



philwhite1960

katelinbutler

duluxaus

archier_

m_vk

han_slater

katymoir

institute_architects_aus

DULUX STUDY TOUR REPORT
QIANYI LIM, MAY 2016
@SIBLING_NATION
COPENHAGEN, LONDON,
MADRID

Wow! What an extraordinary adventure the Dulux Study Tour has been. It has been six weeks since returning home to Melbourne and I am still processing the eleven days of touring Copenhagen, London and Madrid.

Thank you to Dulux and the Institute of Architects for supporting this incredible opportunity. As an emerging architect with my own practice, the opportunity to visit buildings and architectural practices in other contexts has been extremely valuable. Special thanks to Phil White, Matt Henson, Daniela Crawley and Katelin Butler for their organisational prowess and making sure we were well fed and caffeinated on tour.

To my fellow study tourists, Chris Gilbert, Hannah Slater, Katy Moir and Mathew Van Kooy, thanks for your fine company, energy and allowing me to experience all of this through your eyes. xxx



At present, Copenhagen, London and Madrid are all part of the European Union. However, since returning from the study tour at the end of May, the people of the UK have made their affirmative decision to leave. Discussions surrounding Brexit and its impact on the rest of the EU were a hot topic during our short visit to London. Unease within Europe stemming from the refugee crisis and slow economic growth has been reflected in the rise of the far right in Denmark, a country protective of its high social welfare and quality of life. In Madrid, the slow economic recovery post-crisis is evident through stagnant developments and offices sourcing new work from beyond Spain's borders.

It is from this socioeconomic context in which I report on my experiences on the study tour, comparing the three cities specifically through the lens of architecture and its practice.

LONDON BOOM

Ken Allison led our first day in London on a walking tour. From our first vantage point at the Skygarden of Vinoly's 'Walkie Talkie' building, we could see the multiple cranes dotting the London cityscape. It was immediately clear to us that we were witnessing a renewed vigour within London's construc-

tion industry. Described as 'playing catch up' from the global financial crisis of 2008, multiple construction projects that were previously put on hold in London were now in action. Ken took us past some of these construction sites, where we witnessed the enormity of these residential and commercial tower developments from the scale of the street and even had the opportunity to visit the construction site of an AHMM commercial tower. We followed Ken to another AHMM project in East London, the Tea Building, an adaptive reuse of an old industrial warehouse into commercial workspaces. Located in Shoreditch, the Tea Building accommodates a range of tenants including creative agency Mother and other digital startups. The impact on which this building has had on the gentrification of its former working class neighbourhood is evidenced in its command of high rents, and in the neighbouring Shoreditch house, an elite members only club for 'creatives'. Moving further east in London we visited Assemble's studios in Stratford. The fifteen person collective operates through participatory and collaborative processes, both within and beyond the group, and is ultimately driven by a social agenda. This agenda is presumably a reaction to the economic instabilities in which the practice

was born. Assemble's work with the local community on the regeneration of the Granby Four Streets in Liverpool was awarded the prestigious Turner Art Prize—the first time the prize has ever been awarded to architects. This award drew attention to the housing crisis faced by many in the UK.

