



Site-Specific Colour

MALENE BACH - BETWEEN VISUAL ART, SPATIAL ART AND ARCHITECTURE



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Rikke Stenbro / Art historian mag.art.,
PhD in architecture

AVASARA ACADEMY

In a continuous dialogue with Case Design, Malene Bach has developed a colour concept for the architecture of the Avasara Academy. The colour concept includes rooftops, concrete ceilings and reused teakwood doors – all painted with traditional Indian organic pigments, used in villages throughout India, as well as furniture decoration (principles for colour compositions and application). The techniques were developed and tested in collaboration with local craftsmen. With the use of traditional colour pigments and application skills, a subtle relation between architecture, the surrounding mountain landscape and the geographical origin of the young female students is established. Such an approach to both site and tradition resonates very well with the approach of the architects.

As architect Samuel Barclay, partner with Anne Geenen at Case Design puts it:

... As with any of our collaborations we try to create moments of quality that are situationally grounded, considerate to human interaction and are inherently imbued with content and meaning. Malene shares these values and in that spirit we have worked together to create a school that we believe is unique in the world not only for what has been

produced but also in the way in which it was made.

... The value that Malene Bach has brought to the project is immeasurable and goes beyond what I imagined colour could do. The pigments she has used, the technique she has developed, and the thought she has put into the spaces and their relationships has brought what would otherwise be a series of overbearing rough concrete structures down to a human scale and injected a sense of life and civility that it was previously missing.

The artistic and architectonic modus operandi co-developed by Malene Bach and Case Design for the Avasara Academy has a strong historical and geographical commitment. It is evident that a deepened and complex understanding of place and tradition informs both the architectonic and artistic interventions, and is accentuated by using local materials and traditional techniques, which are applied and rearticulated to meet current needs.







The colour concept used to paint the ceilings of Avasara Academy is centred on local pigments traditionally used throughout India, and developed in collaboration with Case Design. Using colour as material, the project sets out to connect the architecture with the surrounding landscape, the cultural origins of the students and the regional historical use of colour.

In collaboration with Case Design, Mumbai, India who designed the campus

Material Organic pigments, white cement and binder on ceilings, paint on rooftop water tanks and solar chimneys, pigments and linseed oil on reused teakwood doors, furniture decoration

Photographer Ariel Huber

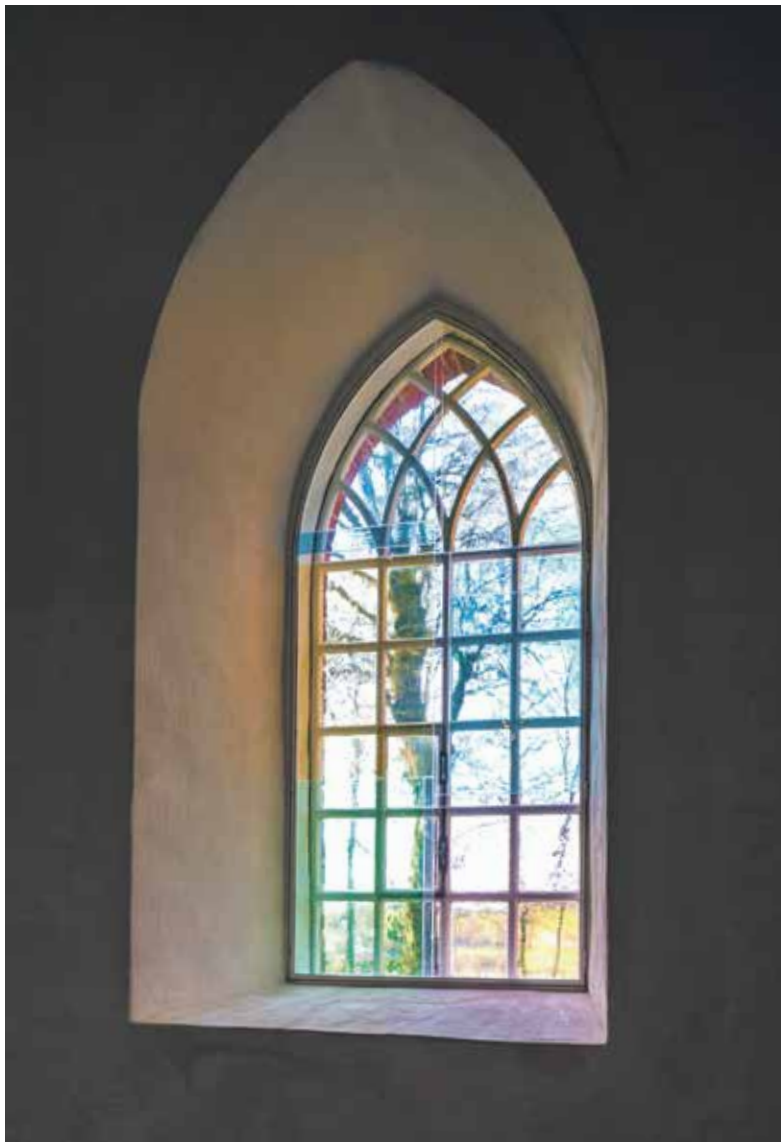
Details Avasara Academy, Valley of Lavale, near Pune, Maharashtra, India

