

Tobias Putrih & MOS: Without Out

Slovenian-born artist Tobias Putrih currently lives and works in Cambridge, Massachusetts, and New York, New York. In 2007 he represented the Republic of Slovenia at the Venice Biennale where he designed *Venetian, Atmospheric*, for the Slovenian pavilion on the Island of San Servolo. *Venetian, Atmospheric* was an open-air movie-theatre/structure inspired by the work of John Eberson, a Romanian-born American architect famous for his exotic, atmospheric cinemas of the 1920s.

In this exhibition for the MIT List Visual Arts Center, Putrih continues his ongoing exploration of the boundaries between sculptural practice and architectural design. Using everyday materials such as cardboard, Styrofoam™, and plywood, he produces fragile structures that span from small modular objects to large installation environments. A prevalent theme in his work is the history of modernist utopian architecture, which he has investigated through the mediums of cinema, sculpture, and architecture. Through his practice, Putrih consistently questions the fixity and certainty of these disciplines.

Recently, Putrih has extended his investigations into the relationship between art and architecture through an ongoing collaboration with MOS, a collective of designers and architects that creates software and uses customized tools of parametric design to produce simple but highly complex structures and buildings. The two principals of MOS, Michael Meredith and Hilary Sample, teach at Harvard University and Yale University while maintaining the practice.

At the Baltic Centre for Contemporary Art in Gateshead in the United Kingdom, Putrih and MOS recently collaborated on the installation *Overhang*, a Styrofoam™ brick structure that intentionally was on the verge of collapse. Based on a mathematical problem that determines the maximum overhang

of a brick stack, it was created by using Processing, software that is an open source programming language and environment. (Processing is an open project that serves as a software sketchbook and professional production tool; it was initiated by Ben Fry and Casey Reas and was developed in the Aesthetics and Computation Group at the MIT Media Lab). MOS used this software program to generate brick stacks in minimal structural equilibrium.

Putrih and MOS continued their collaboration with *Intervention #10*, which they created for an exhibition at the Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen, The Netherlands (May-October 2009). Its design was based on the creation of a primitive arch, and it continued to examine the aesthetic values of original parametric design.

Putrih's and MOS's exhibition at the MIT List Visual Arts Center features a newly commissioned large-scale installation, *Erosion*. The work is constructed as a mammoth white cube, and its inside is a negative form that was generated by withdrawing brick elements. Through this process, its structural design is premised on its inevitable ruination.

In an interview that art historian Svetlana Boym conducted with Putrih and Meredith for the catalogue that accompanies this exhibition, Putrih stated:

...ruination triggers curiosity. It's a process of ultimate exposal and relief at the same time. Basically, it's a fall. Curiosity asks where and how will the fall end, and there is always a relaxing assurance as we know it will end at a standstill. But what's interesting is looking for the exact moment before the structure falls down. At that moment we feel better because we think the true nature of the structure is revealed.

Erosion began with a simple, formal idea about the relationship between positive and negative forms and about the addition and subtraction of building materials. In designing *Erosion*, MOS's

stacking software was used in an inverted manner. Instead of adding blocks, the software eroded and dug into an existing pile by first creating a negative space—a cave—and by eroding it further toward the point of collapse. In that sense, *Erosion* follows a long historic line that starts with primitive troglodytic dwellings and evolves during the Enlightenment into Alexander Pope's grotto filled with wonder and curiosities. Perhaps it culminates with Robert Smithson's cave as a projection room.

Visitors to the exhibition *Without Out* are able to walk under and inside of *Erosion*, a work that confounds categorization between sculpture and architecture. As Putrih and MOS have decided to present the project in a "fixed" state, the blocks are glued together and the structure is presented here as the pure possibility of generated form.

