

The Osthang Presse is a publication produced in conjunction with the ASRM Osthang Project, Darmstadt's 2014 cultural festival, which runs from 7 July to 16 August at the Mathildenhöhe (www.osthang-project.org). This edition has been produced by South African artist Ruth Sacks.

Osthang Presse

Diese Ausgabe der Osthang Presse beschäftigt sich mit Überlegungen zur Künstlerkolonie Mathildenhöhe Darmstadt. Von dieser historischen und utopischen Gemeinschaft ausgehend, zeigt die vorliegende Ausgabe verschiedene Perspektiven zur Idee einer Künstlerkolonie und deren Ziel gemeinsamer kreativer Arbeit im Angesicht des Jugendstil Erbes auf. Das Osthang Project steht wortwörtlich und bildlich zur Gänze im Zeichen der Mathildenhöhe. In Darmstadts historischem Herzen gelegen, steht es in direktem Dialog mit den Überresten der historischen Künstlerkolonie. Reiseführer des 19. Jahrhunderts beschreiben die von der Innenstadt abgewandte Ostseite der Mathildenhöhe als „den verträumtesten Teil von Darmstadt“, auf dem jetzt die Kuratoren des Osthang Project neue Wege für das Ideen von „Living“, „Building“ und „Thinking together“ beschritten haben.

Das Osthang Project ist in mehrere Abschnitte gegliedert. Den Beginn machte im Juli die International Summer School für experimentelles Bauen, bei der die teilnehmenden Studenten und Berufseinsteiger neben bekannten Architekturkollektiven und Büro wie dem Atelier Bow-Wow, Constructlab und dem Raumlaborberlin die Strukturen errichteten, in denen das Osthang Project stattfindet. Die Workshops und Diskussionen mündeten dann in einem intensiven zehntägigen Symposium mit dem Titel „Thinking together“. Die Diskussionspanel repräsentieren dabei ein breites Spektrum an Disziplinen, von Kulturschaffenden über Polittheoretikern und Aktivisten bis hin zu Wirtschaftswissenschaftlern, die ihre Perspektiven und Erfahrungen zu allen Arten künstlerischer Produktion zur Diskussion stellten. Im Anschluss daran findet die 47. Internationalen Ferienkurse für Neue Musik statt.

Die historischen Vorläufer für diese kulturellen Aktivitäten können auf der Mathildenhöhe gefunden werden. Diese wurden durch die Gunst des Großherzogs Ernst Ludwig von Hessen ermöglicht. Inspiriert von der britischen Arts and Craft Bewegung im späten 19. Jahrhundert lud der Großherzog verschiedene Architekten unter der Leitung von Joseph Maria Olbrich dazu ein, in einer utopischen Gesellschaft aus Handwerkern, Künstlern und Designern zu leben und zu arbeiten. Die erste Ausstellung bot 1901 einen ersten Einblick in den entstehenden Jugendstil der Künstlerkolonie. Der Ort war ein Gesamtkunstwerk, dessen Protagonisten mit ihren Familien Kunst und Leben vermischten, in einer Kommune lebten und einen neuen Lebensentwurf praktizierten. Neben den großen Ausstellungshallen, wurden Häuser gezeigt, die bis ins kleinste Detail der ästhetischen Vision der Kolonie entsprachen. Das Ziel des Großherzog war es, künstlerische Kreativität zu fördern, um einen Stil und eine neue Art des Arbeitens im Geist der damals noch neuen Deutschen Nation zu finden. Was heute von diesen idealistischen Bemühungen nach den Verwüstungen des Krieges, dem nagenden Zahn der Zeit und der Entwicklung der Stadt noch übrig ist, sind geschützte Fragmente von etwas, was als organisches Ganzes gedacht war. Die Besucher Darmstadts werden durch die vielen Abbildungen von Olbrichts Hochzeitsturm permanent an das Vermächtnis der Mathildenhöhe erinnert. Dieser wurde 1908 für eine Ausstellung von Hessischem Kunstgewerbe gebaut und findet sich mit seiner unverwechselbaren Silhouette in zahlreichen Logos von Darmstädter Institutionen ebenso wieder, wie in den Werbeschürzen der Stadt.

