‘Coming into Community’: Oslo Architecture Triennale 2022 at the National Museum – Architecture

*Coming into Community* has been produced by the National Museum for Oslo Architecture Triennale 2022. It is also part of the National Museum’s celebration of 2022 as *Skeivt kulturår* (Queer Culture Year), which marks the 50th anniversary of the decriminalization of male homosexuality in Norway. The exhibition curator is Victoria Bugge Øye, with Karianne Ommundsen as education curator and Charlotte McInnes as project leader.

*Coming into Community* is a two-part exhibition about being part of a community. How can architecture help create new forms of community where there is space for everyone?

Heaven by MYCKET

The Ulltveit-Moe Pavilion hosts an installation from the Swedish art and architecture collective MYCKET, *Heaven by MYCKET*. The installation is based on MYCKET’s many years of research into queer spaces and queer club concepts.

Since 2012, Mariana Alves Silva, Katarina Bonnevier and Thérèse Kristiansson have been exploring how architecture and design can be used to create a more inclusive world.

In *Heaven by* *MYCKET*, they link the experience of finding one’s ‘community’ to a time, a place, and an architecture: the queer nightclub. Taking inspiration from their research into queer spaces and histories, as well as their own experiences, the installation is an exploration and celebration of the nightclub, both as a form of architecture and a way of coming together. Here, MYCKET use the queer nightclub as a starting point to examine wider questions about how spaces can help make people feel safe, while also supporting and inspiring them to dream and act.

Often taking the forms of performances and happenings, MYCKET’s work undermines assumptions that architecture must be permanent to make a lasting impression. The frequently short-lived architecture of the nightclub has been crucial to queer lives and communities, yet its cultural and historical significance is often overlooked.

In this installation, visitors are free to dress up, to dance, to play and to rest. Pass through the portal and encounter elements from club architecture in MYCKET’s idiosyncratic universe: a walk-through closet for arrival and transformation; a dance floor where you never have to dance alone; a bar where all kinds of bodies are welcome; and a canopy bed for solidarity and recovery.

Coming into Community

In the Bucher Room, the exhibition looks at how changing ideas about community have influenced architecture and urban planning from the 1960s to the present day. Who has been included? Who has been excluded? What does urban planning look like from queer, feminist and other marginalized perspectives?

While the main aim of post-war housing construction was to accommodate and nurture the nuclear family, throughout the 1960s and 70s, people began to think more inclusively when envisaging, and designing for, communities.

Many residents and residents’ groups began to take matters into their own hands, often in collaboration with architects. They wanted a voice and the right to shape the places where they lived. Some people worked to transform their towns and cities, while others wanted to establish their own communities outside existing urban structures.

Along the walls are six examples of architecture projects from Norway and abroad that have created alternatives to the conventional housing solutions and lifestyles of mainstream society, together with a variation on a traditional approach. Some of these projects continue to thrive today – others, understandably, remained unrealized utopias.

The Nuclear Family as Norm

What kinds of households are our neighbourhoods designed for?

The ‘neighbourhood unit’ became an important planning model in the post-war years. It was intended as a counterweight to the anonymity of city life and to provide residents – primarily nuclear families – with a sense of belonging. In Norway, the neighbourhood unit served as the model for the Oslo suburb of Lambertseter.

The concept of a wider, social-democratic community was strongly embedded in such projects. National housing measures such as the Norwegian State Housing Bank and other housing associations were founded to give everyone the opportunity to own their own home. However, such institutions imposed stringent eligibility criteria and generally prioritised nuclear families. There was not always room for people who didn’t fit into this norm – single people, couples without children, students, older people or people with reduced mobility.

Alone Together

How can architecture adapt to new forms of communities?

The Enerhaugen housing cooperative in central Oslo consists of four high-rise and two low-rise blocks built in the period 1962-65. For the first time, single people could apply to the city’s housing association for an apartment. Until 1959, people who lived alone were excluded from social housing in Oslo. Today, one-person households are the most common form of living arrangement.

Queer people were another group that suffered discrimination in the housing market: until 1967, two people could live together in an OBOS home only if they were married. In 1981, however, anti-gay discrimination in the housing market became a crime.

In the 1980s and 90s, Enerhaugen became a popular place to live among the gay and lesbian community. Originally designed to suit single people and childless couples, the smaller apartments located close to the city centre also appealed to many of those embracing queer lifestyles.

