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BAR FOR THE COURSE

Shed puts 'the crazy back into crazy golf' at Birdies, an indoor course and cocktail bar in Battersea



This image Inside Olafur Eliason's installation at the Aros art museum in Aarhus



FX TALKS

RADICAL THINKING

Pippa Nissen discusses what motivated her to become a designer when she was a child, and what she thinks will provide inspiration for radical thought in the future



Pippa Nissen
Director, Nissen
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Can you pinpoint the thought, whether yours or someone else's, that led you to a career in design?

I remember as a child suddenly working out that your emotions can be radically affected by your surroundings. The precise moment came on a family holiday, when we visited Jørgen Utzon's Bagsværd Church in Denmark. The whole ceiling is like a rolling sea and serves as an emotional metaphor for all sorts of things all at the same time. It profoundly affected me and made me realise that lots of things I was interested in all could come together in a total experience: painting, drawing, music, people and theatre.

In terms of the design and architecture industry, what do you consider the most radical era or pivotal moment?

I always have been fascinated by the 1900s in Europe and the move from symbolism through art nouveau to art deco. I really enjoy how art nouveau is a fusion of craft and ideas and how a completely artificial surrounding can be created through beautifully made details, so that you understand that the environment has been made by people, using painting, carpentry, metalwork, glasswork. For me this was an era that created truly immersive spaces – which we find ourselves working with all the time in our own work.

Which radical thinkers have been inspirations to you in your career?

There are a number of radical thinkers who shaped my studies and led me to where we are now, people I constantly refer back to and whose spirit is still really present. The French dramatist and director Antonin Artaud is one of those, particularly through his work *The*

Theatre and its Double and his theories on needing to connect radically with people in an emotional way before they are receptive to change and able to take in complex ideas.

Who are the radical thinkers that inspire you now?

I have really enjoyed the curation over the past decade at the Palace of Versailles, where different artists have been invited to explore their work in the main building and various gardens. All the installations I have seen have been extraordinary, and this in itself comes from the clients being radical thinkers. The most impactful series for me was by Anish Kapoor, taking the form of a series of large installations criss-crossed through the tiered gardens, beginning with large, reflective domes and walls that distorted and mirrored both the visitors and palace, and ending in a whirlpool at the base of the garden fountains. I

was mesmerised by its simultaneous simplicity and complexity. The day I visited was very hot and sunny, and I remember one of my daughters dancing and playing in the garden whilst I watched the reflections refract.

Who outside the industry can architects and designers learn from?

For me, the theatre is a constant source of joy and inspiration. Theatre shows how poetry can come from the simplest imagery and ideas, whilst allowing different readings and meaning as well as how, through research and stories, we create visions that speak volumes without words. Theatre allows you to see how a shared audience experience creates a certain tension, but transports people too, allowing a space between the 'real' naturalistic worlds conjured and the abstract intellectual world of the audience to exist, which is a space I love. We've worked with Finn Ross, a film designer from theatre, on several projects now and I really enjoy the process. He's great at being patient and quiet – and then magical just at the right moment.

What will lead the way for more radical thinking in your/our field?

I think video games and technology are very interesting right now. The areas of virtual reality and mixed reality aren't quite there yet – but almost! They're dominated by the gaming aesthetic, but in the right hands a wonderful mixture of digital and real life could be created. I feel like this is the next huge turning point in exhibition and spatial design, where people can be in a single space, but where that space is layered with meaning.

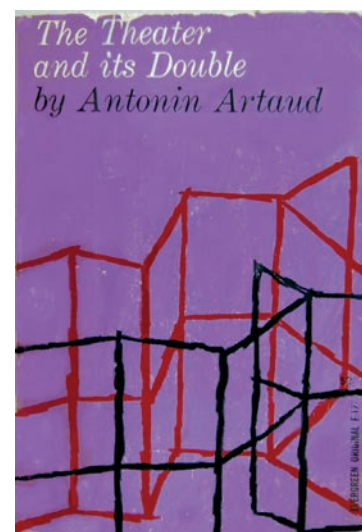
Could you recommend a book/article/blog that inspired your thinking?

When I was at university in the 1990s I invited Future Systems to come and talk to our architecture society. Jan Kaplicky and Amanda Levete both came, and delivered a spellbinding series of images delivered on two slide projectors working simultaneously (the height of tech at the time), showing contrasting images from their work around the

Above Le Corbusier's Ronchamp chapel

Right Victor Horta's house in Brussels

Far right Antonin Artaud has been an inspiration





Left The Olafur Eliason installation again, this time from the outside looking in

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world. They later published a book, *For Inspiration*, following the same idea. At the time it really struck a chord by drawing parallels and making connections with everything around you, giving you permission to understand things that might have seemed impenetrable.

Could you name two buildings/pieces of furniture that you consider radical designs of their time, or perhaps still to this day?

Le Corbusier's Ronchamp chapel in France is extraordinary. I was re-looking at the building as inspiration for a project that we are doing this year, and was reminded how vital it is and the way it uses concrete in a very sculptural way, with natural daylight creating a wall of light that shifts and changes throughout the day.

Victor Horta's house in Brussels still feels radical today. The whole building has been designed, from decorations to steelwork, to feel like an organic painting that you wander through. We visited last year and I was blown away!

I think best with... (e.g. my hands/a pencil/with a computer)

A black pen and sketchbook. More precisely, a Uni-ball Eye fine black pen and a moleskin softback sketchbook, A4. I am so set in my ways that unless I have both of these I feel compromised!

I think best... (e.g. first thing in the morning/last thing at night)

Definitely first thing in the morning. I now

have a new routine where I drop one of my daughters at school and then have a golden couple of hours in the studio as people drift in, when I have my most radical thoughts. By around 3pm I just accept now that I have no new useful thoughts, so I tend to stick to process tasks or cataloguing my morning ideas.

I think best when... (e.g. in a gallery/at home/outside/over drinks/with friends/on the bus)

I actually think best when I'm on my own, at a clear desk. I also love working in our workshop space in the studio. We tend to work by sticking things up on the wall, moving things around and making sense of connections between ideas. We stick up inspiration, words, sentences, sketches to create a visitor experience timeline through our exhibitions. I really enjoy doing this. For me it's like mapping my brain.

The thought that keeps me up at night is...

How not to compromise the best ideas.

The thought that gets me out of bed each day is...

Our best work is just around the corner.

Do you like to think with, or think against?

'With' every time. I'm an optimist and I really enjoy the spirit of working with other people. I get a kick out of sharing an idea and then someone taking it somewhere else and debating the consequence. I find it very difficult if there is a negative person in a

workshop, as it destroys the positive force of creativity. That's why I try and only employ optimists!

If you weren't a designer/architect where do you think your way of thinking would have led you?

I really enjoy thinking about phrases and gestures, and then filling in the detail. At the start of an idea, the sketch is so important and then you have to work really hard to maintain the essence of that sketch to completion. I definitely enjoy creating a narrative – so perhaps a composer, musician or playwright?

Describe radical thinking in three words.

Clear, confident, clever.

What's the most radical thing you've come across today or this week?

I love the work of Olafur Eliason and have enjoyed his radical artworks over the years in different locations. I recently visited two of his works in Denmark. Firstly, an installation in Aarhus at the Aros art museum, where he created a tunnel of colour you walk through. It's beautifully detailed and gradual and full of joy as you look out over the city. We also visited his first building in Vejle, which consists of large archways through to the sea and sky beyond. I enjoy how he creates all-encompassing environments that are different each time – and open-ended too. They're so simple you wonder why someone hasn't thought of them before. A sure sign of how clever they are! **FX**

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