Owner Avasara Academy

Work in progress 2016-19



SNOSTRUP CHURCH



In respect for the historical building and with consideration towards current users, the 12th century church was reinterpreted by bringing together past elements and present aspects. As one of the core components, a large-scale version of a classic renaissance tile was specifically designed and composed in various patterns. Furthermore, the work consists of the development of a new colour palette and rearrangement of the historical interior, along with a geometric glass mosaic in the tower window. By merging various materials and their tactility, it is the intention that the space is able to instil contemplation and presence in a contemporary context.

In collaboration with Leif Hansen Arkitekter

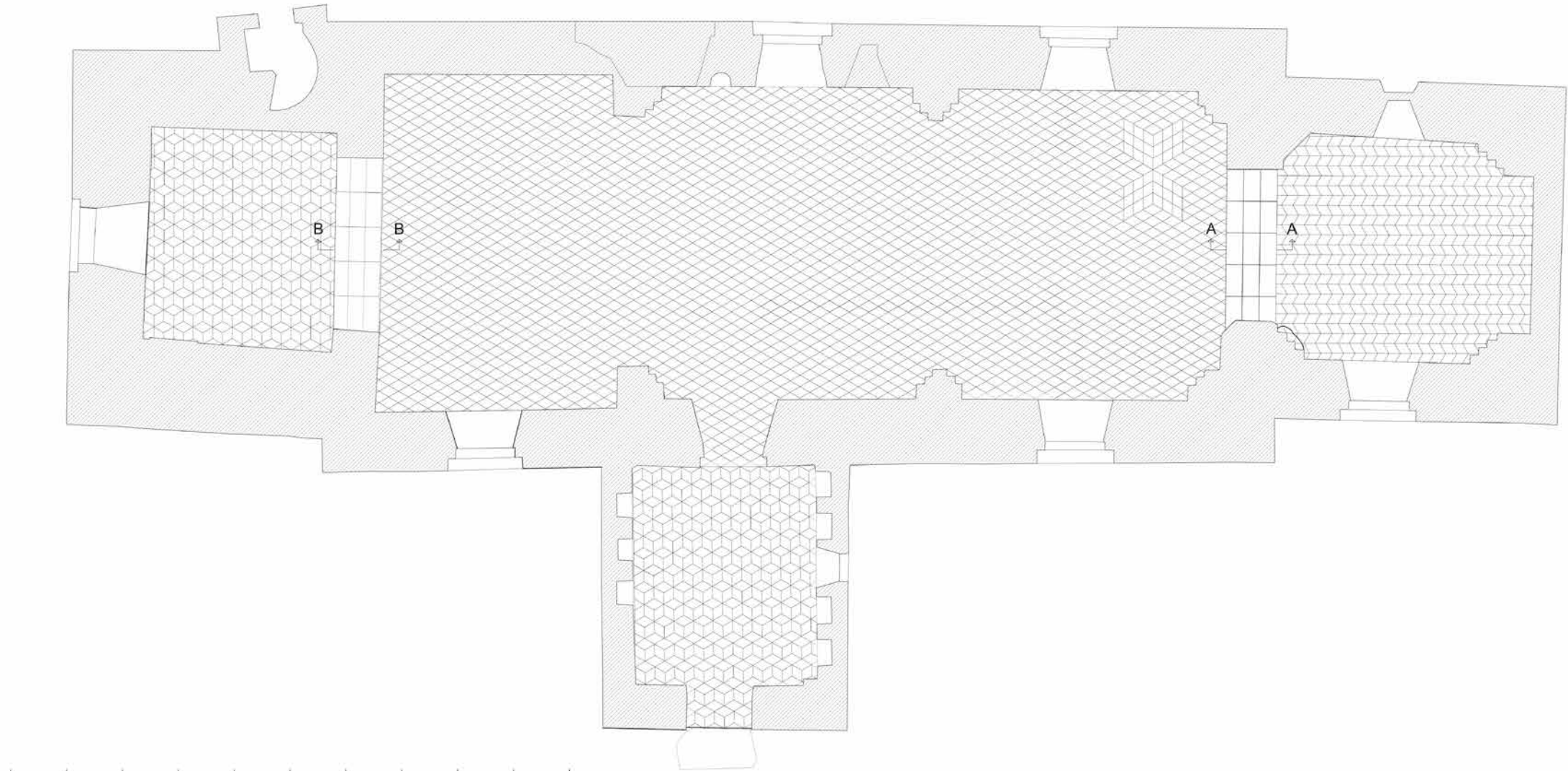
Material Colour scheme, handmade tiles, glass mosaic, bog oak base for the baptismal font, woolen cushions, linseed oil paint, chandeliers and rearrangement of historical interior