Diese Präsenz ist eine Erinnerung an die bedeutende Rolle, die künstlerische Produktion für das Selbstbild einer Stadt haben kann. Gleichzeitig atmen Festivals wie das Osthang Project klar den Geist der alten Jugendstil Künstlerkolonie. Die Stadt Darmstadt wiederum kombiniert immer wieder Architektur, Kunst und Musik mit Möglichkeiten zu Diskussion und Reflektion. So bietet sich auch die Möglichkeit über die Mathildenhöhe nachzudenken. In dieser Ausgabe der Osthang Presse finden sich die Beiträge von drei Teilnehmern des Osthang Projects, die Auszügen aus Präsentationen während des Thinking Together neue. Möglichkeiten und Wege vorschlagen, über die Mathildenhöhe zu reden. Madina Tlostanova aus Russland und ich aus Südafrika komend, nehmen dabei einen Blickwinkel ein, der den Jugendstil auf neue Weise und nicht in dem bekannten Licht sieht. Dies wird möglich, wenn man andere Formen des Jugendstils betrachtet, die parallel zur Darmstädter Künstlerkolonie entstanden. Der Beitrag von Federica Menin aus Berlin ist die Textversion einer Performance, die sich um die Teilnahme am Osthang Project dreht.

This edition of the Osthang Presse provides some reflections on the Mathildenhöhe artists' colony, created in the first years of the 20th century in the avant-garde Jugendstil style. Taking the historic Utopian community as a starting point, the intention is to put forward different perspectives on the idea of an artists' colony and its aims of shared creative practice in the face of the Jugendstil legacy.

The Osthang Project has been operating in the locus of the celebrated Mathildenhöhe monument. Nestled within Darmstadt's historic cultural heart, the contemporary endeavour has, literally and figuratively, been set up in dialogue with the remains of the original artist's colony. Perched on the other side of the Mathildenhöhe hill, described by the late 19th century travel guides as 'the dreamiest part of Darmstadt', the curators of the Osthang Project have developed ways of testing the concepts of living, building and thinking together. Ambitious in scope, the Osthang Project is multi-tiered, stretching across July-August 2014. It started with an International Summer School for experimental building, in which participants (students and young professionals) worked alongside prominent architectural collectives such as Atelier Bow-Wow,

Constructlab and Raumlaborberlin, to build the structures in which the festival was to take place. The workshops and debates which were part of this flowed into an intensive 10 day symposium entitled Thinking Together. This discussion forum presents a broad spectrum of different disciplines, perspectives and experience across a wide range of disciplines, from cultural and political theorists, activists and economists to all manner of artistic practitioners, including performance and visual art. This will be followed by the 47th International Summer School for New Music, billed as a forum for reflecting on and participating in recent developments in music.

The historic precedent for such collective cultural activity may be found in the Mathildenhöhe. This was realised through the patronage of the Grand Duke of Hessen, Ernst Ludwig. Inspired by the British Arts and Craft movement in the late 19th century, he invited architects, under the directorship of the then prominent Joseph Maria Olbrich to design, live and work within a utopian community of German craftsmen, artists and designers. The first exhibition took place in 1901, offering the first glimpse of the Jugendstil theatre that was the artists' colony. The site was a total artwork where its protagonists and their families performed the act of mixing art and life, residing communally while also demonstrating models for living. Alongside grand exhibition halls housing trade fairs were showcase domestic homes, designed down to the last detail in the distinctive aesthetic vision of the moment. These models for living together were also put to use as stages for opera and other forms of performance. The duke's overarching goal was to nurture artistic creativity in order to forge a new style and way of working that captured the spirit of the relatively newly-formed German nation.

