion of 'Eng' include Agnes Denes [Wheatfield, A Confrontation](#), 1982, re-'grown' in London for the exhibition [Radical Nature](#) in 2009 and Sanja Ivekovic's project for [documenta 12](#) in 2007, where Ivekovic transformed the Friedrichsplatz in front of the Fridericianum into a Poppy Field.

Though separated by some 25 years, both projects can be seen to use the growth of seemingly incongruous plants in public space as gestures of profound critical intervention, as a way of questioning the stable and powerful associations of a built environment. Of particular interest to Oslo, may be the High Line project in New York – a public park built on a 1.45-mile-long elevated rail structure running from Gansevoort Street to 34th Street on Manhattan's West Side, which operates as an all-year public thoroughfare including planting which reflects the changing seasons.

Slow time

a curatorial vision for Bjørvika

4.3 Recommended Commissioning Process

Considering both the principles of the vision and the background ideas above, it is proposed that Bjørvika's public art programme should be developed according to the following recommendations:

— A maximum of three projects should be developed one after the other rather than across multiple sites at the same time, allowing for the phasing of the development;

— Projects should each be developed through a consideration of one or more of the four aspects of Slowness outlined above as starting points for a consideration of the non-commercial use of Bjørvika;

— Projects should be developed through collaboration with existing constituencies, organisations or communities within Oslo to ensure long-term ownership and in some cases, programming and maintenance for the projects;

— The reasonable lifetime of projects should be considered both in social and physical terms e.g. could projects occur on a three to four year basis one after the other with long-term outcomes? What might be considered as other forms of legacy for such projects beyond physical presence? How would such projects be maintained and do time-limited projects allow for more realistic buy-in from participants with a clear end date?

— Shortlisting of artists should take place through the recommendation by the Situations Curatorial Team and then should involve the invitation of three shortlisted artists per project rather than by open competition. The selection of artists for each project should be made on the basis of initial proposals made to the partnership group with recommendations for the final selection of artists made by the Situations Curatorial Team to the partnership group.

— Location and budget should not be specified in advance of the appointment of artists. Rather the selection of location should follow through the artists' research visits and consultation with all key stakeholders and budget should be determined through the testing of the viability of proposed projects.

4.4 **Provisional Timeline**

Phase One

July – December 2010

- Studio visits by the Situations Curatorial Team to meet provisional artists prior to shortlisting (this is proposed primarily to ascertain whether the artists are suitable for the specific context of Bjørvika and as multiple artists' visits can be undertaken at once, this is more cost effective than individual visits by multiple artists over a longer period of time)
- Shortlisting of artists for Project 1
- Research visits by three shortlisted artists to Bjørvika
- Selection of one artist to advance a proposal
- Location research and selection
- Evaluation commences

Phase Two

2011

- Appointment of part-time Artists' Project Manager in Oslo
- Development of proposal by artist for Project 1
- Finalising of viability and costs of Project 1
- Development of engagement programme and partner(s) for Project 1

Phase Three

2012/13

- Development of engagement programme for Project 1
- Production and installation of Project 1
- Promotion and Launch event
- Initial evaluation of Project 1 completed

- Shortlisting of artists for Project 2 then commences with development of proposal for completion in 2014/15.
- Shortlisting of artists for Project 3 commences in 2014 for completion in 2016/17



4.6 **Evaluation and Research**

Best practice in public art commissioning (see Appendix 1) advises that evaluation should be embedded in the process from the beginning, identifying criteria for success and acknowledging varying notions of risk. It is advised that a proportion of the commissioning budget be set aside for an ongoing evaluation process, as well as documentation and promotional resources, which could be held by Kunsthall Bjørvika.

As Situations is part of the University of the West of England, it is proposed that we establish a joint-research project to investigate and appraise the Bjørvika public art programme and its outcomes over a five year period. Possible sources of funding for a collaborative research project might be the Arts and Humanities Research Council Knowledge Exchange Programme.

The Art Booklet

Edited by Tone Hansen, Per Gunnar Eeg-Tverbakk, Marius Grønning, Therese Staal Brekke and Anne Beate Hovind, Bjørvika Development Ltd., 2009

Art as Protagonist? (2009)

With contributions from Michael Baers, Heidi Bergsli, Markus Degerman, Anne Beate Hovind, Åse Løvgren and Karolin Tampere
www.commonlands.net

Open space: Art in the public realm in London 1995–2005 (2007)

Showcasing inspirational examples of art in public spaces from artist-designed bridges to temporary performances in Tube stations, this publication looks at a broad selection of the possibilities and contexts within the public realm.