Photographer Jens Lindhe

Details Snostrup Kirke, Frederikssund, Denmark. 4,495 tiles cover the total floor surface of 160 m². The tiles have been developed in collaboration with Neue Ziegel-Manufaktur Glindow, Germany

Owner Snostrup Kirkes Menighedsråd

Completed 2017



TRANSPARENCY WITH A TWIST

Malene Bach's skywalk artwork is a stroke of genius

There is something breathtaking about bridges that connect buildings several storeys above ground. One of the most famous is the Bridge of Sighs (Ponte dei Sospiri) in Venice, where the condemned were given a last glimpse of freedom before being led down to the dungeons.

Here, four centuries later, the designers of the University of Copenhagen's Niels Bohr Building, Vilhelm Lauritzen Architects and Christensen & Co., repeat the feature, albeit without the Venetian sighs.

Instead this brand-new skywalk inspires other expressions — expressions of joy. Something due in no small part to Malene Bach's simply brilliant site-specific artwork, which runs along the bottom of the bridge making it visible from the street. The work is geometrical, accentuating the façade of a stunning building comprised of crystalline forms jutting out at different angles.

A geometry echoed in the artwork, but with less uniformity. The façade itself consists of the same modules pointing in different directions, whereas the artwork elongates their shapes, although without losing their sharp edges. The artwork is held in nine hues, perfectly harmonised and drawn from a colour scale close to nature, adding much-needed warmth to the building.

But Malene Bach has even more to offer, because her bridge work also relates to one of the basic principles of the architecture of the Niels Bohr Building, i.e. transparency. Transparency has long been a buzzword in the world of architecture, where it signals openness, responsiveness, and that nothing has been swept under the carpet.

But we would be justified in asking how see-through this transparency actually is. Because even though we can see people working inside many new buildings, at the end of the day we have no clue what it is they are actually doing. Is the person in front of the screen updating their facebook page? Analysing statistics? Or are there more shady activities going on under our very noses?

*So there will
be sighs, but
sighs of joy!*

Malene Bach's use of transparency also pursues another contemporary trend, i.e. the display of the self and one's life on social media. To be seen, to be looked at, has become a basis and condition of life that could benefit from some scrutiny. Because just like the transparency of architecture, our web presence is virtual and the boundaries between exhibitionism and surveillance are everything other than solid.

