



NÖUA

Steffi Klenz **AN ALLURING MAQUETTE**



Curator:
Michael Raymond

Exhibition design:
Rintala Eggertsson Architects



22 June -
11 August
2024

AN ALLURING MAQUETTE

By Michael Raymond

What do you find alluring about the architecture in your local area? How can new buildings better reflect regional cultures, environments and contexts? Can we reclaim our urban centres from homogeneous designs churned out by globalised systems of architecture? In her series of photographic assemblages, *An Alluring Maquette*, artist Steffi Klenz probes at these questions and asks us to reconsider the urban world around us.

At the heart of these new works are photographs of a little-known building in Japan by the German architect Bruno Taut (1880-1938). This building, the Hyuga Villa, stands as a testament to his attempts to break from the mould of modernist architecture and forge a more culturally sensitive method of design. Taut believed that architecture has the power to reshape the world and society for the better. The model (or maquette) embodied by this building and his practice, is the focus of Klenz's complex,

seductive and uncanny imagery. Compositions which are as visually interesting and rich as the ideas behind them.

Taut was an early practitioner of modernist architecture, a style which gained prominence in the first half of the twentieth century and is associated with architects such as Le Corbusier (1887-1965), Walter Gropius (1883-1969) and Frank Lloyd Wright (1867-1959). Modernism sought to create elegant, minimal and rational buildings. In theory, its principles were conceived of as 'universal', its designs applicable anywhere.

Despite this, in reality its mostly European and American pioneers were inspired by Western industry and product design. Their emphasis on rational universal ideals paradoxically can be seen to reflect values long-established by European philosophers during the age of enlightenment in the eighteenth century. Therefore, while pursuing utopian

ideals, one consequence of modernism has been the appearance of similar-looking Western inspired buildings around the world. A proliferation of lines, space and geometry; of concrete, glass and steel. Coinciding with this rise has been a decline in local styles of architecture, craft and design.

Political theorist and anthropologist James C. Scott outlined this trend in his influential publication *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed*. He critiques what he calls 'high modernism', a series of beliefs and forces that privilege universal and scientific principles over local knowledge and customs. Scott argues that high modernist projects devised by governments and bureaucrats often fail because they do not consider local expertise or account for the complexity of real life. He singles out the Brazilian capital Brasilia, built in the 1950s, as a prime example. Designed as a modernist utopia, the resulting wind-swept empty streets and anti-pedestrian layout has been described by critics as more dystopian.

In pointing to these flaws in modernism as a universal, repeatable and top-down style, *An Alluring Maquette* seeks to champion a more fragmentary, diverse and localised view of what architecture

could be. Through Taut, Klenz shows how architectural ideas can span geographies with sensitivity and care.

Taut enjoyed a successful career in Germany until the Nazis came to power in 1933 and he fell from favour due to his pacifist and socialist leanings. Instead, he accepted an invitation to travel to Japan and became a passionate advocate for Japanese architecture and craft. Retracing his footsteps in 2023, Klenz journeyed to the seaside resort of Atami, 100km south of Tokyo, to photograph the Hyuga Villa. A pioneering cross-cultural design, this building fused traditional Japanese materials and craft, with European modernist details. The three rooms named Beethoven, Bach and Mozart include a mix of bold vivid colours and dangling lightbulbs, details that nod to the Berlin jazz clubs of the 1920s. Complimenting them are features including tatami mats, sliding doors and a wide-spread use of bamboo. What Taut's building achieves is to create a hybrid, a modernist design sensitive to local context. A synthesis that arguably succeeds where Brasilia fails.

In several of the works, Klenz combines photography of Taut's Villa with imagery of the wunderpus octopus, an animal found off Japan's Ryukyu Islands. Here she draws a connection between Taut - who strove to assimilate stylistically into

his surroundings - with the wunderpus - who, too, can mimic its environment. Traditionally interpreted as a defence mechanism, Klenz is interested in French literary critic Roger Caillois (1913-78) who theorised that animal mimicry is governed by the 'lure of space'. In this interpretation, the wunderpus chooses to find and copy an environment it finds attractive. In doing so the wunderpus blurs the boundaries between itself and its surroundings, making it difficult to distinguish between the two. Klenz also plays with this effect in her imagery as different components mingle and intertwine, becoming difficult to separate. Not just a metaphor for these optical illusions, or Taut who was lured by Japanese architecture, Klenz uses the wunderpus to ask: why are we attracted to particular places? How are we affected by our environment and how do we affect it in return?

Surrounding the wunderpus and Taut, Klenz interweaves imagery of traditional Japanese *tsugite* and *shiguchi* joinery as well as *suminagashi* ink marbling and *urushi* lacquer painting techniques. Studying these during her visit to Japan, Klenz hereby inserts her own knowledge and appreciation for craft into the works. This extends to the intricately handmade wooden frames that surround them. The exhibition is presented in a space designed by Rintala Eggertsson Archi-

tects. The structure nods to Japanese architecture, with raised flooring and paper walls framed by wooden joints. Like Japanese housing the overall design is centreless. Meanwhile, the various walls, openings and viewpoints echo the forms and differing depths of field in Klenz's imagery - sometimes there's a view through to a recognisable image, at other times we find this obscured.