ISBN: 0728713241. ISBN-13: 978 0728713246.

Published by Arts Council England and Central London Partnerships

Two Minds: Artists and Architects in Collaboration (2006)

The process of collaboration between artists and architects is analysed and documented in this collection of 18 projects funded by the RSA Art for Architecture scheme. Essays by international writers and curators Philip Ursprung (Zurich) and Cara Mullio (Los Angeles) place the RSA scheme in an international context.

Editor: Jes Fernie. ISBN: 1904772269.

ISBN-13: 978 1904772262.

Published by Black Dog Publishing.

For further information on exemplary projects see:

Beyond Leidsche Rijn beyondutrecht.nl

Future Farmers futurefarmers.com

Grizedale Arts grizedale.org

Portavilion Project uprojects.com/portavilion

Project for Public Spaces pps.org

Situations situations.org.uk

Devised by Claire Doherty, Director of Situations, UWE, in consultation with the Bjorvika Reference Group.

University of the West of England

Spike Island

133 Cumberland Road

Bristol

BS1 6UX

www.situations.org.uk

Guidelines for public art commissioning developed by Sophie Hope and Cameron Cartiere at Birkbeck, University of London

The Commissioning Process

- Commissioning organisations should agree on a strategic public art plan or policy that outlines why they are commissioning public art before commissions are considered. Commitment and support for public art should be demonstrated throughout the organisation. These plans/policies should serve as guidelines but not dictate the content or stifle the creative process.
- Public and private regeneration bodies should invest in training and guidance for commissioners, planners, communities and artists about the different ways of working with art in the public realm.
- There is no definitive or single ‘right way’ of creating art for the public realm. The commissioning process needs to recognise the diversity in approaches, interests and skills of artists and reflect this in the aims and objectives of the project.
- Clarify at which stage of the planning process artists should be employed. Acknowledge that some artists prefer to be involved at an early stage.
- Acknowledge the various partners and stakeholders involved and how they will work together (e.g. architects, planners, artists, educators, other professionals, community members). The roles and responsibilities of all those involved in the commissioning process should be clarified from the onset and need to be expressed in a universally acknowledged and accepted form of contract.
- Public art is not a universal problem solver for poor urban design or a magic formula to solve social injustice. It needs to be recognised that good public art is not a single substitute for good public policy.
- Public art commissions should be driven by the unique context of a given project rather than overly prescriptive or generic briefs.
- The commissioning process should allow room for and learn from rejection, refusal and negotiation of the commission by artists and other stakeholders.

The Artist

- If specific proposals for public art are requested in advance, artists should be paid appropriately for the time spent on site visits and developing the proposal.
- While a request for qualifications is an excellent process to narrow the field of potential artists in an open call, the review of previously completed work should not be the only basis for developing a public art project. Where appropriate, sponsoring opportunities for ‘first time’ public artists will allow for the continued expansion of creativity and artistic vision within the public art field.
- Assumptions should not be made about artists based solely on previous work. Commissioners should remain open to the possibilities of artists developing new approaches and creating original works.
- Artists working in the public realm need to be acknowledged and paid as professionals on a par with other members of the team, such as architects and designers.

The Curator

- The curatorial role in public art commissioning needs to be recognised as supporting, co-producing and overseeing negotiation and artistic vision, from the concept to completion of a public art project. Curators need to have access to funders and stakeholders to develop a working relationship throughout the commissioning process. The curator can ensure a balance is struck between risk and risk management enabling innovation and experimentation.
- Investment in curatorial training and mentoring of public art administrators will help to facilitate creativity throughout the administrative process. Simply changing one’s title from ‘administrator’ to ‘curator’ is not an acceptable substitute for proper training and curatorial expertise.

Appendix 1

Guidelines on Commissioning: A Manifesto of Possibilities

The Community

- 'The community' (or 'the public') is not a uniform group of people. Every project based in a community needs to be aware of the specific audiences the work is intended for. These audiences may be particular age groups, ethnicities, economic backgrounds and/or communities of interest. Acknowledgement of who the public artwork or project is for and why should be transparent. There may be different audiences at different stages of the project.
- Artists work with communities but not subsequently for them. The role of the artist is not necessarily to create communities but rather to make connections.
- Recognise the time it takes for communities to become participants in the public art process and the value of sustaining long-term relationships and networks.