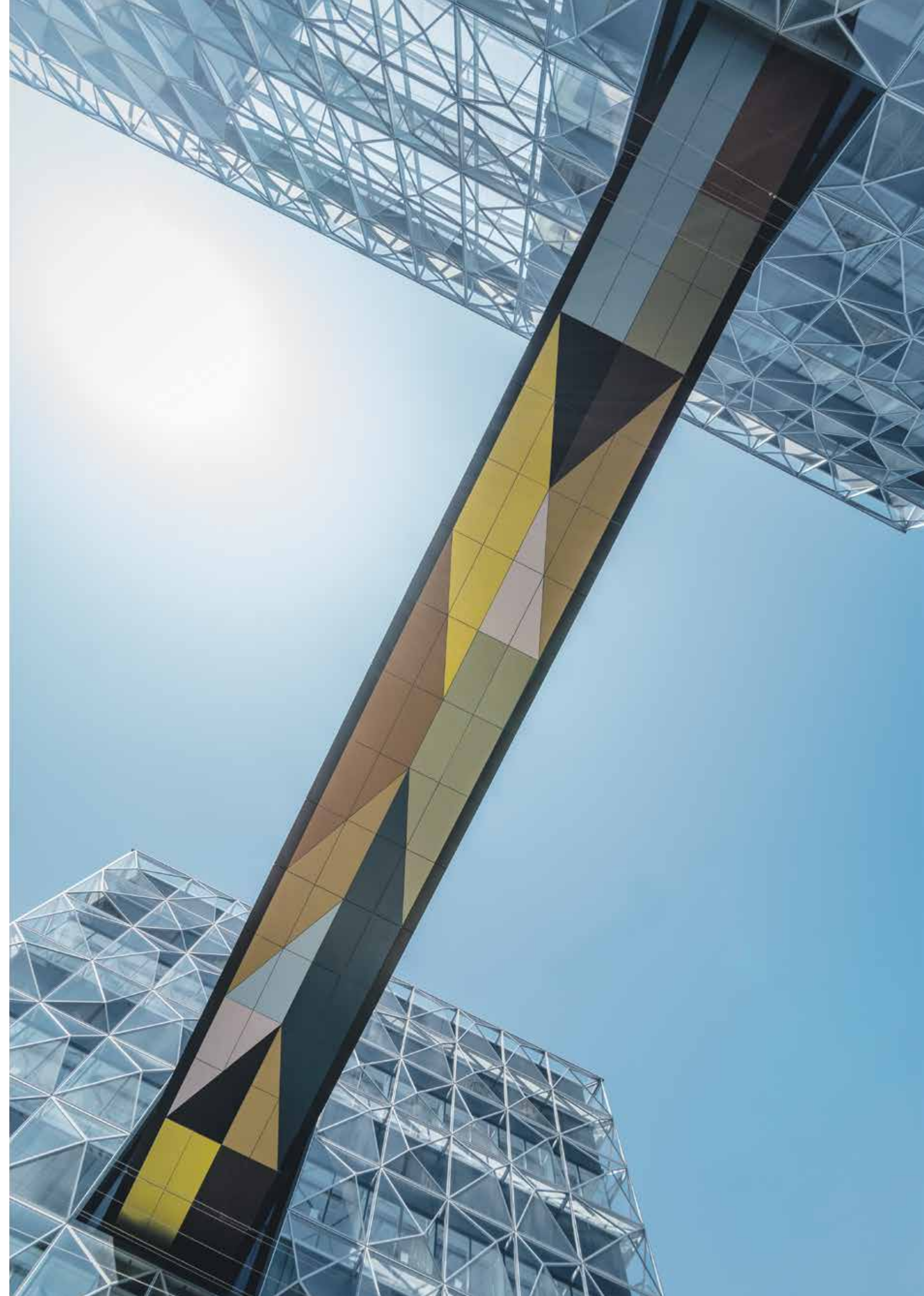
That transparency is not always what it pretends to be is something Bach works elegantly into her skywalk artwork by using exactly the same coloured sections under the bridge as on the linoleum floor inside. It is, in other words, as if the base of the bridge is transparent. But it is not. The transparency here is an illusion, as the idea of transparency so often is.

