



## Humlebæk, Copenhagen – Living the dream and dreams of living: the future frontiers of domesticity

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A new show at the Louisiana Museum of Modern Art explores architecture's relationship with anthropology through different approaches to housing

'In this exhibition an encyclopaedic range of material from past and present is brought together... There is no single simple aim in this procedure. No watertight scientific or philosophical system is demonstrated. In short, it forms a poetic-lyrical order where images create a series of cross-relationships.' So wrote the Independent Group in the August 1953 press release for its show *Parallel of Art and Life*. Yet this statement could easily have been written about the current show *Living: Frontiers of Architecture III-IV* at the Louisiana Museum of Modern Art in Humlebæk, Denmark.

*Living* is the last exhibition in a series called the *Frontiers of Architecture*, which explores architecture's relationship with other disciplines. The first in this series, *Cecil Balmond: The Hidden Order* (2007), looked at the relationship between architecture and mathematics. The second *Green Architecture for the Future* (2009) explored the relationship between the discipline and sustainability, coinciding with the Climate Summit in Copenhagen. Now, *Living* presents architecture from an anthropological viewpoint through the lens of housing. The exhibition considers 'ways of living' through a combination of art and architecture projects. With about 120 projects, it presents a 'cross section through a giant field', supported by a highly illustrated catalogue that provides a variety of theoretical and analytical essays.

The reference to the work of the Independent Group appears in the catalogue essay 'Archipelagos and Pavilions', by *Domus* editor Joseph Grima. Although he accepts that architects will always crave the clarity of the pavilion in its purist form, his essay offers a critique of urban transformation resulting from the 'Bilbao Effect' and the prevalence of the term 'starchitecture', whose reputation is more important than his vision. Unlike most architecture exhibitions, *Living* is focused not on individual buildings and their architects but on the city, either the intimate space of the ordinary individual or from a more distant perspective on the urban context or collective environment. Architecture here clearly assumes a 'supporting role'. It is seen as the fabric of the city, the necessary backdrop or frame to other people's lives.

The projects are categorised into three main themes: 'The Dream', looking at architecture as a model for elementary life; 'Cell/Network', exploring the relationship with others; and 'Homeland', about what makes us feel 'at home'. At first this appears a straightforward strategy to understand the content of the exhibition. Yet, like the complexity of the urban environment it seeks to convey, there is more than one organisational system. The main themes are divided into several sub-themes, and a fourth 'Behaviorology', which takes the suburb as its starting point, appears unannounced.

The projects are presented in every conceivable medium, at every scale. Three case studies occupy entire rooms and expand on certain themes in greater depth, and several specially commissioned full-size installations occasionally blur the boundaries between the display and museum. The Louisiana Museum of Art itself, built in several stages by Danish architects Jørgen Bo and Vilhelm Wohlert over a period of 33 years, appears to form part of the landscape. The museum's various elements overlook the sea and encircle an open lawn, concealing several levels of underground galleries dug into the hillside below. The natural materials and simplest of forms are the perfect backdrop for such an exhibition as *Living*.

Although the enormous scope of the exhibition means that it will appeal to a wide audience, for architects, especially those interested in the design of housing, there is a significant amount to see. At the scale of the city, there are a number of familiar projects. The 'Cell/Network' theme features the Danish 'free town' of Christiania, established by squatters in 1971 and largely community-driven, as well as the latest developments in housing design, such as the soon to be completed W57 by BIG (Bjarke Ingels Group). The 'Homeland' theme includes the Elemental project in Chile by Alejandro Aravena, which invites residents to make additions to a basic house type, and several *Ordos 100* projects, including those by Ai Weiwei and Herzog de Meuron.

The sub-theme 'At Home Anywhere' displays the more speculative *Moonville* (2009) by Vogler and Vittori, a vision for

a settlement on the Moon based on a medieval Italian town, and Superstar: A Mobile Chinatown (2008) by MAD, which sees the future of the metropolis in star-shaped mobile skyscrapers circling above the city. Bart Goldhoorn's proposal Block City (2009), entitled Russia from Collectivism to Individualism, develops a study of the Soviet Microrayon to propose a radical approach to solve the current housing crisis, where schemes would be mass-produced and custom-made, on standard-size blocks, based on open source designs and architects being paid royalties rather than fees.

'The Dream' theme of the exhibition brings together almost exclusively projects at the scale of the individual dwelling. It looks at 'the dream of returning to the greatest simplicity where everything superficial is gone and only the most absolutely elementary architectural units remain'. Here, unsurprisingly, are caves, dens and tree houses - Terunobu Fujimori's Tree Tea House and Sou Fujimoto's Final Wooden House - designed around a single module and basic human activities. These projects, and the full-size installations, such as Le Corbusier's Cabanon (1952), promise to appeal to most visitors, who will enjoy the physicality of the spaces and particularly the sensory experience of the access corridor installation complete with odours (Regime).

However, those works that invite us to explore the anthropological aspects of dwelling through images of the intimate spaces of interiors may make us feel less comfortable, voyeuristic even. For instance, PLAN (2003-04), by Polish architects Aneta Grzeszykowska and Jan Smaga, describes the spaces in plans of apartments with photomontages of aerial views that show every last detail of occupancy; or Dutch photographer Erik Klein Wolterinck's Keukens (2009), which takes the doors off to expose the contents of your kitchen cupboard.

Trying to succinctly describe Living's innumerable ideas has been a difficult task. Language may not be the best tool. In English, there is no appropriate word to describe the process of making a house a home, and perhaps one word could never sum up the myriad different approaches. The closest terms 'homely' or 'home-making' belong only to domesticity. In English translations, Living uses the strange term 'homing', to describe the act of making a home (embracing the idea of 'a home away from home'). Perhaps more successfully, the exhibition invents the term 'unhomeable' - to describe a space that cannot be tamed - as seen in the Koolhaas HouseLife film of The House in Bordeaux (1998).

One attempt to sum up our knowledge of living in the city is Alexander Brodsky's mixed-media object Settlement, originally created for the Venice Architecture Biennale of 2006, under the theme of Cities. Architecture and Society, as a metaphor for the Russian city. A model of a dormitory town sits at the bottom of a barrel organ-like glass cabinet dark, submerged and desolate; turning the handle illuminates many windows, releasing the swirling snow and creating the magical, nostalgic image accompanied by a barrel organ arrangement of Your Mother Should Know by John Lennon and Paul McCartney (1967) - a tribute to those who came before and have more knowledge.

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