Today, what is left of these idealistic endeavours, after the ravages of war, time and urban development are protected fragments of what was initially conceived of as an organic whole. Visitors to Darmstadt are constantly made aware of the Mathildenhöhe's presence through numerous representations of Olbrich's Wedding Tower. Originally built for a 1908 exhibition of local Hesse arts and crafts, images of the distinctive structure are disseminated in a variety of logos and designs for Darmstadt institutions as well as promotional material for the city. These are a reminder of the dominant role that artistic activity can have on a city's way of imaging of itself. Similarly, festivals like the Osthang Project echo the spirit of the original Jugendstil artist colony. The city of Darmstadt is again a site of contemporary experimentation with models for living through combining architecture, art and music with discursive opportunities for critical reflection. As such, it provides a platform to reconsider the role of the Mathildenhöhe. See here are contributions from 3 participants who provide short excerpts from presentations they gave during Thinking Together on new possible ways to consider the artist colony. Madina Tlostanova and myself, based in Russia and South Africa respectively, present positions based on looking at Jugendstil from outside of dominant, popular narratives. These are approached via other variants of the movement happening at the same time as the German branch (embodied in the Darmstadt artist colony). Berlin-based Federica Menin's contribution is a text version of a performance that reflects on the situation of having participated in the Osthang Project from the start.

Madina Tlostanova
ON DECOLONIZING THE ARTISTS' COLONY

One of the crucial effects of modernity is the colonization of space by time which has had results in many realms of human society, subjectivity and creativity. A colony is an interesting example of the modern intersection of spatiality and temporality, as analyzed by Michel Foucault in his works on heterotopia. He provides the example of the New World Puritan settler colonies as heterotopias, which he calls ideal other spaces, alongside the "... extraordinary, marvelous and absolutely regulated Jesuit colonies that were founded in South America." It is a Western view that follows the logic of an empty territory, subject to colonization. It completely ignores the people who had the misfortune to be born and dwell in that territory and, therefore, stood in the way of the triumphant march. For them, these Puritan and Jesuit colonies could hardly be ideal heterotopian spaces. On the contrary, they acted as materialized hellish dystopias; distorted reflections of an alien and unfamiliar logic, destroying all previously existing cosmological, social, cultural and other orders. Foucault's heterotopia needs decolonization and a serious rethinking from the position of the other; be it a colony, a totalitarian state or other constrained societies.

Artists' colonies are heterotopias par excellence. They are able to combine several incompatible spaces, or their projections, in real space. In a sense, an artists' colony is an analogue of a white settler colony, with all the necessary features of isolation, relative independence, utopianism and, to some extent, providentialism or messianic drive to build a new city upon a hill. Significantly, in the early Russian version of a new world – the main journal specializing in the new art understood as no less than a new way of life, was called "Mir Iskusstva", the World of Art. The artists' colony often models its social structure on a family (rather than a state) or a closed group; a community of frequently esoteric brothers in art and creation. The way such colonies treated aboriginals – the local community, peasants and artisans – was very similar to the Jesuits and Puritans invoked by Foucault in his reflection on heterotopias. In a way, these demonstrate the darker, repressive side of the seemingly ideal artists' colony, under whose freedoms there often lies a strict hierarchy; a grid, with no horizontality involved. Even in the most favorable cases, when such artistic colonies made a feature out of their restored connections with folk art and quests for national roots, theirs was mainly an anthropological approach to such material or a clear stylizing. In the Russian case of coloniality of knowledge, being and perception, as well as borrowed and distorted forms of Orientalism, Eurocentrism and mental and cultural dependencies came to the fore, resulting in the so called neo-Russian style. For lack of the usual exotic others (Amerindians, African slaves, etc), the Russian peasantry were orientalized. Instead of colonial spaces used as sources of inspiration for the nascent Art Nouveau, it was Russia's own national past and folk art – the Heimatkunst - which the artists rediscovered and remade in their anthropological replicas or in stylized and whimsical fantasies, completely transforming the representational principles of the original folk art into their modern, plastic patterns. The latter was typical of the Abramtsevo artists' colony near Moscow; an estate belonging to the rich philanthropist, Sava Mamontov. It was marked by aesthetic universalism and a corporate, yet at the same time familial, spirit aimed at the quest for a reimagined and hypertrophied recreation of national roots in which the Abramtsevo artists saw an ideal merging of the beauty of utility and the utility of the beauty (Vasnetsov, Polenov, Repin, Serov, Vrubel).