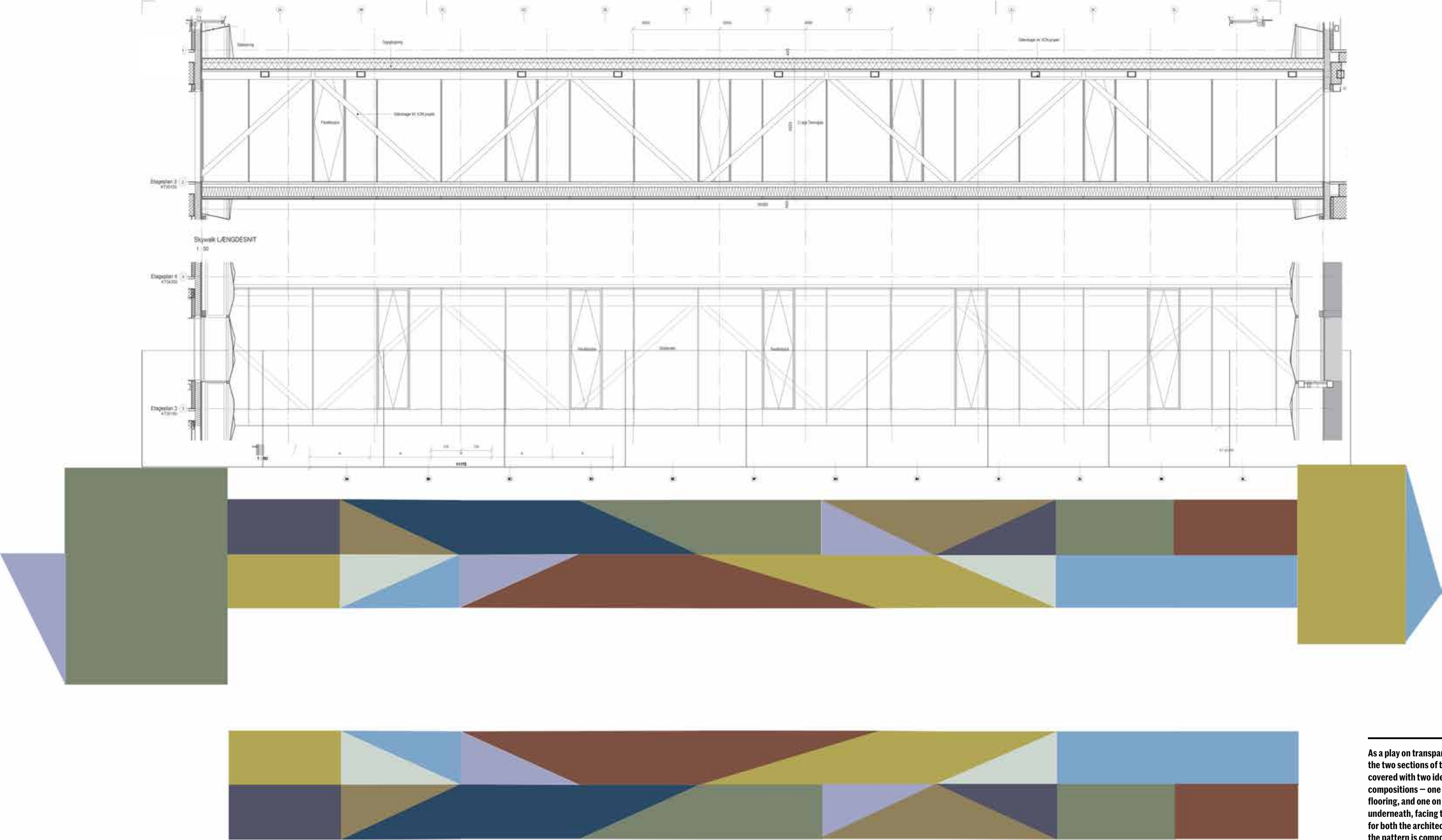
Bach's site-specific artwork is thus discreet, it accentuates, and it comments on multiple aspects of contemporary life. It is rare to see so many — and such weighty — issues addressed in a single artwork.

But then again Bach (b. 1967) is no novice when it comes to architecturally integrated art. She graduated from the Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts in 1993, and alongside art for exhibitions has completed a wide range of public commissions, from Karup Air Base (with Malene Landgreen) in 2004, to Xher award-winning artwork at Nørrebro Park School (2012), and now the new skywalk crowning her achievements to date.

When the Niels Bohr Building is complete it will not only be physics, chemistry, computer and natural science students who will be able to enjoy Bach's artwork. The rest of the population will also have access to the building at park level, and even be able to arrange to take a walk across the bridge.

Trine Ross Art historian with a MA from the University of Copenhagen. She is a published author and art critic at the Danish newspaper *Politiken*, where this review was published in July 2017.





As a play on transparency, the bridge between the two sections of the Niels Bohr Building is covered with two identical colour compositions – one on the inside linoleum flooring, and one on the outside façade panels underneath, facing the street. With a regard for both the architecture and the materials, the pattern is composed to mimic the structure of the building and form a connection between the outside and the inside.

In collaboration with Vilhelm Lauritzen Architects and Christensen & Co. Architects

Material Powder coated façade panels and linoleum flooring
L 39 m **W** 4 m
Photographer Jens Lindhe
Details Niels Bohr Bygningen, New Science Centre, University of Copenhagen, Denmark
Owner Danish Building & Property Agency, Bygningsstyrelsen
Work in progress 2015–20

Linoleum flooring inside skywalk and arrival zones. Outside underneath: coloured façade panels facing the street

LANDMARK



Placed in a busy intersection and coupled with a changing light design, this structure signifies UCL Campus Odense, and relates to the integrated art project created inside the college building itself. It is constructed out of stacked and interfering aluminium sheets, covering a superstructure. As an expression of a temporary condition, the landmark points towards the journey that the students undertake during their studies.