MADRID IN RECOVERY

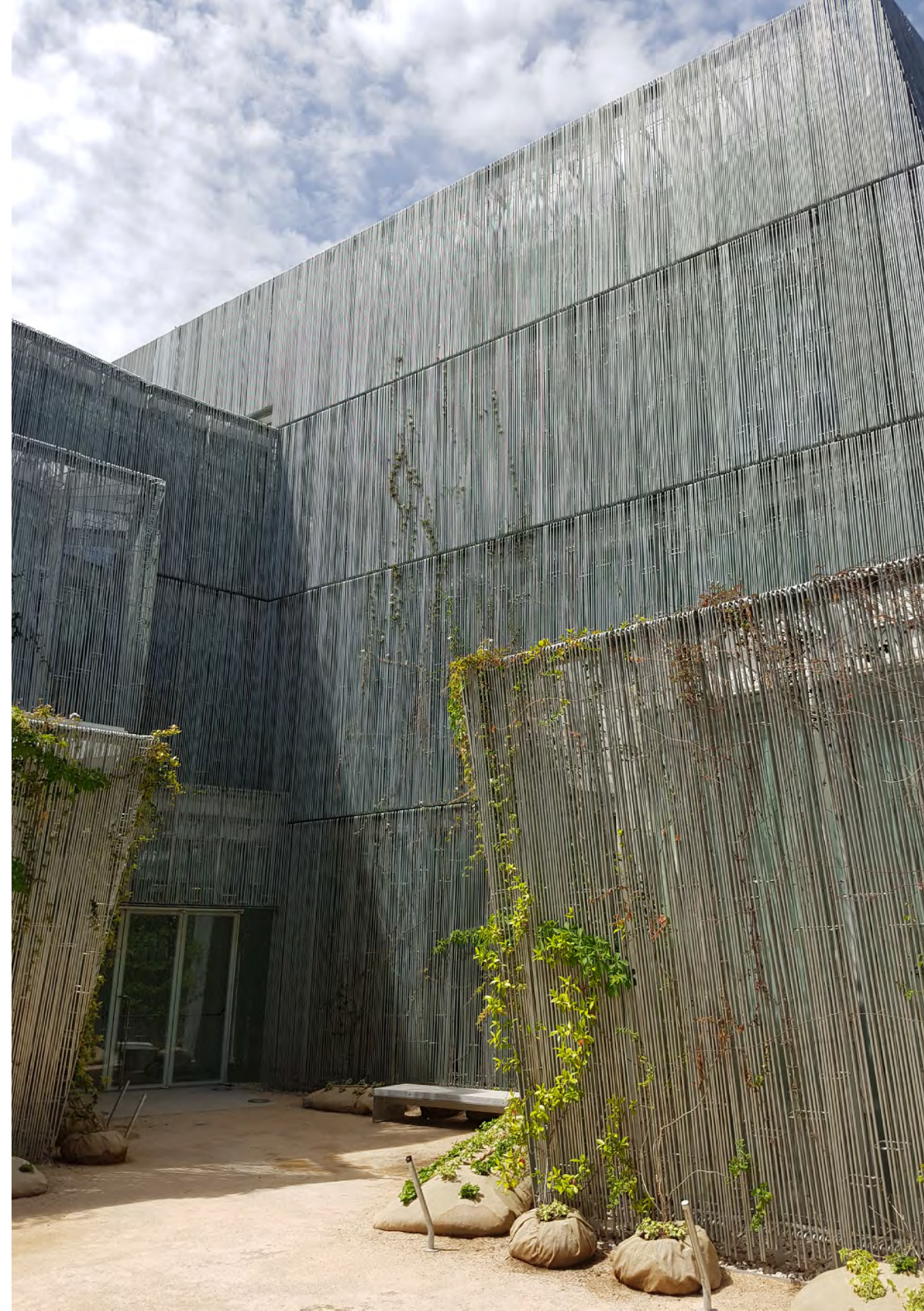
In Madrid we visited several practices; Langerita Navarro, Selgas Cano, Estudio Entrestitio, AGi Arquitectos, Foster Lab of the Norman Foster Foundation and Burgos and Garrido. None of these practices appeared to have any significant live projects within Spain; either surviving on commissions from overseas or on academic positions in Spain and abroad. In the case of Burgos and Garrido, the practice was consulting to foreign cities on urban renewal schemes similar to their recently completed Rio Madrid project.

Maria Hurtado de Mendoza, co-director Estudio Entrestitio presented various projects all located in South America and admitted to spending half the year in New York teaching. Jose Selgas of Selgas Cano, was also working on a range of projects in London and the United States from their home studio in Madrid – but none in Spain itself.

The after effects of the economic downturn in Spain has seen a large number of architects leave the country to take up practice in more economically fertile environments. The phenomenon of this Spanish diaspora has seen some of Spain's most promising architects take up stable academic positions at foreign institutions, allowing them to maintain a practice through speculative projects. Close to home, in Sydney for example, is Spanish borne practice FAKE Industries – its directors are also architectural educators, and have injected a valuable and refreshing global perspective into the curriculum at the University of Technology Sydney.