Altogether, in *An Alluring Maquette*, Klenz echoes Taut's revolutionary habit of breaking with convention – albeit with the traditions of architectural photography rather than architecture itself. More than merely presenting photographs of Taut's buildings, she creates kaleidoscopic collages that bring the disparate range of ideas and influences mentioned here to the fore. She also subtly reverses the historic relationship between photography and modernist architecture. While photography of consumer products and manufacturing played a key role in inspiring early modernist architects, Klenz here uses this very medium to critique it. In questioning, or even fracturing this legacy, *An Alluring Maquette* asks: rather than trying to design and replicate a single vision of utopia, what if instead we took a moment to look around, discover what lures us and start creating our own *utopias*?



Steffi Klenz
An Alluring Maquette
 Installation view, NOUA, Bodø 2024



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BIOGRAPHIES

Steffi Klenz (GE/UK) Artist

Steffi Klenz is an artist based in London who approaches photography as an expanded visual discipline. Her practice is fundamentally concerned with challenging conventional conceptions of architectural representation. Unlike conventional architectural photography, which uncritically flatters its architectural subject matter, Klenz revisits the capacities of the photographic image and architecture to go beyond containing and reproducing the built environment but instead her work bridges the gap between the flat surface of the photograph and the spatial experience of architecture.

Klenz takes great care in finding fitting and ambitious final form for her conceptual projects via books, exhibitions and exciting collaborations. Her agility of thinking is reflected in the ways in which she combines disparate references in her work, and also in the interesting ways in which she adapts it to the site in which it is exhibited.

She has exhibited her work across the UK and internationally. Selected venues include The British Museum, The Royal Scottish Academy in Edinburgh. The Royal Academy in London, The Well-

come Collection London, Camden Art Centre, The Museum for Contemporary Art in Taipei, The Museum of Contemporary Art Alicante, FotoMuseum Antwerp, Los Angeles Centre for Digital Arts (2016), The Phoenix Art Museum, The Finish Museum of Photography, Künstlerhaus Bethanien in Berlin, Kunstverein Ludwigshafen and Museum Künstlerkolonie in Darmstadt.

Her work was part of the *Rights of Passage Project* for the 2015 Venice Biennale, The Biennale for Contemporary Photography in Germany in 2020, The International Biennale for Photography in Belo Horizonte (Brazil) in 2021, The Biennale for Electronic Language and Technology in Sao Paulo (Brazil) in 2022, The London Festival of Architecture in 2022 and most recently the 2023 Tokyo Biennale.

Michael Raymond (UK) Curator

Michael Raymond is Assistant Curator, International Art, at Tate Modern where he works on acquisitions, exhibitions, collection displays and community programmes. He has co-curated the exhibitions Nam June Paik (2019), Cezanne (2022) and Philip Guston (2023), as well as displays including Vivan Sundaram, Rosa Barba, Monster Chetwynd and the Beuys' Acorns installation by Ackroyd & Harvey on Tate Modern's south terrace (2021).

Previously he worked at the British Museum on exhibitions including Hokusai (2017), Rodin and the Art of Ancient Greece (2018), Manga (2019) and coordinated the Asahi Shimbun Displays.

Rintala Eggertsson Architects (FI/NO) Exhibition designers

Dagur Eggertsson and Sami Rintala are the founders of Rintala Eggertsson Architects, a Norway based architecture firm, which bases its activities around furniture design, public art, architecture, and urban planning.

The work of Rintala Eggertsson Architects has been exhibited at the Maxxi Museum in Rome, Victoria & Albert Museum in London, the National Art Museum of China and with the project 'Corte Del Forte' at the 2018 Venice Biennale. The company has received prestigious awards over the years such as The Global award for Sustainable Architecture, Wan 21 for 21 Award, Architizer A+Award, Travel & Leisure Award, American Architecture Award, and the International Architecture Award. Their projects and texts have been published in architecture magazines such as Abitare, Area, Architectural Review, A+U, L'Architecture d'Aujourd'hui, D'A Magazine, AMC architecture, Detail, Domus, Topos, and Wallpaper as well as New York Times and Wall Street Journal. Eggertsson and Rintala have taught architecture in Europe, Australia, and North America and in 2019 as Gensler Visiting Professors at Cornell University in New York.

INFORMATION

Opening hours
Thur - Sun 12-16

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Sign up for NOUAs newsletter on our web page and get invited to all our openings as well as information about current events.

Free entry.

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NØUA is an artist-run institution for photography as contemporary art. NØUA collaborates with Norwegian and international artists, curators, writers and art historians from the region and abroad, to create a program that promotes conversations and new thinking about photography as contemporary art.

The program of exhibitions, lectures and artist talks is presented primarily in the premises in Bodø, but also outside the city and internationally, in collaboration with external institutions. Through the programme, we want to promote relevant productions and artistships, with the aim of giving the public an opportunity to participate in a timely conversation about the issues and opportunities facing photography as contemporary art today.

NØUA was established in 2017 by artists Marianne Bjørnmyr and Dan Mariner. The venue includes the exhibition space and project space on the building's second floor and a public arena at street level.

The NØUA program is always free and open to everyone. Follow us on social media or sign up for our newsletter to get our updates.



Steffi Klenz
An Alluring Maquette, 2024

Accompanying this exhibition is a free publication *Now you Hear Us: Some Notes on the Future of Bodø*. Taking the themes raised in *An Alluring Maquette*, this includes interviews with seven local residents of Bodø, inviting them to reimagine the town's architecture and the proposed redevelopment of the airport.



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