Assisted by Architects Gudrun Krabbe and Christiane Thomsen

Material Concrete, powder coated and anodised aluminium and steel

H 5 m **W** 4.5 × 3.1 m

Photographer Kirstine Mengel

Details UCL Campus Odense,

Niels Bohrs Allé, Odense, Denmark

Owner University College Lillebælt

Light design Jesper Kongshaug

Completed 2017



UCL CAMPUS ODENSE

Based on painting as an expanded field, a palette of colours and aesthetic design of the elements that comprise all buildings (doors, floors, stairs and walls) has been devised in this integrated art project. The design consists of several elements, all of which connect to the main feature of a double-layered wall of sliding colour panels: the colour scheme of the staircases, the floors in the canteen, graphic designs on glass walls, signage, the curation of UCL's existing art collection, and the landmark outside the main entrance. The five colour palettes of the wall panels outside the five blocks in the south wing constitute a wayfinding system repeated in the colour scheme of the signage and staircases.

Assisted by Architects Gudrun Krabbe, Christiane Thomsen and Visual Artist Rikke Winther

In collaboration with Cubo Arkitekter who designed the extension and renovation

Material Double-layered wall of sliding panels, laminate and aluminium, colour scheme, linoleum flooring, graphic designs on glass walls, signage, curation of UCL's existing art collection
H 5 m **W** 4,5 × 3,1 m
Photographer Laura Stamer
Details UCL Campus Odense, Niels Bohrs Allé, Odense, Denmark
Internal area 30.965 m² for 5.950 people daily
Owner University College Lillebælt
Light design Jesper Kongshaug
Completed 2016



PLEASE TOUCH THE ARTWORKS!



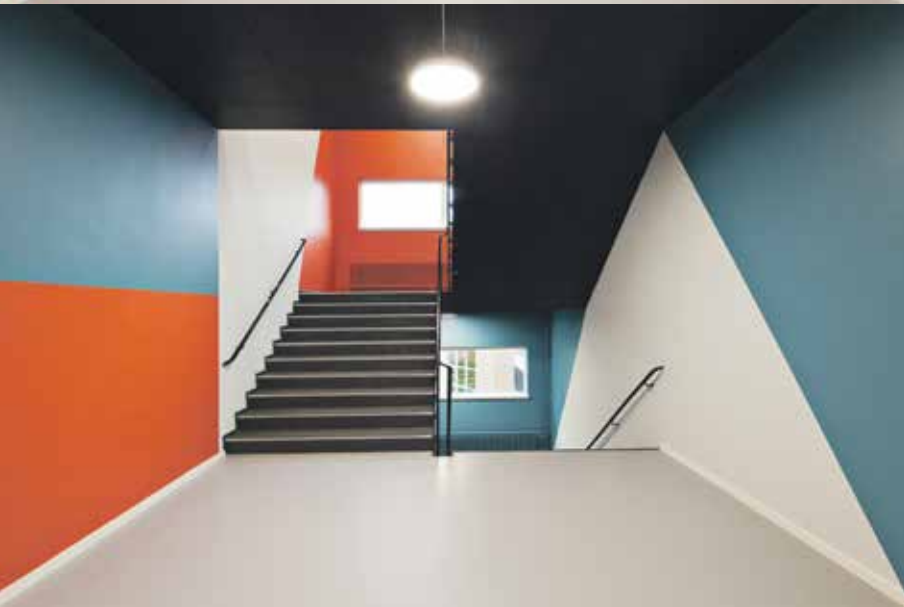
We are usually told that art is to be seen but not touched. But this is only partly true of Malene Bach's site-specific, integrated art project for new buildings at University College Lillebælt. Based on painting as an expanded field, she has devised a bold palette of colours and aesthetic design of the elements that comprise all buildings: doors, floors, stairs and walls. Her design consists of several elements, all of which connect to the main feature of a double-layered wall of sliding colour panels: the colour scheme of the staircases, the floors in the canteen, graphic designs on glass walls, signage, the curation of UCL's existing art collection, and the landmark outside the main entrance. The five colour palettes of the wall panels outside the five blocks of the south wing constitute a wayfinding system repeated in the colour scheme of the signage and staircases.

Because the art project is so integrated, as a guest, student or lecturer at the college you start to understand the basic structure of the architecture through elements like the use of colour on the stairs. The colours change on every level. The basic form stays the same, but there is a constant, slight shift as you move from level to level. Malene Bach paints her way into the architecture, accentuating it with her muted, matt colours. This creates a natural flow as you move up through the building. The five palettes are repeated in the colour scheme here, with geometrical forms that generate an energy that urges onward movement. Discrete yet clearly present.

One of the key elements of Bach's integrated art project is the works of UCL's existing art collection: landscapes, still lifes and portraits the institution has acquired over the years. A major challenge, because here the past clashes with contemporary aesthetics and new building functions. Malene Bach has met this challenge by creating a double-layered wall of sliding panels in different colours. This sliding wall blocks the view of the wall behind, but people at the college are encouraged to move the panels from side to side, thereby revealing what they hide: a way to rediscover works the students may have stopped noticing.