Having heard from my Spanish architectural classmates from exchange about the effects the economic crisis has had on the profession, I was pleasantly surprised to encounter a vibrant and bustling Madrid. However as we delved deeper into the city, it became clear that though there were a series of recently completed significant projects, they were incomplete in their programming.

Opposite our hotel in Malasana was the recently completed Barcelo market. The municipal building is situated like a monolithic box, out of scale and context within the finegrain streets of the city cen-



tre. Whilst the ground floor of the building houses the local market, activating the streets surrounding it, the upper few levels remain unoccupied. The original plans for the building to include a community sporting hall and library have been put on hold as the municipal council tries to raise the funds to resource the building's programming. The building's translucent polycarbonate façade reveals little of what the spaces are like within, it is like a ghost of its potential to be a vibrant community building.

The Fundacion Francisco Giner de los Rios by Cero9/Amid is another example of a recently completed

building that has suffered the effects of the economic downturn. The building's intricate external façade is made up of an infinite number of galvanised steel rods that are welded together to form a veil over the glazed façade behind that also acts as an infrastructure for a green façade. The building projects a bold front to the street amongst the 19th century architecture of the Ensanche district. In contrast to the complexity of the externals, the interiors, save for one exquisitely detailed auditorium, lie blank, poorly finished and forgotten. This was a tease for all of us on the tour as our enthusiasm for the building's exterior was deflated

upon reaching the interior. Without getting lost in translation with our Spanish speaking guide through the building, one could only speculate that the funds to complete the building to its original design intentions depleted before completion. On our tour through the building we were given an extensive explanation on the history of the foundation, however it remained unclear when we left exactly how the public could utilize this building.

The Matadero Art precinct is another large scale public commission completed in recent years. It lies vast and open with cultural incubator programming. An adaptive reuse of a former slaughterhouse, the Matadero is part of the larger Rio Madrid project. The urban renewal project was set to revitalize and connect the river back to the city. The 4million euro project involved burying a main arterial road below the river, a new 6km length of landscape and urban renewal works, alongside the riverfront in order to connect it to the city centre. The municipality of Madrid funded the majority of this work, with its completion in 2015. The investment of such a large sum of public funds into the project, at a time when the country was facing its largest economic struggle, had me further scrutinize the project's success on its return to the city.

Amongst the newly established complex of cultural buildings of the Matadero stands an incongruous structure. Escaravox, conceived and built by Andres Jaques' Office for Political Innovation has received a lot of attention on the blogosphere for its inventive reuse of infrastructure for public spatial programming. The low cost structure is made out of an assemblage of materials with its main structure being a pair of agriculture irrigation wings. Situated within one of the public open spaces of the Matadero, Escaravox acts as a multipurpose apparatus for a range of public activities that may be booked by anybody for use. This free public amenity seems to be a reflex to the economic downturn of recent years, and perhaps a comment on the multi-billion euro complex it is surrounded by.

COPENHAGEN SOCIAL

In the wake of the refugee crisis and slow economic growth, the EU has seen a rise in the far right reflecting sentiments of fear. Last year in Denmark, controversial laws on asylum seekers were passed in parliament with intention to protect the high welfare state. Copenhagen, the capital with more than half a million inhabitants is often ranked as one of the top cities in the world to live in; based on the high quality of life offered to its citizens. Den-



mark as a nation has a high level of social security, with free healthcare, education, pensions for childcare, study and the elderly. On our tour of Copenhagen we witnessed with envy the high quality of life enjoyed by Danes and the social values and culture imbued within its architecture.

Two projects by practice Lundgaard and Traanberg stood out, in particular the Tietgen student housing and the Royal Danish Playhouse. The circular planned student housing accommodates 400 students and is formed around a large communal grassed courtyard. Colourful light filled laundry rooms, workshops, multipurpose event spaces, studios and libraries filled the ground floor of the building, encircling a large grassed courtyard. On the floors above, a network of lounges, store rooms, state of the art kitchens and timber decks encourage social exchange amongst its residents. Private rooms for singles and doubles are well equipped – with compact bathrooms and built in wardrobes and beds. The architects arranged the communal spaces to face into the large grassed courtyard, with the private rooms for singles and couples facing out along the circumference of the building. No needs have been missed - I can picture myself living here and consider how this model of co-housing could

be adapted to become a mainstream model of medium density living.

