

## Two Minds Artists and Architects in Collaboration Edited by Jes Fernie

Collaboration is like a love affair; it segues from admiration to anxiety, rejection to rage, desire to envy, powerlessness to misunderstanding, from not getting what you want but maybe coming nearer to knowing what you thought that might be. Katherine Clark Working with artists acts as an eye-opener, a dialogue which forces us to reconsider our own position and sharpen our thoughts. Artists in general seem to operate more within an oeuvre and bring certain ideas to a site, while we tend to respond to what is already there. It is the difference between a conceptual and a contextual approach. Eelco Hooftman Architects' concerns are very complicated –they constantly have to justify themselves and their designs. I spend time and money NOT justifying myself. Nathan Coley Artists are not necessarily natural collaborators or even suited to 'project' work – their ways may be too messy, too private, too arcane, or too inconclusive. But most artists have a design sensibility, the capacity to grasp a brief and enjoy the creative energies which deadlines release. Richard Wentworth Herzog & de Meuron don't start from a design position. Their way of thinking is familiar to many artists – I think it allows them a kind of expressive freedom and daring more often associated with art than architecture. Michael Craig-Martin In general, architects like to build a building that is slick, fixed and suitable. The artist is searching for a more brute, independent and confronting approach, as art should be! Joep van Lieshout Towards the end of the project, Antoni and I had developed a level of telepathy. I could say 'That socket there, it's a bit...', 'Yes, it is a bit, but it reminds me of that bit that you just...' 'Yeah'. Steve Tompkins ...we have to admit, on the strength of experience, that artists are usually more interesting than architects. The artist places contemporary problems at the heart of his activity, whereas the architect tends to find these embarrassing, inconvenient, undesirable, even. Herzog & de Meuron Keith's perception of things differs from mine substantially and the lightness of his design approach brings a very refreshing element in our work. Collaborating with Keith has made me aware how much I've been conditioned to certain schemata as an architect and in how far I take materialisation, structure and a fixed design methodology for granted. Dominik Holzer

Black Dog Publishing

Interest and activity in the field of collaborative practice between artists and architects is growing rapidly. Two Minds is the first book of its kind to document and critique this activity, focusing on new work by high profile and emerging practitioners such as David Adjaye, Jacque Herzog, Chris Ofili, Pipilotti Rist, Kathrin Böhm and Nathan Coley. Edited by Jes Fernie, an established authority on the subject, the book includes two essays focusing on collaborations in North America and Europe, alongside a series of in depth case studies.

A valuable resource for architects, curators, artists and all those involved in making buildings, spaces and things for the public domain, this book is an accessible and timely consideration of an important phenomenon. Divided into three sections Groundscapes, Buildings and Things, the case studies cover a range of small scale artist-led projects, landscape schemes and award-winning buildings.

Jes Fernie is a freelance writer and art consultant. She was director of The Royal Society for the encouragement of Arts, Manufactures and Commerce Art for Architecture scheme from 1998–2004. Philip Ursprung is Swiss Science Foundation Professor, Institute for History and Theory of Architecture in Zurich. Cara Mullio is a freelance writer and curator based in Los Angeles.

Art/Architecture  
UK £19.95 / US \$29.95 / CAN \$39.95  
ISBN 1 904772 26 9



Black Dog Publishing  
Art Architecture Design Fashion History  
Photography Theory and Things  
www.bdpworld.com

## Things

- 136 **Support Structure, London**  
Gavin Wade and Celine Condorelli
- 144 **Minotaur, Kielder**  
Shona Kitchen and Nick Coombe
- 150 **Cattle Market, Warwickshire**  
Keith Wilson and Dominik Holzer, Alsop Architects
- 156 **Sound Mirrors, Folkestone**  
Lise Autogena and Tom Barker, b Consultants
- 162 **Mobile Porch, London**  
Kathrin Bohm, Steffan Saffer and Andreas Lang



## Mobile Porch Kensington, London

Artists: Kathrin Böhm and Stefan Saffer

Architect: Andreas Lang

1999–2000

Mobile Porch Christmas card event  
(organised with Valentin Bontjes van  
Beek), Portobello Road, London, 2000

Kathrin Böhm and Stefan Saffer are members of a growing breed of artists interested in the dynamics of social interaction. Like artists Thomas Hirschhorn and Alfredo Jaar they work almost exclusively in the public domain, using process rather than product as a focus for their work. Böhm and Saffer make structures, situations and tools which engage users, clients, institutions and members of the general public in the process of making and considering art. Their aim is to create non-hierarchical spaces where extraordinary things can happen.