An Alternative Neighbourhood

How can a neighbourhood experiment with different ways of living?

Since the post-war period, the goal of Norwegian housing policy has been for people to own their own homes. The Svartlamon neighbourhood in Trondheim is the result of a campaign for affordable homes near the city centre and the preservation of historical wooden buildings. Today, Svartlamon functions as an autonomous eco-community, whose residents have rejected the owner-occupier housing model in favour of cooperative solutions.

In the mid-1980s young people in the music and counterculture scenes in Trondheim began moving into a dilapidated area scheduled for redevelopment. Many were influenced by punk anti-capitalist ideologies and the squatting movement.

After a long battle, squatters became tenants. Svartlamon is now made up of 100 old and new buildings and nearly 300 residents. Rent is kept low through simple housing standards and collaborative DIY initiatives.

It Takes a Village

How do you create a neighbourhood where people take care of each other?

In 1967, the Selegrend Movement was started by the Bergen-based lawyer and priest Edvard Vogt as a reaction to post-war housing construction. The central focus of a *selegrend* (literally a ‘happy community’), was no longer the nuclear family, but the idea of a country village with room for everyone.

A third of the dwellings were reserved for housing-vulnerable groups, such as people with disabilities, single parents, and immigrants. Participation in the construction process ensured costs were kept low and that the needs of each resident were met. In 1970, the Selegrend Movement began collaborating with the architecture firm Cubus. In 1975, the first of two Selegrend projects were completed.

Following the liberalization of the housing market in the 1980s, it became more difficult maintain special quotas for housing-vulnerable groups, but solidarity and neighbourliness have continued to be important.

Architecture for and by Women

What would the city look like if it were designed by women?

An important counterweight to many modernist planning ideals came from feminist voices in the 1970s and 80s. In 1981, the feminist architectural cooperative Matrix was established in London.

In response to the patriarchal and exclusive system they saw dominating the architecture and construction sectors, Matrix worked to change the design process in two ways: offering free architectural assistance to marginalized groups and co-designing with them.

They worked with women’s centres, kindergartens, and housing projects for single, gay and lesbian people. They also developed educational resources and methods to demystify the language and processes of architecture.

Reduced state funding for community services led the group to disband in 1993, although many of the members continued their work through teaching and design. Matrix played an important pioneering role for later feminist groups and their work continues to be relevant today.

A Space of Our Own

On whose fantasies are our cities and homes based?

Women entered the architectural profession in earnest in the 1970s. As a result, the field of architecture was also subjected to feminist criticism. The American architect and filmmaker Noel Phyllis Birkby (1932–1994) studied architecture at Yale University and Cooper Union. As a lesbian woman, she had difficulty adjusting to the male-dominated field of architecture, and also to the heterosexual feminist movement. Birkby eventually joined a radical lesbian milieu on the American east coast, where she found collaborators and partners.

In the 1970s, Birkby began to organize ‘Environmental Fantasy Workshops’ for women’s groups throughout the United States. She was interested in what housing and living could look like if freed from patriarchal ideals. Inspired by the consciousness-raising techniques of 1970s activists, Birkby’s discussion and drawing exercises were intended to make women more aware of their own desires and dreams.

The Stonewall Nation

The idea of a separatist gay state emerged in the wake of the Stonewall Riots in 1960. The American activist Don Jackson was among those who wanted to establish a separate city for gay men. Jackson proposed creating what he called the Stonewall Nation in Alpine County, California. He envisaged a safe place filled with love, where people could be themselves without the risk of encountering harassment, violence, and prejudice.

Don Jackson's utopian vision is the starting point for the film *The Stonewall Nation* (2014) by Sille Storihle. In it, Jackson is played by actor and activist Michael Kearns. The film is presented here alongside a 1986 interview with Don Jackson conducted by Olaf Odegaard, artwork by Odegaard, and archive materials from the ONE National Gay and Lesbian Archives at the University of Southern California. The materials were selected by Storihle in collaboration with the National Museum.

Storihle is an Oslo-based visual artist with a degree from the Academy of Fine Arts in Trondheim and CalArts in Los Angeles. Storihle is working on a new publication based on the archive materials presented in the exhibition.