The Art

- Public art is NOT a single art form. There are a multitude of approaches, methods and motivations for public art. Acknowledge and celebrate the depth and breadth of the field.
- There is cultural value in commissioning temporary public art. The effects can be as dramatic, significant and sustainable as permanent works. Public art is often placed in the precarious position of trying to address all stakeholders' agendas and needs.
- Recognise the limitations and possibilities of public art. Be ambitious but realistic. Remember, "context remains half the work" (originally stated by the Artists Placement Group in the 1960s).

The Evaluation

- Evaluation should be integral to the process, embedded from the beginning, providing productive suggestions as a qualitative tool and NOT a pre-emptive checklist.
- Acknowledge the varying notions of risk. Identify the different criteria for success and allow time for understanding these differences.
- Evaluation should be transparent and honest.
- Evaluation should recognise failure and the potential lessons that can be learned.
- The evaluation process is not limited to the art; it can also include the stakeholders and the commissioning process itself.
- Current timescales for evaluation are too short. There is a need for long-term investment in evaluation. The sustained 'value' of public art needs time to reveal itself. This is a process that may take years. Therefore the aim of evaluation should be informative rather than reactionary.
- Evaluation is most effective when information is disseminated and shared. Commissioners should make publicly available evaluations, debates and archives of public art projects.

ART PAPERS

STRIKING IDEAS + MOVING IMAGES + SMART TEXTS
NOVEMBER/DECEMBER 2008 US \$7 CAN \$9 UK £6 EU €8



REVOLUTION
URBAN GREENING
AS ARCHITECTURE

TARGET
WALTON CREEL'S TRADE
IN SOUTHERNESS

SPECTACLE
OR CRITIQUE:
OLAFUR ELIASSON

LABOR
LAND AND LOSS:
Yael BARTANA





TEXT / BERIN GOLONU

There's a revolution spreading across the United States. It aims to green urban and suburban spaces and turn them into agricultural sites. Although such initiatives are also occurring in other parts of the world, they seem especially relevant in a country that has one of the largest carbon footprints on the globe. They signal an important shift in consciousness, which may, hopefully, trigger a shift in lifestyle. Such initiatives hold the promise of alleviating interrelated social and environmental ills: to fight climate change and reduce our reliance on fossil fuels through localized food production, to provide urban—and especially low-income—dwellers with better and more affordable access to fresh produce, to reduce the dumping of pesticides into the soil and groundwater, and to restore humankind's integral relationship with the land that yields its sustenance. It may not be surprising that such concerns are in the public consciousness these days. Perhaps more unexpected is the fact that, among the activists, environmentalists, and farmers engaged in these initiatives, many artists are leading the cause and lending shape to what our green and bountiful cities of the future may look like.

Although many of these projects have occurred on a grassroots level through personal initiative, certain persuasive individuals are managing to give their efforts greater traction by convincing institutions, policymakers, and government officials to get behind their utopian visions of an urban agrarian future. Profiled here are a handful of American artists and architects who have both introduced prototypes for urban sustainability into the public sphere and gained material and moral support for their ideas, thanks in part to their highly effective collaborative practices. Principals Amale Andraos and Dan Wood of WORK Architecture Company (WORKac) recently won the commission from MoMA and P.S.1's Young Architects Program for a temporary design of P.S.1's courtyards to host the institution's summer concert series. Going far beyond the predictable beach theme, WORKac proposed to build a fully sustainable and productive urban farm, complete with roaming chickens. *Public Farm 1 (P.F.1)* required the collaboration of over thirty other artists, designers, engineers, farms, and green suppliers and adhered to highly progressive standards of sustainability.

At around the same time, on the opposite coast, artist and architect John Bela was hatching a plan with Slow Food Nation to build

ABOVE, TOP TO BOTTOM: Civic Center Victory Garden market, 2008 (photo: Kristen Loken); John Bela, day 2 of Civic Center Victory Garden (photo: Naomi Starkman/Slow Food Nation) / OPPOSITE: seedlings for Civic Center Victory Garden (photo: Scott Chernis)



GREENING THE REVOLUTION

Civic Center Victory Garden, a temporary farm outside San Francisco's City Hall, marking the opening festivities of this organization's August 2008 conference. Bela took his cue from fellow San Franciscan artist Amy Franceschini and her collective Futurefarmers, who have been reviving war-era Victory Gardens in backyards all over San Francisco. *Civic Center Victory Garden* transplants an urban farm to the lawns of the city government, a site that hosted Victory Gardens during the First and Second World Wars to compensate for a diminished agricultural labor force.