Andreas Lang had just finished studying at the Architectural Association in London when he met Böhm at a *ValleyVibe*'s event in Deptford, south London.<sup>1</sup> Böhm and Saffer were looking for an architect to collaborate with on the development of a social space underneath the dramatic wing of the Westway Flyover in North Kensington, London. Lang's commitment to what could loosely be referred to as 'relational architecture' (an interest in the way social relationships shape our environment) chimed with Böhm and Saffer's emerging investigation into the effect that informal constructions can have on the texture of everyday life. Lang left the AA with a strong desire to establish a practice far removed from the office-based, admin-heavy environment that subsumes the lives of most architects. His desire to test ideas directly by working on site, considering the dynamics of public space at first hand and creating 1:1 objects to a brief of his own making, lead him to work in a way more often associated with artistic practice. He says that he knows how to build a building but what he is really interested in is why he is building it.<sup>2</sup> This question was the driving force behind his decision to work with Böhm and Saffer.

The artists were under the illusion that with the introduction of an architect onto the team, they would be working in an office, using the latest CAD software to develop ideas. However, true to his practice, Lang insisted that they work on site, using a car bonnet as a desk and basic material such

Mobile Porch being rolled, dismantled and set up by Kathrin Böhm, Stefan Saffer and Andreas Lang, Westway Flyover, London 2000

as paper, scissors, glue and tin foil to make a series of models. This direct activity bought a sense of immediacy and contact with the users which is tangible in the end product.

Out of these playful but intense design workshops, the idea for *Mobile Porch* emerged. A curious little peripatetic object, the 'porch' can be rolled from site to site and opened to reveal a platform for multiple uses. It is made of aluminium and plywood and measures 2.2 by 2.3 metres. During its stint underneath the Westway, it took on many guises including that of a market stand, a swap shop, a gallery, a venue for fashion shows, poetry readings, fuel cell workshops and cocktail parties.<sup>3</sup> When it was set on fire by local arsonists, it survived (to be renamed *Mobile Scorch*) and went on to tour parts of the UK, Holland, Spain and Germany.

Lang's involvement in the project was considered by Böhm and Saffer to be an opportunity to strengthen the theoretical underpinning and practical application of the project; with his involvement, it was possible for *Mobile Porch* to be viewed as a work of art manifested within an architectural framework. In practical terms, Böhm freely admits that — like many artists — she is unable to conceive of space in three dimensions. She and Saffer are not primarily concerned with the design of space; they focus on the activity they want people to engage in along with the social and spatial conditions those situations require. They see Lang's ability to intertwine concerns relating to public space with the design of an object as key to the extraordinary success of *Mobile Porch*.

Already subverting the usual process of events by forming a collaborative team made up of participants who met through an informal network rather than a formal selection process, Böhm, Saffer and Lang set out to strike a blow to the professional barriers that exist between artists and architects. They became interested in Buckminster Fuller's idea that specialists are under threat due to their inability to forge links with other disciplines and soon found themselves making no distinction between themselves as artists and architects in design meetings.

Collaboration to Böhm, Saffer and Lang is a fluid, emotive affair. Unlike other artists in this book who work to a tight brief and concentrate on particular aspects of a building's form (Michael Craig-Martin on the Laban, for instance), Böhm and Saffer invited Lang to write the brief with them and become an intrinsic part of the conception and design of the project.

- 1 *ValleyVibes* is a public art project by Jeanne van Heeswijk and Amy Plant, 1999–2004. It is a sound machine on wheels which can be hired and used to play and record music and poetry.
- 2 Interview with the author, May 2005.
- 3 *Mobile Porch* was commissioned by curator Georgia Ward of the North Kensington Amenity Trust (now Westway Development Trust). The programme of events was run by Böhm, Saffer and Lang who were on site every day for their two month residency.
- 4 From an unpublished RSA report on *Mobile Porch*, RSA Archive, London, 2000.
- 5 *Park Products* was commissioned by Sally Tallant, Head of Education & Public Programming, Serpentine Gallery, London, 2000.