The Royal Danish Playhouse also designed by Lundgaard & Traanberg is located on the Copenhagen waterfront. The building is comprised of a dark brick clad plinth that is surrounded by a raised glazed box that projects over the harbour. The Playhouse considers both the experiences of the patrons and visitors, as well those that work within it. The ground floor entry offers a voluminous space adjacent to the boardwalk and water for the reception, lobby and public bar areas; however it is the actors, set designers, dressmakers and other backstage workers that are given priority of space within the building. The work spaces and offices for these staff members are located on a hovering floor that encircles the black box theatre. Wrapped with a glazed facade, this floor level offers panoramic views across Copenhagen's harbour and urban landscape beyond. Up against this facade is a series of intimate timber lined seating pits with cushions. These zones are used as informal areas for meetings, discussions and break-out space. Along with the cafeteria and other common spaces, a social net between the different workers and departments is created.

Looking down from the 8 House >
BIG, Copenhagen DK



Our visit to Jan Gehl's office emphasised the importance of nurturing society through the planning of our built environments. He shared with us how when he was a young architect, his psychologist partner questioned why architects were not given any training in the understanding of people and society when creating their physical environments. He shared with us a quote from Ralph Erskine, an old friend and hero of

his: "To be a good architect you need to love people". These words remained with us throughout the duration of our tour of Copenhagen and its surrounds, including Malmo where we visited the Bo01 housing by Gehl Architects. Located on the exposed waterfront of Malmo, the housing development is an exemplar for architecture and urban planning as discussed in Gehl's book 'Life Between Buildings'.

The diverse mix of housing typologies is planned around a warren of small scale streets, interrupted by pocket parks and playgrounds with curious sculptural devices that also aid in sustainable landscaping systems. The public and private here is blurred, where privately owned gardens feel open and part of the public realm, and where the community has taken pride in maintaining its public spaces. There is a great community spirit present within this modest collection of housing types.

Contrasting to our visit to the Bo01 Housing was our tour through Orestad. From our elevated train ride from the city centre, we passed recently completed housing developments of a large scale. We visited three of these by Bjarke Ingels Group, the 8House, VM Housing and Mountain Housing. Each of these projects is a formal experiment in high density residential typologies, that sit along the spine of Orestad like a collection of diagrams. The relationships between each of the residential developments is weak, with little consideration to the human scale. Lene Tranberg described the failings of Orestad like buildings that are standing next to each other not holding hands.

IN PRACTICE

Clear distinctions could be made between the studios of the three cities that we visited, and their approach to practice. These are a product of professional and institutional structures, how architecture relates to other industries as well as the culture of competitions.

In Copenhagen, architectural practices have two defined architect roles – 'design' architect and 'construction' architects. At our practice visit to Danish multinational firm Bjarke Ingels Group where I was an intern almost ten years ago, I met with an old colleague, Marie Lancon, who has the role of 'design' architect. Marie works primarily on the conceptual stages of projects, working on project bids at the competition stages. Coincidentally, her partner Tobias works at the practice as a construction architect. Tobias is involved with the delivery stages of a project, managing the documentation, costing and consultant coordination. Construction architects undergo a training that is different to that of a design architect, with a degree in Architectural Technology and Construction. For every project that is successful in reaching the delivery stages (there are many schemes that do not!), there is a project design architect



< Werner, our guide for Madrid, discussing the structural principles behind Rafael Moneo's Atocha Station.



that continues to its completion to ensure the original design concepts are maintained.

