



Raumlabor's king-size Swing.

Time to come

Within the next thirty years the South Harbour of Køge will undergo a transformation from an industrial wasteland to a modern district of housing and businesses. In a special initiative related to this development, a new strategy of temporary operations has been launched for the area. The Urban Play exhibition is a part of this strategy.

Covering an area of 43,000 square kilometres, Denmark is not a big country. Strategically situated in the Baltic Sea and with more than 7,000 kilometres of coastline, the sea is a ubiquitous element. Denmark has a lot of towns and villages like a string of pearls along the coastline. Køge is one of these towns and it also has one of the oldest harbours in the country. Køge is situated south of Copenhagen, only 30 minutes' drive from the centre of the capital.

Charlotte Bagger from Råderum and landscape architect Bettina Lamm from the University of Copenhagen, department of Forest and Landscape, are the curators of the Urban Play exhibition in the Southern Harbour of Køge. The exhibition consists of a number of activities by an impressive team of artists from the US, Canada, Germany and the Nordic countries.

The exhibition scenography is phenomenal. The clinical white walls of the exhibition gallery, where art only may



Ditte Hammerstrøm, Claus Bjerre and Jeremy Walton introduce a building playground in miniature.



Photos: Tuula Hjärne

The floating bath pavilion by Rinttala/Eggertsson.

be seen and not touched, contrasts with the dirt and noise of the harbour as a backdrop. Here, the pieces may not only be seen, but also touched, transformed and used. Take off your shoes, run in the sand, take a dip in the ocean and a tour in the sauna, compose your own furniture or your own piece of music and enjoy a bit of food in the mobile harbour kitchen. The exhibition appeals to one's inner child where the ability to sense and experience certainly depends on the playfulness that the different artistic approaches allow. If you find it difficult to cast off your inhibitions then bring a child or two with you to Urban Play.

Playtime

The main strength of the exhibition is its ability to invite people to participate. Many of the pieces are add extra value with a dose of play and humour, which further strengthens the concept, encouraging and motivating strongly for user involvement.

Monika Gora and Gunila Bandolin from Sweden set the tone with their installation called 'Conservatory for Discarded Pianos'. The visitors can play one or more of the pianos, performing their own concert in major and minor reverberating across the inner harbour. Ditte Hammerstrøm, Claus Bjerre and Jeremy Walton introduce a building playground in miniature where kids and grownups with their own hands, hammer and nails can act out Bob the Builder by helping to make a bench - The Bench is Yours. Afterwards one can take a seat and enjoy a lunch pack on one's own piece of work in the picturesque harbour environment. If you have forgotten to bring lunch, or if you are just extra hungry after all the hard work you can always visit the Dane Jesper Aabille and his event-based feature of fish trips, romantic dinners and eat with the project Mobile Kitchen: a food performance that challenges the social space between performer and audience, through the direct interac-

tion between the two. The Snailstair by Happyspace does not challenge the social level, but instead the physical with a small and beautiful spatial gesture. It is a staircase with varying riser and tread ratio, which because of the gradation of scale appears to be a stair, seat, landing and observation post. Distorting scale is something that Raumlabor introduces with great efficiency on the beach. If you have not yet found your inner child this is the place where it will happen. A turn on Raumlabor's king-size Swing must give a good idea of how Jonathan Swift's Gulliver felt when meeting with the giants in Brobdingnag. With its huge and imposing industrial buildings, scale is a major factor in the Southern Harbour.