I think the efficiency of collaborations relies very much on communication, trust and emotion. Everybody comes from a different background or profession. Everybody speaks a different language. Everybody has different thoughts. To find the best form of communication is very important in each collaboration.  
Stefan Saffer<sup>5</sup>



## Park Products

Below Mobile Porch hosting a swap shop (organised with Nicoline van Harskamp), Portobello Road, London, 2000

Opposite Stall for Park Products, Kensington Gardens, London, 2004

Kathrin Böhm, Stefan Saffer and Andreas Lang have gone on to form public works, an art/architecture collective founded with architects Sandra Denicke-Polcher and Torange Khonsari. In 2003-2004 Böhm and Lang carried out a year long residency at the Serpentine Gallery in London.<sup>5</sup>

The project was a collaboration between public works and groups of people who use or work in the park in which the gallery is situated: gallery staff members, visitors and gardeners, product design students from the nearby Royal College of Art and scientists from Imperial College. The residency culminated in the creation of 11 unique products which were traded from an adaptable mobile stall. Members of the public were invited to borrow or procure items such as fencing tools, plastic handbags and toys in order to help maintain and contribute, in some way, to the life of the park. Chompost Bar, for example, was a compressed bar of compost made from leaves harvested from the Royal Parks of London. Visitors to the Park Products stall were invited to help on-duty gardeners in tasks such as picking up leaves and collecting peanut shells, in return for a chocolate-shaped compost bar. Conversations developed between users and gardeners, and exchanges were formed which were based on knowledge and raw material rather than financial transactions.

Park Products is an extension of the collaborative work that Böhm and Lang began on Mobile Porch. While their relationship is now established, they continue to ask each other, and their audience, questions such as: “How can we expand the meaning and possibilities entrenched in most current art and architecture practice?”, “How best can we propose a new and radical way that artists and architects can work together?” and “Can we move beyond the current obsession with the ‘individual’ and the ‘object’ as the primary focus of attention?”. Answers to these questions are never arrived at in any straight forward fashion, but come to light through the production and use of the work itself.



# Acknowledgements

I am extremely grateful to the artists and architects in this book, all of whom have displayed a generosity of spirit and dedication to their practice which has been the driving force behind my work on this project.

Thank you also to all those who played a key role in the development of the RSA Art for Architecture scheme: Renato Benedetti, Theresa Bergne, Paul Bonaventura, Nathan Coley, Michaela Crimmin, Clare Cumberlidge, Andrew Derbyshire, Alan Haydon, Mike Keatinge, Justine Kenyon, Tania Kovats, Gayle Markovitz, Lord Palumbo, Hugh Pearman, Sandra Percival, Kath Shonfield, Yinka Shonibare, Ingrid Swenson, Rachel Taylor and Lizzie Tulip.

Conrad Atkinson, Helen Auty, Lord Bute, Ann Crawley, Peter Fink, Lesley Greene, Michael Manser, Sandy Nairne, Deanna Petherbridge, Vanessa Swann and Michael Wrottesley played an important role in setting up the RSA Art for Architecture Scheme in 1990; it is a pleasure to be able to thank them here for their commitment to the germ of an idea.

Finally, I am grateful to Stuart Smith, Victoria Forrest, Catherine Grant and Duncan McCorquodale, Jason Glynos, Jordan and Carter for helping me put this book together.

The following organisations generously supported the RSA Art for Architecture scheme:

Department of the Environment  
Department of National Heritage  
Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment  
Scottish Executive  
Northern Ireland Assembly  
Welsh Assembly  
British Airways Property  
John McAslan Family Trust  
Henry Moore Foundation  
Arts Council England  
Crafts Council



## Black Dog Publishing

Art Architecture Design Fashion History  
Photography Theory and Things

© 2006 Black Dog Publishing Limited, the artists, architects and authors  
All rights reserved

Texts by Jes Fernie, Cara Mullio and Philip Ursprung  
Edited by Jes Fernie [jes@jesfernie.com](mailto:jes@jesfernie.com)  
Produced by Catherine Grant  
Designed by SMITH  
Victoria Forrest

Black Dog Publishing Limited  
Unit 4.4 Tea Building  
56 Shoreditch High Street  
London E1 6JJ  
Tel: +44 (0)20 7613 1922  
Fax: +44 (0)20 7613 1944  
Email: [info@bdp.demon.co.uk](mailto:info@bdp.demon.co.uk)  
[www.bdpworld.com](http://www.bdpworld.com)

All opinions expressed within this publication are those of the authors and not necessarily of the publisher.

British Library Cataloguing-in-Publication Data.

A CIP record for this book is available from the British Library.

ISBN 1 904772 26 9

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise, without prior permission of the publisher.

Every effort has been made to trace the copyright holders, but if any have been inadvertently overlooked the publishers will be pleased to make the necessary arrangements at the first opportunity.



Two Minds has, in part, been supported by the RSA, ACE, The Scottish Executive and The Northern Ireland Assembly