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8 Photos

**O**ak is a love letter to Nordic culture and its global resonance. For its ninth edition, *The Creative Spaces Issue*, the biannual bookazine pays homage to the environments that fuel Scandinavian creatives' habits and practices.

Introducing space as an overarching theme uniting disciplines and cultures, *Creative Spaces* features conceptual artist Olafur Eliasson and jewelry designer Sophie Bille Brahe among numerous other inspiring Scandinavians. In Berlin, a two-part panel included artists Henrik Strömberg and Sophie Erlund as well as architect Sigurd Larsen and translator and writer Saskia Vogel. While Strömberg's studio acts as a metaphor for his working habits in general and the details of Erlund's studio very much resemble her intricate installation work, Larsen and Vogel translate the practices of one place into an entirely different setting—one by carefully connecting stories and readers, the other by designing signature buildings across Europe.



### **How would you sum up your Nordic heritage and its influence?**

**Strömberg:** To me, the Nordics are a curious, 'outskirt'-style place, a cultural island that is still waking up in a dazed state of being. Heritage can be defined as that of being open to the new and the different, and the Nordics are very much "early adopters" embracing innovations. Having lived abroad for a long period, my awareness and respect increases the otherness of different cultures. What the Nordics have in turn influenced is the appreciation of that innocent view, something aesthetically reduced and formally minimal.

**Vogel:** An adopted home. Growing up in Los Angeles, I only came to know Sweden as a home as a teen. That sense of home deepened when I started working as a literary translator and engaging with contemporary Swedish-language literature. This has always made me think of the world beyond the parts that are right in front of me. The Nordic relationship to nature, for instance in the work of scientist and author Helena Granström, definitely impacts how I think of space, cities and protecting our planet.

**Larsen:** The fact that I was born in Denmark and also studied there has had an influence on me, but I never intended to do things in a particularly Scandinavian way. I might have some preferences in terms of materials but I'm rather influenced by the local climate and landscape conditions that something is built in. For the Scandinavian houses, this is very much about daylight; there's not that much daylight in our winter, so you want to get the most out of it. And I think that's a key topic in Scandinavian design and architecture in general.

**Erlund:** After spending my first 15 years living in Denmark, I have lived abroad in the US, UK, Italy, and Germany and adopted a non-rooted and keen sensibility to my surroundings by having to adapt numerous times. A certain introspection sneaks into your sensibility and perception of the world when your identity is repeatedly exposed and posed in contrast to that and those who surround you.

### **How does your work relate to space?**

**Erlund:** It is in every single piece I make. Spatial relations and how we perceive the physical moment we inhabit drives where the work goes and it is part of every decision I make. It is hard to describe how because it is a sensibility and has been my tool since the beginning.



On the right: Artist and photographer Henrik Strömberg



Translator and writer Saskia Vogel on the left; architect Sigurd Larsen on the right



Artist Sophie Erlund

### **Do you differentiate between physical and mental spaces?**

**Erlund:** They inform each other. The idea for a piece of work often comes to me as more of an intuition, which I consider a sort of abstract mental space. I can feel the atmosphere of the space I want to create. Sometimes it is a smell or a sound but most often it is simply a hunch of a direction I want to follow. Then the idea takes physical form and this is where my formal language and my understanding of the physical space then takes over and finds a way to give the initial idea a physical body.

**Strömberg:** Yes, I think of them as different stages: the idea space and the action space, plus the showing of the work—giving it away or letting it go. The space of the mind and that of the physical space feed off each other like a sort of ever-growing puzzle with a clear path but without an absolute answer.

**Is there one place that will always inspire your creativity?**

**Larsen:** The Louisiana Museum of Modern Art outside of Copenhagen. It was built in the 1950s and they've been adding buildings onto it over the following decades. Also I think it's the perfect example of how to put architecture into a landscape to make it more interesting.

**Erlund:** America was the first place that took me with storm. I fell in love right away. Not so much with the country itself but with the spirit of the people. Meeting the American attitude of hard work and making your own success by striving for what you want absolutely took me out of my Scandinavian, secure shell of tentative modesty, and shaped the international life I have lead since leaving Denmark 20 years ago.

**Vogel:** There's something about the Swedish archipelago—east or west coast—in spring that dazzles me, in the true meaning of the word. On one of the first warm days of the year when the leaves are just starting to unfurl, I feel dazzled by beauty. And this feeling reminds me of the power of encounters with beauty on all levels—art, design, sport, architecture, literature.

**At the panel, you also touched on beauty. Can you describe how a sense of beauty is at play in your work?**

**Larsen:** I think a lot of people who look at architecture look for beauty, and that's the way you also aesthetically value things in your everyday life. The process of making architecture has little to do with making something particularly beautiful, though; beauty is not really a phenomenon that we mention or talk about.

**Vogel:** I think about beauty as an encounter. But when it comes to aesthetic practice, I think about connection, emotion, and flow. As a translator, I think about how to translate the emotional experience of the novel. Connecting with the reader, telling the story in a way that opens up the world to the reader: that's the aim. Connection is part of translating culture, as well. Thinking about the reader and how to tell them a story so they're with you and hopefully seeing and processing the world, no matter how unlike their own, with fresh and open eyes.

**Larsen:** What I find beautiful and also appealing in a sort of general aesthetic of what's being produced is probably a relatively simple material palette. I find a mixture of too many different materials rather noisy and disturbing—and also uninteresting. Scandinavia, Japan, and Switzerland would be examples of places where we have developed an idea that something exclusive is something that is actually a little bit more quiet and calm.





As Nordic identity and its global influence run through the DNA of Copenhagen-based publication *OAK*, *The Creative Spaces Issue* examines how various international environments inspire creativity. Meet the brains behind the magazine, publishing director Anne Riis and creative director Laura Terp, as part of our feature introducing their previous issue, *The Global Local Issue*.

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