Also on view are a number of models (including one for *Intervention #10*, which was created for the Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen in Rotterdam) and a film of the erection and collapse of another Styrofoam™ block stack that is similar to the *Overhang* structure. These materials further illuminate how Putrih explores the potential of ideas that may or may not be built. Many of the models presented here follow the ideas of the 19th-century German educator and crystallographer Friedrich Froebel who in the 1830s developed the idea of the Kindergarten. His Kindergarten featured a curriculum series of twenty-two educational toys that he called *Gifts*. The influence of Froebel's concepts of modularity and representation resonated throughout the 20th century and can still be traced in current preschool education. These models clearly stay within collaborator's original idea for the exhibition: the questioning of form-generating tools and processes while looking for a common ground between artistic and architectural practice.

Jane Farver, LVAC Director

About the Artists

Born in 1972 in Kraj, Slovenia, Tobias Putrih graduated from the Academy of Fine Arts, Ljubljana, Slovenia in 1997. From 1997-98 Putrih studied at the Kunstakademie Düsseldorf, Düsseldorf, Germany. He currently lives and works in Cambridge, Massachusetts, and New York, New York.

Putrih represented Slovenia in the 52nd Venice Biennale, Slovenian Pavilion, Venice, Italy, (2007), and his recent solo exhibitions include *Overhang*, BALTIC Centre for Contemporary Art, Gateshead, United Kingdom (with MOS Architects) (2009); Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen, Rotterdam, The Netherlands (with MOS Architects) (2009); Kunsthaus, Zurich, Switzerland (with Runa Islam) (2008); and *Lost Cinema Lost*, Galleria Civica, Modena, Italy (with Runa Islam) (2008).

Selected group exhibitions include *Fast-Forward*, Project Space 176, London, United Kingdom, (2008); *Megastructure Reloaded*, Former State Mint, Berlin, Germany, (2008); *Peripheral Vision and Collective Body*, Museion, Bolzano, Italy, (2008); *Psycho Buildings: Architecture by Artists*, The Hayward Museum, London, United Kingdom, (2008); *Forms of Resistance*, Van Abbemuseum, Eindhoven, The Netherlands, (2007); *Multiplex-Directions in Art, 1970 to Now*, Museum of Modern Art, New York, NY (2007); *Greater New York, P.S.1 Contemporary Art Center*, New York, New York (2005); *In the Gorges of the Balkans*, Kunsthalle Fridericianum, Kassel, Germany (2003); and *Manifesta 4*, Frankfurt, Germany (2002).

Michael Meredith is Associate Professor of Architecture at the Harvard University Graduate School of Design. Meredith is a principal of MOS, an interdisciplinary architecture and design practice engaging an inclusive methodology of speculative research, expansive collaboration, and extensive experimentation. Michael Meredith and Hilary Sample are the two directors of the firm, which is based in Cambridge, Massachusetts, and New Haven, Connecticut. Their work has been recognized with multiple awards and published in numerous books, magazines, and websites.

Meredith previously taught architecture at the University of Michigan, where he was awarded the Muschenheim Fellowship, and the University of Toronto, where he was the co-recipient of a Canadian Foundation for Innovation grant. He received his BArch from Syracuse University, and his MArch with distinction from the Harvard Graduate School of Design, where he was also awarded the Frederick Sheldon Traveling Fellowship. In 2003, he was a resident at the Atlantic Center for the Arts, and in 2000 he completed a residency at the Chinati Foundation in Marfa, Texas.

Related Public Programs:

Gallery Talks

Wednesday, October 28, 12:30 PM
Mark Linga, LVAC Educator

Thursday, November 5, 6 PM
João Ribas, LVAC Curator

Saturday, November 14, 2PM
Mark Linga

Wednesday, November 18, 12:30 PM
Mark Linga

Wednesday, December 2, 12:30 PM
Jane Farver, LVAC Director

Saturday, December 5, 2 PM
João Ribas

Wednesday, December 16, 12:30 PM
Mark Linga

LVAC Film Night

(Organized by LVAC adjunct film curator John Gianvito)

Thursday, December 17, 7:30PM, Bartos Theatre
Decasia, dir., Bill Morrison, (2002), 70 min.

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