In doing so, Malene Bach draws on her own artistic interest in slight shifts and the gaps between surfaces that occur when elements of form meet, an encounter she accentuates through the colours of the surfaces. She thus creates her own mural, operating entirely on its own terms.

Because Malene Bach does not solely focus on what can be seen — her own artistic palette and the existing artworks — but also on what we imagine we might see ... which changes constantly depending on where the panels are moved or left. She makes us curious, sparks our imagination. The result is elegant, practical, and not least an inspiringly aesthetic experience. An achievement of note.



“I put a lot of thought into how the colour scheme and other artistic elements can enhance the physical surroundings poetically and tactually, as well as contributing at a functional level. The building’s supporting structures, columns, girders, staircase elements, and radiator grilles were painted black to frame the colours, light, and landscape outside. Painting them black reduced the level of detail, turning them into graphic forms with a calming effect.”
Malene Bach



“My aspiration has been to turn statutory architectural and institutional demands into positive qualities. Contemporary energy and security requirements fill architectural spaces with structural components and objects. Where we could, we integrated these in the double layered wall of sliding colour panels, but there were some radiators, fire barriers and fire extinguishers we could not move. These were camouflaged by being painted in the same colour as the wall behind them, reducing their visual impact as much as possible.”
Malene Bach



TRANSFORMATION OF NR. VIUM SCHOOL

Nr. Vium School was built in 1966 and closed down in 2008. In 2010 the citizens bought the empty buildings in order to develop a village in the school as a framework for everyday and leisure life in the parish.

With the participation of Videbæk local community, Erik Brandt Dam architects and Cornelius+Vøge have renovated the abandoned school to create a civic center.

Malene Bach has developed a colour project in close collaboration with Erik Brandt Dam, the users and stakeholders. The colour scheme emphasizes the original design of the rooms, inspires creativity and movement and counsel for use and orientation in the building. The colour palette refers to the existing colours, tuned into colours used in architecture of the 60's.

In this transformation of a former public school, built in 1966, a bold colour palette referring to the period was reintroduced, in a process of preserving original qualities and integrate them with the new purpose of the building as a civic centre today. The former practical ways of painting textured panel coatings, that could resist wear and tear, was emphasized and merged into the new design. Instead of removing the coatings, they inspired the divided compositions on every wall. By preserving existing building elements, the identity and former use is still present.

In collaboration with Erik Brandt Dam Arkitekter, who designed the extension and renovation

Award The Danish Renovation Award, RENOVER prisen 2017

Overall colour scheme Walls, linoleum flooring, acoustic ceilings, interior and preservation of existing building elements

Photographer Laura Stamer

Details Landsbyen i skolen, Videbæk, Denmark

Owner Nr. Vium Sports- og Kulturcenter

Completed 2016







Malene Bach / Visual Artist

THE COLOUR PROJECT

In the project from The Danish Building & Property Agency, contractor, and Bertelsen & Scheving Architects, Royal Building Inspector, emphasis was placed on the desire for a distinctive and thorough artistic colour matching of the three connected buildings from three different time periods.

Because there was no original colour material to be found in the buildings that I considered appropriate to use as a basis, I looked for a welcoming contextual connection to which the Ministrys's buildings could be related. The location at Slotsholmen with a lovely view of the architect Gottlieb Bindesbøll's building, Thorvaldsen's Museum, plus the Christiansborg riding grounds, canal and Gl. Strand, summons forth a piece of Danish architectural history. Because the view along Stormgade is otherwise dominated by the grey façade of the National Museum of Denmark one's gaze is drawn by the view, space and colours towards Slotsholmen, and I wanted to incorporate all that into this building.

Therefore I decided to base the colour palette and all of the integrated decoration on Bindesbøll's generous architecture from the middle of the 1800's in the form of Thorvaldsen's Museum, characterized by its colourful and geometric ornamented space. This then became the theme and the starting point for my artistic work in numbers 2-6 Stormgade: to use a piece of Danish cultural history to establish a contextual connection that points to an artistic approach to architecture.

The enclosed staircase running thro ugh number 4 is part of a painted geometric colour composition that follows the planes of the staircase and uses colours from the respective stories. The painting underscores the form, and the overall expression is of the geometric shape and colour conceived as one entity. The many facets of the enclosed staircase come into view as one moves through the buildings.