The anthropological approach was a model used in a later artists' colony, Talashkino, which was frequented by Maluyutin, Vrubel and Reirikh. It was, again, an estate which belonged to a philanthropist and artist Maria Tenisheva. The artists acted like anthropologists, collecting houseware items from nearby villages in order to later reproduce them verbatim in carpentry, ceramic and other handicraft workshops. This revival of folk crafts was aimed at transforming the mundane and boring existence of the modern subject but, in fact, had very little, if any, connections with the local community, which was used exclusively as a mute and passive source of material; in exactly the same way as aboriginal or colonial art is appropriated by imperial authority. Tenisheva's case was a little different as she made a point of involving the local peasants in a more inter-active way, opening a school and inviting the local community to study and work there.

The coloniality of Art Nouveau colonies is grounded in a specific utopian dictate, where a group of artists engineer their ideal of the world; an environment combining the natural with the

man-made and rules of behavior are imposed onto a group of people, forcing them to become modern (and, presumably, happy). In the example of the famously efficient and inexpensive houses designed for Darmstadt exhibitions, we find mixtures of real, livable houses with display models that often went unsold. Similarly, in the first Russian Art Nouveau private houses (that still adorn Moscow streets), architects such as Schechtel, Kekushev and Walcot almost forced their spatial taste and other aesthetic decisions onto their clients, making them live under strictly prescribed rituals. These interiors predetermined the pattern and timing of behavior for those who dwelt within (with even movement around the house being charted) and demanded too much of the inhabitants. They were tasked into being co-authors of a new lifestyle, or actors on the Art Nouveau stage (many of the artists involved also worked in the theater) to the point that they stopped being masters of their own homes. Hence, these private houses belonged only to the artists themselves or the most advanced champions of the new artistic style. A more democratic Art Nouveau vision was represented in the Homebuilding Company which, again, attempted to erase the thin boundary between exhibition models and real houses in the *Myorty* – meaning, dead – side-street in Moscow. Here, less expensive but original houses (often designed by one architect in different styles) were offered and sold.

The expansionist element of the new art, its ability to spread at lightning speed across different levels and art forms, as well as morph into a brand, also betrays its inherent coloniality; an ability which certain artists realized fairly early and were able to experiment with. Alexander Benois (involved in the design of the Russian Orthodox church found in Darmstadt) took on an ironic attitude to the commercial and mass forms of Art Nouveau in accentuating its spiritual and axiological dimension. These, in turn, needed to be created and maintained by the new applied arts and the art industry which, for him, remained paradoxically close to a pure form of art.

The quest for re-imagined national roots is another tricky element which has a lighter and darker side. It is grounded in nationalist exclusionary ontologies and often led to the revanchist sentiments of a second rate empire, based on imperial difference, the bitterness of defeat in the division of the world and re-division of colonies and other resources. This potentially dangerous nationalistic and messianic evolution is also inherent in the artists' colonies we have been discussing here. In Russia, most of these tendencies were abruptly cut off after the 1917 Bolshevik revolution, which soon condemned the excesses of Art Nouveau quaintness and made its architectural samples efficient according to its own logic, turning churches into warehouses, private mansions into public buildings and houses into nightmarish communal apartments and, in relatively favorable cases, into new elite dwellings (for example, the writer Maxim Gorky's apartment; a Ryabushinsky mansion designed by Schechtel) as well as embassies (as is mostly the case today). Many Art Nouveau artists and architects perished. Schechtel was forcibly removed from his Art Nouveau house and died in his daughter's room in a communal apartment. Others changed their trajectories 180 degrees. Schusev, who started out deigning Art Nouveau churches, went through Art Deco and constructivism to become the architect of the now infamous Moscow Hotel, as well as Lenin's mausoleum.

