



Hanging Gardens

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Oslo Museum avd. Bymuseet

26. april 2008 – 23. august 2009

Frogner Hovedgård, Frognerveien 67

tirsdag - søndag kl. 11-16

om; bymuseet

www.du-store-verden.no



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In 2004 visual artist and filmmaker Christian Bermudez initiated the landscape intervention project series *Emerging Horizons* by transforming his house into a giant “polkagris” by painting his house in striped colours of fuchsia and white, - this to create a debate and a possible response among his neighbours.

Polkagrishuset was documented in a short film premiered at Høstutstillingen 2006 and later earned the Main Prize at the 5th Ibero-American Digital Art Biennale in 2007. By then Bermudez was well into developing the second project of the series; *Hanging Gardens* as presented in the two exhibitions *The mammoth and the bee* at Oslo Museum, avdeling Bymuseet and *Babylon Heights* at ROM for Kunst og Arkitektur.

On the background for *Hanging Gardens*, in the artist’s own words:

Six kilometers east of Oslo’s centre, crowning the hills between Groruddalen and Østmarka, rests Tveita Borettslag, one of the largest structures located in the Alna valley. It is a complex of 819 flats divided into three 13-storey tower blocks planned alongside with a shopping centre, schools, entertainment facilities, and linked to the subway system. Over the years, the buildings have become an icon of Norwegian suburbia, as much as a visual flag of east Oslo.

Tveita Borettslag is one clear example in Norway of what became infamously known as ‘brutalism’ in architecture. Built towards the end of the 60s, the building has been modified over the years. Plain concrete was not early settlers’ taste. Then the building was painted in a yellowish-white tone. The original verandas, having a piece of horizontal wood, were painted ‘hytte’ brown and later substituted, by those who could afford it by iron ornaments, whose design is a reminiscent of Norse motives.



All those modifications haven’t been properly documented; they still belong to the realm of oral tradition. Presumably, the Norwegianization of the building was clearly intended already in the original structure, as the concrete facade was designed to mimic the panel structure one can find everywhere in Scandinavia. There are some publications about the building, but mostly in colloquial terms. Amazingly, some of the pioneers who moved to Tveita in 1967 still live there, but this is not what ‘Hanging Gardens’ is about. This project is not about the history of this building, neither a study case of Norway’s suburbia.

My interest is how the landscape, understood as a social construction, changes over time, just as the society where it is located. I’m working from an artist’s perspective, meaning a subjective version that allows me to use elements from architecture, biology, history and other fields. Based on the same recipe that was used to approach my previous project ‘Polkagrishuset’ (2004-2006) where the film ‘Dear Neighbor’ documented the outcome of painting a house not far from Tveita in fuchsia and white stripes.

‘Hanging Gardens’ (2006-2008) as an art-project presents its results in the film ‘The mammoth and the bee’ - a film about reading a building, its context and the society that created it. The film’s mood is gloomy and not as cheerful as in ‘Dear Neighbor’. Working in Tveita and not in a single house is another reality. At first hand it might feel as a failed enterprise, it being art and not urbanism, a project that never had as a goal to prompt a change, or bring forward answers to people who never ask for them and who probably enjoy living there.

Nevertheless, the project ends with an open proposal in the form of a gift. Nine seed packages, handpicked and brought from Mexico by Bermudez, hope to reach 1% of Tveita’s balconies. An open letter was sent to all Tveita Borettslag dwellers inviting them to the exhibition at Oslo Bymuseum, where those who wish, can pick their favourite plant and start “The one percent high altitude gardening society” (Den 1% Høydehageforening)

If they ever existed, the hanging gardens were located in Babylon about 600 BC. The same place where after the great flood, man emigrated from the East, settled and started building the greatest tower. While on their way to heaven, languages got confused and having failed in their attempt, man scattered throughout the earth. For mankind, having well-intended and common goals will not be enough, when incapable of agreeing on the words to be used first. The pursuit of the highest level; as in the case of modernism or the garden city, is doomed to become a failed utopia by the tower’s legacy.

Babylon was condemned, but its tower became a praise to the unfinished, a monument to the impossibility of the total achievement. There are 819 apartments in Tveita Borettslag created under the premises of social democracy, where all of them have access to a balcony. All of them regulated under a common set of rules where colours can’t be changed, clothes can’t be hung, birds can’t be fed. Although from the distance all the balconies might look identical, not two of them are alike.



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‘Hanging Gardens’ is the second chapter of *Emerging Horizons* (2004-2010) a greater art project about change and landscape. The project started with ‘Polkagrishuset’ (2006). *Emerging Horizons* third and final project will be accomplished by 2010.

‘Hanging Gardens’ consisted of the exhibition ‘Babylon Heights’ at **ROM for Kunst og Arkitektur** (28.02-06.04 2008) and ‘The mammoth and the bee’ at Oslo Bymuseum (04.2008-2009) with the support of **Du store verden!** ‘Hanging Gardens’ is supported by: **Norsk kulturråd** og **Billedkunstneres Vederlagsfond**.

More information: www.zanatefilms.com