

(inside)

interior design review

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interior design
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awards
2014
shortlist

83



Suzie Attiwill, associate professor interior design and deputy dean, learning and teaching, School of Architecture + Design, RMIT, recently visited Estonia at the invitation of the Estonian Society of Interior Architects (ESIA) and participated in their inaugural symposium with interesting results.

I left Estonia with a sense of having participated in something significant for that country's interior architecture. Invited by the Estonian Society of Interior Architects (ESIA) to be one of several international speakers at their inaugural symposium titled 'Dynamics of Theory and Practice', I also witnessed a dynamic between past, present and future. Tüüne-Kristin Vaikla, one of the symposium organisers, uses the word 're-purposing' in relation to her practice-based PhD research and it is a term that also expressed the intent of the event. A frequent reference to 'in Soviet times' makes evident ongoing effects of the past Russian occupation (from 1940 to 1991) and the desire to re-purpose the present. 'Purpose' comes from the word 'propose' and it was in this sense that the symposium, as well as projects and practices, had this quality of re-purposing. Bringing people together physically in the current political, social, cultural and historical situation of Estonia to present, converse, share, debate and discuss interior architecture practice was an act of re-purposing; of proposing and activating the present as an agent of change to transform the past for the future.

ESIA was formed in 1990, the same year Estonia gained independence from Russia for the second time. 'During Soviet times' interior architects were part of the Union

of Estonian Artists. Unlike Australia, the term 'interior architecture' is widely used with practitioners required to have relevant qualifications. While interior architecture was already an established practice in Estonia, with an annual award since 1978 for best practice (making it the oldest design award in Europe), the formation of ESIA was to recognise the importance of the profession as part of architecture. Urmo Vaikla, president of ESIA since March 2013, and his partner Tüüne-Kristin initiated the symposium to intensify and re-purpose the profession of interior architecture; to engage the profession in discussion beyond the requirements of commercial briefs in order to realise its potential to contribute to and transform the present cultural, social and urban situation.

Symposium presentations were by invited practitioners and educators from inside and outside of Estonia: Thomas Callebaut, tcct, from Bruges and Sint-Lucas School of Architecture; Peter Dautzenberg, Peter Dautzenberg + partners Architecten BNA/BNI, Amsterdam; Ro Koster and Ad Kil, Ro&Ad Architecten, Amsterdam; Joke van Hengstum, president of the European Council of Interior Architects (ECIA); Jüri Kermik from University of Brighton; Morten Lund from Chalmers University of Technology, Gothenburg; Tüüne-Kristin





Vaikla, Vaikla Studio; Margit Aule and Margit Argus, KAOS Architects and Ville Lausmäe, VLS. These presentations were in English and composed the first day and half of the symposium. This was followed by presentations – from architect and pastor Martin Samm, MS arhitektura and Hannes Praks, incoming head of interior architecture, Estonian Academy of Arts – and discussions in Estonian, including a roundtable composed of interior architects, architects, an architectural historian, a linguist, a landscape architect and a client's consultant convened to discuss a number of issues specific to Estonia.

This made for an interesting dynamic over the three days between issues to do with the present, international interests and the specificity of Estonian interior architectural practice. The discussions were held in Estonian as linguistic connotations are vital to the way things are understood in Estonia. I encountered similar concerns with language at the International Federation of Interior Architects/Designers' Global Symposium, *Design Frontiers – Interiors Entity* in New York City, 2011, where the word 'interior' has different meanings in different cultures and in some, has no direct translation.

The roundtable discussion began with a presentation by Peeter Päll, a linguist, regarding the etymological roots and linguistic possibilities of titles, including 'interior architect' and 'interior designer'. Urmo, who noted that Latvia does not have a term for interior architecture and, given it does not exist as a practice or profession, made the importance of naming a practice apparent.

The present as active agent in repurposing the past for a future is a mode of practice the Vaiklas have activated in diverse projects, from the commercial to the curatorial, and makes evident their desire to contribute through the practice of interior architecture to larger contemporary cultural, social, historical and political concerns. *How Long is the Life of a Building?* is a project that in many ways sits at the heart of their practice. The focus of the project is a building called Linnahall, designed by architects Raine Karp and Riina Altmäe for the sailing events that took place in Tallinn as part of the 22nd Moscow Summer Olympic Games in 1980. Situated on the waterfront near the harbour, just beyond the walls of the old medieval town, it was designed as a concert and sports venue with a 5000-seat amphitheatre and

a 3000-seat ice-skating hall. Demis Roussos and Duran Duran performed there. In 2007 it was closed and is maintained on a 24-hour basis in anticipation of a proposal in the present for its future.

How Long is the Life of a Building? re-purposed Linnahall. A forum held on the stage of the main hall gathered key people for a discussion; student projects presented future scenarios and, in 2012, Linnahall was the subject of the Estonian pavilion at the 2012 Venice Biennale. Curated by Tüüne-Kristin, the installation included a film of Linnahall made by Urmo, as well as furniture and mirror panels from Linnahall. An extensive catalogue in English and Estonian documented the discussions and propositions.

Like the Linnahall project, the symposium brought theory and practice, aesthetics and functionalism, academic and commercial practice together to re-purpose and re-propose a present complicated by a recent past and one where the potential of interior architecture to activate the present was foregrounded as an action to re-purpose and propose a future. ■
(The film can be viewed on Vimeo and the catalogue on ISSUU.)