Decolonization of the artists' colony is not possible through exclusively artistic means. Art alone cannot not solve the problem of *sumak kawsay* – a plentiful and meaningful life in Amerindian terms – unless it spills out into the public space and interacts with local communities and social movements in a reciprocal way.

Federica Menin
THE OSTHANG PROJECT AND ITS NEIGHBOUR

Notes on how to invert the orientation of a hill.

I would like to use this moment of expectation towards what I am going to do in the "present" as a moment of sharing a reading / a narration in development, which will lead space. The intention is to bridge or sew the ideal / the imaginary with direct personal experience; a diary. A moment to make a general vision and the specificity of such a place closer one to another. Getting closer to the scale of our own experience here, I wrote a text almost two months ago. I was looking forward all this to happen, from a different perspective. I want to now use it as a score for a composition open to variations. I passed through many different cities to arrive here. I would like to now invite you know to continue this journey-in-a-journey which, ideally, takes the shape of a questioning together through the many different folds and envelopes which constitutes this place and our presence within it.

Matildenhöhe was based on the common consideration of aesthetic core as a mechanism for change, a revolution or protest against the standardization and ugliness that the wave of industrialization at the time between 1800-1900, was imposed on the cities and the lives of their inhabitants.

With the highest attention to every single detail, they shaped their artist colony, an environment to live and work in. So close, but also far away from the reality they intended to change. What reality have we been living in here?

What are its limits, problems and and points of rupture? And what does this have to do with a collective reality, what came before for each of us and how will it effect our future time?

In fact, the Matildenhöhe colony remained in its special, isolated, and impermeable spot, not by chance on a hill, above the city of Darmstadt.

Matildenhöhe was an experiment strictly connected to an established ideology which separated life from the project. In the intention of the main founder Ernst Ludwig we can read his "projection" of an ideal of both beauty and efficiency.

The use of the term "projection" is not accidental. It indicates something distant, even for its founders and activators' lives. Who are they and how did they live? Was everyday life questioned their dream-like, efficiently autonomous city developed? Was its "autonomy" actually realizable or desirable?

This is taking place on the same location and intends to follow the potential pre-defined series of laws or rules belonging to "an other place", and reproduce them without consideration of the issue of living together, or how we want to live together. Its challenge is not to provide an answer in the form of a particular space/aesthetics, but rather to create a context/situation in which questions and urgencies can arise, be exchanged and lived, without separating the form of such a context from what it concerns.

This approach put its trust on the process, more than on the production of a defined object. A phenomenological approach leads via a necessary path, which allowed the present and actual emergencies and possibilities to emerge.

Ruth Sacks
THE JUGENDSTIJL GESAMTKUNSTWERK FROM THE OUTSIDE

I have been fascinated by Jugendstil —known as Art Nouveau outside of Germany and Austria— for some years now. I was initially drawn to look closely at the style when I lived in Belgium and realized that the time of the arts movement coincided with King Leopold II's colonial regime in the Congo (the Congo Free State existed from 1885 – 1908 and Art Nouveau from approximately 1890 – 1910). After some research, I found that many classic Belgian Art Nouveau environments were either commissioned directly by the regime and figures directly associated with it and, consequently, were enriched by highly lucrative business in the colony; money that came at the cost of hundreds of thousands of Congolese lives. I came to see the remaining traces of the style as markers in the contemporary Belgian landscape of a time when the fashionable avant-garde became entangled with imperialism. With this in mind, I found that re-looking at Art Nouveau language revealed certain tendencies that lent themselves to promoting pro-nationalist, expansionist outlooks.