The idea of turning water-thirsty green lawns into food-producing gardens has also been embraced by Los Angeles artist and architect Fritz Haeg, who launched his first *Edible Estates* project on Independence Day in 2005. With the support of various art institutions, Haeg has selected seven other urban and suburban front lawns since then—six in the U.S., and one in London, England—and worked with their owners and residents to turn them into edible gardens. With the publication of *Edible Estates: Attack on the Front Lawn*, a recent book chronicling his projects, Haeg has declared an all-out war on irresponsible water and land use.¹

Art's reverence for nature and the environment is nothing new in this country. It has taken many forms since the nineteenth-century Hudson School landscape painters used their canvases to pay homage to America's natural beauty. A number of recent art projects do, however, trace a more direct historical lineage as predecessors to contemporary urban greening initiatives. Cited most often are Bonnie Sherk's *Crossroads Community (The Farm)*, 1974-1980, in San

Francisco; Agnes Denes' *Wheatfield—A Confrontation*, 1982, in Battery Park City, New York; and Mel Chin's *Revival Field*, 1991, in the Pig's Eye Landfill of St. Paul, Minnesota. These artists made a conscious decision to opt out of the production of commodities for consumption and exchange and to engage in social practices that give back to the environment and to society. They also paved the way for their contemporaries, making previously unorthodox practices not only acceptable, but respected by the art establishment.

The contemporary projects of a younger generation of practitioners share many of the aims of their predecessors'. They attempt to remedy urban environmental degradation by reclaiming various sites for productive use; they deploy rural practices in the urban sphere to engage in a critical examination of both labor and land use; they delineate space for communal activity and ritual where diverse urban populations can come together; and above all, they create public awareness about environmental concerns. But today's efforts are much more than symbolic or grandiose gestures aimed at creating public awareness. Contemporary practitioners turn such awareness into direct and immediate public action. As we face the very real threats of devastating climate change, a global food crisis, and oil shortages, they address environmental concerns with an unprecedented urgency. As such, their aims are twofold and connected: discursive and practical. By generating discourse they disseminate new possibilities for social and environmental change, and by setting achievable and practical examples that yield tangible results, they build convincing arguments that can be adopted by others.





WORKac are trained architects, but they have collaborated with a host of other artists, sculptors, sound designers, and engineers on *P.F.1*. The construction of the farm's vertical structure, which houses tubular cardboard planters clustered in clover configurations, was supervised by sculptor Art Domantay, who has produced numerous outdoor public art commissions. Artist Elenie Blanchard made the fabric wrappings surrounding the columns near the wading pool to animate the structure with color and texture. Creatives working at Electronic Crafts have designed and engineered the sound and video environment, featuring the calls and portraits of various farm animals residing at the Queens County Farm Museum. Atlantis Energy Systems fabricated the solar panels that power these electronics. The list of collaborators goes on, too lengthy to note here. In this, and with all of its interlinking components, *Public Farm 1* is a visionary environment that eludes classification. Is it a farm? A playground? An art installation? Or is it an educational model for sustainable building and design? It is all that and more. As a result, it is poised as a multi-use environment that can serve a wide variety of different audiences and needs.

But what about the location of *P.F.1*? Does its placement in the courtyard of an art institution confirm the structure as "art," thereby giving it a more discursive intent? Andraos and Wood explain that

they wanted the structure to serve as a space for leisure and relaxation. They also wanted to give it a didactic purpose. As such, they turned a section into "The Grove," an educational environment near the pathway leading to the museum's entrance, which contains information panels with facts about *P.F.1*'s green collaborators. These facts are also peppered with eye-catching inspirational pull quotes such as: "Over the three months of summer, *P.F.1*'s rainwater collection system will collect 6,000 gallons of water for irrigation," or "NYC's 14,000 acres of unshaded rooftop could host over 400,000 *P.F.1*s."