These defined roles and skill sets within Danish architectural practice are in contrast with Spanish education, where architectural study involves a thorough knowledge of both conceptual design and construction principles. The Spanish architect's registration process culminates in a 'final project' - an architectural thesis project supported by a construction documentation set, complete with structural details. This rigorous undertaking allows architects in Spain to sign off on structural engineering for projects within a certain scale. The structural knowledge inherent to Spanish architectural training is evident in the output of Spanish architecture. Rafael Mo-
neo's Atocha station extension is a clear example of this. We visited the project near the centre of Madrid, its impressive and expansive canopy over the station tracks is formed by a grid of concrete columns with a repeated geometric umbrella of roof beams, taking cues from the pattern of the tracks below.

Engagement with competition projects was ubiquitous throughout the practices that we visited. The culture of competition work in Copenhagen appears healthy, and a regular part of practice. Our visits

here were mainly to larger practices, including Henning Larsen, 3XN, Tegnestuen Vandkunsten and Lundgaard and Tranberg. At 3XN, we were told that 85% of work comes from competitions, paid and unpaid, Invited and anonymous, compared to 20% in Australia. Any public money in a project goes to the competition process. Lene Tranberg of Lundgaard and Tranberg explained that the building program for a project is written before any architectural input is given, however with competition projects, there's an opportunity for architects to question the brief and programming of a project. The role of the architect here is elevated beyond that of a service role, to one that is a key component of higher level thinking at the early strategic stages of a project.

From our practice visits in Spain, it was apparent that competitions were taking up the majority of most studio's outputs, this due to the lack of work within the country. Maria from estudio Entrestitio talked us through the projects within their studio, uncovering box after box of white card study models for various competitions that they were working on. I felt exhausted examining these—without a laser cutter in sight, I mentally calculated the number of man hours (and dollars) they would have taken to create. One winning proposal she presented to

< Maria of Estudio Entrestitio talking us through one of many conceptual study models

us was for the Museum of Memory in Bogota, Columbia. The client did not define the esoteric ideas behind Memory and as such these were beautifully driven by the experience of the architecture. Unsurprisingly, the project is now paused in design development phase, where Maria and her partners patiently wait for delays in local government funding.

In London we visited a diverse range of practices, from the mammoth campus of Foster+ Partners to the non-hierarchical collective of Assemble. The preconceptions I had on Foster + Partners were challenged after our visit. Yes, the multinational behemoth with its 1000+ employees was what I was expecting, however I was unprepared for the sheer power it wields in the industry, able to absorb the expertise of other companies effortlessly. It was impressive to see how the practice's experimentation with new technological concepts could develop speculative projects into possible realities. Their winning NASA competition project proposes a robotic 3d printed inhabitation on Mars, made from lunar dust(!).

On the other end of the spectrum is Assemble's collaborative approach to practice. The visit to their warehouse studio brought waves of nostalgia – its ad-hoc and com-

munal nature reminded me of SIBLING's own beginnings, not long ago in a similar unoccupied Fitzroy warehouse. The 15 person collective situates itself between art and architecture; taking a participatory and collaborative method to practice that imbues an urgency for the greater social good. Their self initiated projects, supported by government, community, and institutional grants, may be an outcome of the economic times—however it has also allowed Assemble complete freedom in the direction for which they drive their practice. Whilst these two practices couldn't be more distinct from each other, they both broaden the scope of architectural practice and redefine the role in which architects have in the creation of our built environments.

Following the tour I continued onto Venice for the 15th Architecture Biennial. This year's curatorial theme 'Reporting From the Front', devised by Chilean architect Alejandro Aravena, draws attention to how architectural practice can address socioeconomic issues faced across the globe. Within the pavilions of the Giardini, specific concerns relating to the nation are exhibited. The crisis on unaffordable housing within the UK is addressed at this year's British Pavilion 'Home Economics', where hypothetical spatial

and financial models for residential typologies are presented. The Spanish Pavilion is a survey of incomplete construction projects and radical approaches to architecture as a result of the 2008 economic crises.

As I reflect on the themes presented in the Biennial, there is a clear connection with the socioeconomic realities faced at vary-

ing degrees by the practices we encountered firsthand on the study tour. As Europe's cities continue to be shaped by these new realities, so too do the architectural practices that operate within them. The traditional role of the architect is being redefined through social and participatory practices, reinforcing it as the agent for change in our urban environments.



All of us in front of the Yardhouse >
Assemble, London UK