During the fin de siècle period, Art Nouveau was developed by the artistic avant-garde in a bid to forge a new style for the mechanized era. Artists turned artisans, architects, designers and craftsmen drew on fundamental organic forms from nature, alongside a mix of past European styles, especially Renaissance and Baroque, alongside Oriental aesthetics to create utopian environments. Every element of the design was overseen by the architect/artist, from the furniture to the cutlery. The core idea was to break down the hierarchies between the arts. Within the immersive enclosures of what was then recognized as the 'modern style', aesthetics from non-western cultures were routinely woven into the greater system of patriotic signs and symbols. Moreover, imagery of an imagined, romanticized peasant past were also appropriated to form utopian visions intended to inspire patriotic pride.

Each version of Art Nouveau, from the curvilinear, whiplash effects of the Belgian line to the heavier, more geometric formations of Germanic variants, was a style that tried to revive partly imagined regional craft heritage. That is, handicrafts and materials perceived to be traditional to that place were employed in an attempt to revive a 'spirit' of national identity. In Darmstadt, the Grand Duke openly oversaw the creation of an artist's colony to this effect. The efforts of architects like Joseph Maria Olbrich and Peter Behrens here not only sought to improve German handicraft and national aesthetics by means of their activities, but also to fuse art and life. At a time when cultural innovation was thought to be a tool towards creating a unified German nation, Art Nouveau tendencies strove towards consolidating all the arts. The artist-designers at the Mathildenhöhe conceptualized and constructed living and work spaces in their entirety, from the overall structure to the furniture and cutlery to be used within it. Each individual building that made up the whole was bound up in an all-encompassing aesthetic of repeated symbolic motifs and forms as well as principles of structural integrity. A romantic version of quotidian life was elevated to an aesthetic experience. As with all Art Nouveau works, this vision of harmony was sequestered off from the realities of everyday every-day living for those not fortunate enough to afford its pleasures.

Despite an aesthetic emphasis on 'folk' tradition and local craft, German working classes were excluded from the privileged unit of the artistic haven. Residents were creatives who lived alongside and staged exhibitions and events for the cultured elite who funded them. While the foundational principles of the colony's total environment were to capture the spirit of the age, alongside the potential for an exalted status of art in every arena of German culture, the greater German community never entered the ethereal confines of the commune. The effects of living in an environment governed by the rules of 'ethical design', pure in all its denouements, could only be appreciated by a designated few.

We can start going... We can participate? What is all this? We would like to bake some cakes for you, and to come and prepare a dinner with you. We will take some vegetables from our collective garden nearby. It's strictly forbidden to play, and talk loudly after 23 o'clock. Permissive borders are dissolving, or taking another form. And this opaque zone can be considered the space of dialogue, of transformation and also permeability with the surrounding, which will be a necessary part of it. These notes can be a series of memories, interpretations and witnesses from a form of togetherness, but its potential is that the whole has been and will be more than the sum of all its parts.

We are made up of different entities and participants, where difference is able to emerge and be lived on an everyday basis. Different plans/projects/voices are involved, coming from different backgrounds. How do they coexist? And more than this, how will the space "in between" them be used and considered as an integrant and essential part of the whole? I got to the point that this is a place full of predetermined definitions. Perhaps I

I am fed up with all this... I just went for a walk, haven't yet been to the needing to be alone. Matildenhöhe museum, yet for this reason. We are looking for spaces as definitions where exchanges are allowed to take place, questions asked and uncertainty, vulnerability, and changes are faced. How do you feel? What will happen when I go? When they go? There is still a big lack of a free space for vulnerability as part of our common lives.

It is interesting for me to think about moments like meetings, lectures etc. as a space for processes, for an ongoing/incoming definition, a process of communing. Are we all tuned on the same language? The desire of creating a new one always seems more urgent. It could be red as a process of recognition of claims and desires through trying to inhabit a space and practicing the acts that this involves.

Do we have a perfect structure or mode for a community to shape or invoke? Maybe all these can take place as a result of material and affective conditions of shared existence.