In addition, WORKac is teaching a seminar at Princeton University on cities and ecology, premised on the notion that ecological concerns can, have, and should influence future urban planning efforts. They believe that ecology works best at a citywide scale to effect change, and that it's hard to make a real difference on an individual level. When asked whether any government officials were responsive to *P.F.1*, Wood replied that the New York Council on the Environment was a big advocate, and even helped facilitate the installation of the rainwater collection cistern that irrigates the farm.³

Likewise, artist John Bela is looking to gain citywide support for his urban greening initiatives. A multidisciplinary practitioner, he is also a designer and landscape architect. Bela was approached by Slow Food Nation to oversee the implementation of a temporary garden

ABOVE: Fritz Haeg, *Edible Estates regional prototype garden #5*: Austin, TX, 2008, installed at Sierra Ridge apartment complex, commissioned by Arthouse, Austin, TX



that would host a series of events during the organization's conference. Instead of building a temporary garden, Bela suggested that they launch a farm right in the middle of San Francisco, and donate its produce to the city's homeless population. *Civic Center Victory Garden* won the support of San Francisco mayor Gavin Newsom, who temporarily lent the project land in a very visible location right outside of his office. Highly symbolic, the mayoral gesture and the garden's location are both integral components of the garden as they assert the leadership of San Francisco and the surrounding region in tackling environmental concerns of the future. Bela, along with other artist/gardeners such as Franceschini and the Futurefarmers, plan to turn such a gesture into reality.

The vision is to create a network of community gardens on public land throughout the city. "We can't afford to keep inert urban landscapes anymore," states Bela. "Alongside our soccer fields and our dog parks, we need to have productive food gardens."⁴ He notes that there is public interest and support for such a vision in the Bay Area, and that a convergence is occurring as other cities such as Philadelphia, Detroit, and Chicago have also launched urban agricultural initiatives. What would it take to make such a vision a reality in the Bay Area? "A greenhouse, some tools, and an experienced volunteer labor force." *Civic Center Victory Garden* has garnered tremendous attention and

gained valuable support over the course of its run, not only from other community gardeners around the Bay Area, but also from the general public. Originally scheduled to run through late September, it will now close in November with a Thanksgiving harvest. The hope is that public support for the garden will translate into this future volunteer labor force.

The city would also need to take a few other immediate steps in order to promote urban agriculture, remarks Bela. First, suitable urban agricultural sites need to be identified. Second, a temporary occupancy permit approval process needs to be put in place, allowing farmers to temporarily tend to private lands. Third, the city needs to set up an urban agricultural land trust to protect land in perpetuity and earmark it for food production. "We need to get a round table together with all the players, see what our shared needs are, and figure out how the city can help us," states Bela. "I've recommended that the city create a position titled Director of Urban Agriculture in order to help us do that."

Unlike Wood and Bela, who seek to inspire sustainability efforts at the city level, Haeg believes that effective change can and must start with the individual. His *Edible Estates* intend to empower individuals to undertake such change on their own turf. Trained as an architect, Haeg has been making inroads into the artworld by having art insti-

ABOVE: *Edible Estates* regional prototype garden #3: Maplewood, NJ, 2007, sponsored by Garden Supplies (photo: Curtis Hamilton/Canary Project)

tutions support each project by identifying local households willing to turn their front lawns into *Edible Estates* "prototypes." In order to meet the goals of the project, he adheres to fairly strict selection criteria, which he outlines in his book. The house needs to be "on a somewhat lengthy typical residential street lined entirely with uninterrupted groomed front lawns." The front yard should be "very visible from the street, with regular car traffic." The prospective *Edible Estates* owners should be: "super enthusiastic about the project, and committed to and willing to continue the *Edible Estates* prototype as long as they live in the house."⁵

Haeg's criteria prove that he seeks to lend the project both practical and discursive potential. On a practical level, the front lawns should become organic, food-producing gardens maintained over many years by their owners. The immediate benefits of such an effort are plentiful: *Edible Estates* owners would reduce their water intake; they'd stop dumping pesticides into their soil and their ground water; and they'd reduce the number of carbon miles required for produce to reach their plates. However, the discursive power of the *Edible Estates* may even be more impressive than its practical potential. Rather than siting the gardens in residents' backyards, Haeg situates them on their front lawns, "on streets with frequent car traffic," in order to maximize their visibility. The idea is that each of these gardens should serve as a prototype for the neighborhood, so that other residents may look upon them with a tinge of guilt the next time they power up their gas-guzzling lawnmowers or dump a bottle of Roundup Ultra onto the grass where their kids play. As a matter of fact, Haeg's intention is to locate these prototypes in sites and neighborhoods that are as typically Middle-American as possible, in order to question the conservative values that promote wasteful consumption and land use. Past *Edible Estates* gardens have primarily been located in suburbs such as Salina, Kansas; Lakewood, California; and Maplewood, New Jersey, among others.

