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Exhibition

Cultural exchange

Foreign architects have picked up prize projects in Norway that would once have gone to locals, but they have had a healthy influence on architectural culture and practice, says ***Olav Kristoffersen****.*

Importing Architecture
National Museum, Oslo, until 7 April

Until recently local architects ruled the ground exclusively in Norway. Not anymore. The exhibition Importing Architecture at the National Museum in Oslo displays 17 recent high quality projects by foreign architects in Norway.

Although not a member, Norway conscientiously complies with the European Union's public procurement legislation, and a number of important commissions have been given on the basis of open international competitions. Even national treasures may now be designed by non-Norwegian firms, such as Oslo's elegant landmark arena for the national sport, ski jumping, designed by Copenhagen-based JDS Architects and completed in 2010, and the monumental National Museum by German architects Kleihues & Schuwerk, planned to open in 2018.

Less fortunate is Spanish architect Juan Herreros with his translucent multi-storey design for the new Edvard Munch Museum next to Snøhetta's opera house. The project is currently stopped due to a political controversy about its location. Regrettably, the client refused to let the curator exhibit the project. Instead, the debate itself is represented through a large number of newspaper articles.

Unlike most European countries, Norway has largely avoided the global economic downturn, and new public projects are being commissioned all over the country. DRDH Architects from London has designed a library and a concert hall in Bodø, currently under construction, which demonstrates a level of sensitivity to scale, materials



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and city fabric that is almost forgotten among Norwegian architects today. A set of extremely elaborate working drawings, clearly based on thorough research into local conditions, shows a rare will to take charge of every aspect of the project.

Norwegian and Danish are basically dialects of the same language, and Danish firms have naturally succeeded in invited competitions based on design or tender. The professionalism of Danish firms such as Vandkunsten, 3XN and KHR is raising the bar with a diverse range of projects in locations across the country.

Steven Holl's strange and magnificent historical museum for writer Knut Hamsun on a spectacular site in northern Norway is an obvious pick. The result of a direct commission by a courageous bureaucrat in 1994, it was finally completed 15 years later. Peter Zumthor's project for a zinc mine museum, consisting of a footpath and fascinating timeless structures in a rugged mountainous landscape, is currently under construction on the west coast. Both projects excel in the tradition of poetic architecture informed by context which is so admired by Norwegian architects.



Olav Kristoffersen is a co-founder of Trondheim-based Brendeland & Kristoffersen, whose projects include housing at Svalbard, inside the Arctic circle (AT185). An exhibition of its work, curated by architectural photographer David Grandorge, will be at the 0047 Gallery in Oslo from 16 March until 7 April.





Left *Sinkgruvemuseum, Sauda, designed by Peter Zumthor.*
Right *Kulturkvartalet, Bodø, designed by London-based DRDH Architects (top); Hamsunsenteret, Hamarøy, designed by Steven Holl Architects and completed in 2009.*
Above *Plassen cultural centre, Molde, western Norway, designed by 3XN Architects (ph: Adam Mørk).*