A floating bath

One of the main challenges in the future development of the area will inevitably be how to retain and strengthen the qualities of scale and tactility that already exist. One of the indisputable qualities of the area is the beach and the ocean, and with their project for a floating bath pavilion Rinttala/Eggertsson aim to strengthen some of the activities already existing here. And if anything can help to generate activities related to the exhibition it must be the constant flow of people strolling through the harbour area on their way to the beach. A suitable detour could be a visit to 'The Society for Exploratory Research' where you can operate as an urban space detective with detailed instructions from Keri Smith from Canada. Here the focus is on the surroundings, observed by the visitor and registered in the mobile logbook for research. Rebar Group from the States is represented by two fantastic projects at Urban Play. One is The Ground is Poisonous and the other is Playscape of Wood and Sand. The Ground is Poisonous consists of a footbridge across poisoned earth where visitors can sow seeds in the ground, transforming the

landscape into a lush field. The other project is a playscape of huge and massive logs, arranged in a vertical position, encircled by a sand dune. The perfect shape of the circle will inevitably become deformed and fade over time as visitors make use of and play on it. Both of the projects have strong aesthetic qualities in addition to their conceptual strength and they both contain a process of transformation since they change shape and condition during time - echoing the essence of a living harbour where goods constantly are unloaded, stored and shipped.

The use of culture as an operative tool in the development of urban spaces is a sympathetic gesture. The greatest challenge for the Southern Harbour must be the location, since it is secluded and the activities occurring in the area are manmade. The dwellings are missing and so are the people. The curators seem aware of this since they have planned a series of events to attract people and to generate flow and activities in relation to the exhibition. Without manning and programme it can be hard for a town of 35,000 inhabitants to supply the exhibition with enough people. Whether the cultural strategy that 'ensures the city life before the city' succeeds depends partly on temporary initiatives like Urban Play. This is the right occasion for wide angles, reflections and user input, not to mention mistakes. But it needs more in the long term. If the cultural strategy in Køge is to be understood as architectural enzymes that will help create city life over time, Urban Play is a good kick-start. The initiative certainly announces both the site and the strategy, but in terms of the future and the ambition of successful urbanization of the area, the big question remains - now what?

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Lustgarten

Blink a few times and feel water drops splashing in your face. The fountain in the Lustgarten, Berlin's oldest public pleasure garden, offers cool refreshment here on the Museuminsel. Through your eyelashes and the water drops you can see the famous Berliner Dom, the city's bombastic neo-baroque cathedral, and the Altes Museum, a neoclassical temple of learning and loftiness. And on the other side a void: the enormous Stadtschloss was demolished in 1950 by the communists. Not that that's of much consequence: on hot days one seeks refreshment, not culture.

In the shade of the granite basin tourists take a breather from what Berlin has to offer. Once a marshy sandbank in the city's river Spree, the Museuminsel offers ample quantities of art and even larger amounts of history. The garden of the Stadtschloss, with its sculptures, fountains, vegetable gardens, exotic plants and subterranean grottos, made a walk in the Lustgarten a veritable delight. Nowadays, orderly plant pots and manicured lawns in geometric patterns do the job. Underneath the newly planted lime trees it's still a pleasant place to laze awhile.

Dust clouds and soldiers' boots brought an end to the peace when the Lustgarten was transformed into a parade ground for the Prussian prince electors in the eighteenth century. Emotions continued to run high when the famous architect Schinkel and landscape gardener Lenné converted the exercise ground back into a public garden. At the time of the Weimar Republic half a million Berliners protested amongst the flowerbeds against the rising right-wing radicalization, although to no avail. Grass made way once again for stone, over which battle songs and 'Heil Hitlers' would echo.

Today the strains of a kyrie elaison can just be heard above the splash of the fountain; a high, thin humming, with nowhere near as much persuasive power. The children playing around the fountain, jumping from stone to stone, hardly notice the group. This time there are no red and black flags, no ensigns, no sweeping torch beams. Just a board, with 'Jesus Saves' on it. And underneath a bespectacled young man, who sways a little from left to right. After all, it's a weighty message he's proclaiming.

'Salvation in the last hour' announces the leaflet pressed into my hand by a woman in a long skirt. Hitler or the Lord: the Lustgarten remains the place where opinions are aired. Paper, stone or grass: the medium doesn't matter. The current form of this public space harks back to a less controversial period of history. To the lawns of the era before the Nazi and DDR parade ground of stone. And to the old fountain, now present in a modern form. The attraction remains the same, even for the bespectacled young man. Freed of his board and message he too skips joyfully towards the cooling spray.

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