The discursive dimension of the *Edible Estates* also extends into art institutions, by way of an exhibition that accompanies each site-specific garden. The actual planting of the garden is a small part of the project. The telling of the garden's story—in as many ways as possible—is his primary motive. Each exhibition takes the form of an *Edible Estates* headquarters, where videos, photographs, written documentation, and hands-on workshops come together as yet another discursive platform. In an effort to reach as broad a cross-section of audiences as possible, Haeg further broadcasts his *Edible Estates* stories in slide presentations and talks in many different locations, from art institutions, to nurseries, to colleges and universities. "I like the fact that when the projects are written about in mainstream media, they're not contextualized as being a part of the art world," he states. "It prevents hard core activists from dismissing it as 'just art.'"⁶ There is a great deal of interest in Haeg's *Edible Estates*, from a number of different areas and disciplines. His busy speaking schedule alone is a testament to the projects' popularity and success. But he remains extremely humble about it all, explaining,

The *Edible Estates* can engage people who both care and don't care about art, and neither person will realize that the other is looking at it. I don't make work for audiences who are slavishly trying to make art or slavishly be activists. I just like doing the work and letting it find its way into different audiences.

P.F.1, *Civic Center Victory Garden*, and *Edible Estates* all address Margolin's concerns that discourse can, at times, take prevalence over direct action in matters of art and sustainability. They simultaneously address and transgress these concerns by closely marrying the two, positioning discourse to directly further the practice, and vice versa, allowing practice to generate engaging stories that reach growing numbers of willing participants. Margolin concludes his essay by stating,

imagination is an artist's greatest asset. It can produce bold visions of what a sustainable future might be like.... People can be moved and aroused by powerful environments, innovative designs, and practical demonstrations of active engagement.⁷

It seems as though we're more in need of such bold and promising visions for a sustainable future than we ever have been before.

NOTES

1. Fritz Haeg, *Edible Estates: Attack on the Front Lawn*, New York: Metropolis Books and DAP, 2008.
2. Victor Margolin, "Reflections on Art and Sustainability," in Stephanie Smith and Victor Margolin, *Beyond Green: Toward a Sustainable Art*, Chicago and New York: Smart Museum of Art, University of Chicago, and Independent Curators International, 2005, 24-27. For an assessment of this exhibition, see Jennie Klein, "Curating Environmentalism in Post-Industrial America," *ART PAPERS* 31:05 (September-October 2007): 18-21.
3. From the author's interview with Dan Wood and Amale Andraos at P.F.1, New York, August 21, 2008.
4. All John Bela quotes are from the author's interview with the artist at *Civic Center Victory Garden*, September 4, 2008.
5. Haeg, 50.
6. From the author's interview with Fritz Haeg, September 28, 2008.
7. Margolin, 28.

Berin Golonu is an independent curator and writer living in New York. As Associate Curator of Yerba Buena Center for the Arts in San Francisco from 2003 to 2008, she curated numerous exhibitions including *The Gatherers: Greening Our Urban Spheres*, 2008; *The Way That We Rhyme: Women, Art & Politics*, 2008; *Peer Pleasure*, 2006; *Underplayed: A Mix-Tape of Music-Based Videos*, 2006; *The Zine UnBound*, 2005; and *Bay Area Now*, 2004 and 2008, among other exhibitions. She is a frequent contributor to *ART PAPERS*.

TOP: before and after views of *Edible Estates* regional prototype garden #2: Lakewood, CA, 2006, owners: Foti Family, produced in collaboration with Millard Sheets Gallery for the exhibition *Fair Exchange and Machine Project*, Los Angeles; MIDDLE: before and after views of *Edible Estates* regional prototype garden #3: Maplewood, NJ, 2007 (photo: Curtis Hamilton/Canary Project); BOTTOM: before and after views of *Edible Estates* regional prototype garden #1: Salina, KS, 2005, garden owners: Stan and Priti Cox, commissioned and sponsored by the Salina Art Center, Salina, KS