In continuation of the inspiration from Thorvaldsen's Museum, in addition to the colour palette, the project also invited working with geometric ornamentation on walls and floors. Film on glass walls created dynamic and varied compositions based on simple geometric principles. In the conference room, one long wall is covered with mirrors that expand the space and provide a reference to the gala ballrooms of the past. In order to interrupt the profane and direct translation of reality in the mirrored wall, the entire long wall is painted in a geometric pattern with a purpose-made mother-of-pearl lacquer that accentuates the reflected light. This gives even more space to the mirrored surface.

Because parts of the buildings in numbers 2-6 Stormgade are listed and also bear the hallmarks of the building periods, I wanted the new colour palette to lie in a natural continuation of a classical way of providing colour to rooms and buildings, both in terms of nuance and composition. This classical form must not be confused with a conservative approach. I was not concerned with doing something 'historically correct', but rather with establishing a new connection between the three buildings, their use and location. At the same time, the colour palette is meant to fit with modernization and allow a contemporary expression. The colour palette was developed on the basis of some old series of colour samples from the Copenhagen Painters' Guild. They were scanned and adjusted relative to the individual rooms. I involved Sten Valling, Byens Farve, Copenhagen, as my consultant, with his considerable experience with colours and paints in listed buildings. It seemed obvious to use environmentally friendly and older types of paints, as one of the goals of Ministry of Energy, Utilities and Climate is to appeal to green building.

Jens Bertelsen / Architect MAA

The first challenge of any transformation project is to see, understand and accept the existing conditions. The next step is to find opportunities and set limits, so that the desired change can either respect what exists or set a more radical course because the architectural values are not great enough to warrant saving. This is what we call working with the acknowledging principle.

First and foremost, this approach to transformation projects means that we acknowledge the history, the architect, the architectural and spatial qualities, and the original idea.

Next we acknowledge that a building has often undergone many changes, adaptations and expansions in order to accommodate the functional demands of changing times. All the same, we must be aware of the fashion of every era, for many changes are made over time to satisfy a change in fashion or new functions. Not every change is negative: change can have improved a building, which is why it is important to acknowledge the history of the change, the architect(s), and the architectural and spatial qualities. The object is to see and experience what has been maintained.

Finally, we acknowledge daily life and the people who use and own the listed building and that which is worth preserving, and therefore we are receptive to critical views, requirements and preferences with regard to the historical aspects.

All together, the acknowledging principle is about finding the core of the original idea – if it is to be found, that is – while we ‘help’ the aspects worthy of preservation or the listed building to accommodate practical requirements. What we then have is a critical, balanced synthesis of the original and the future, where the preservation values and artistic values are strengthened rather than weakened, so that they will live on.

This is the way we have worked with the three different buildings on Stormgade.



Jens Bertelsen Architect and founding partner of Copenhagen based practice Bertelsen og Scheving Arkitekter ApS



In the process of priming the Ministry of Energy, Utilities and Climate, emphasis was put on a distinctive colour palette and geometric compositions, inspired by the adjacent cultural and historical buildings Thorvaldsens Museum by Architect Gottlieb Bindesbøll and Slotsholmen. Working within an intersection of texture, pattern and surface, the colour-based project encompasses carpets, translucent foil ornamentation on interior glass panels and a painted mirror wall. With an overall focus on colour and a desire to challenge the functions of the rooms and the movement within, the transformation binds together the spaces of three very different historical eras.

In collaboration with Architect Jens Berthelsen, at Bertelsen og Scheving Arkitekter ApS who designed the renovation
Material Colour scheme, natural paints, translucent foil ornamentation, woolen carpets, glass panels and mirrors painted with mother of pearl
Photographer Jens Lindhe
Details Energi-, Forsynings- og Klimaministeriet, Copenhagen, Denmark
Owner Danish Building & Property Agency, Bygningstilsynet
Completed 2014



Peter Thule Kristensen / Professor, Dr.phil, PhD, cand.arch

COLOURED SPACES

The new bathhouse at Skodsborg Spa & Fitness incorporates architecture and water with the surroundings as well as combining Malene Bach's artistic intervention with culture in the broadest sense of the word. This is art at many different levels: painted walls, glass work, tile patterns and objects – sometimes barely noticeable, at other times outstandingly clear. The colours are consistently instrumentalized: often appearing transparently iridescent and relating to the spaces as well as being spatial in and of themselves. Malene Bach quietly challenges the borders between visual art, spatial art and architecture, prompting a reconsideration of the nature of the Gesamtkunstwerk.

Place

Henning Larsen Architects – the designers behind the new bathhouse – have related to the long history of Skodsborg Spa & Fitness. Founded in 1898 as a modest sanatorium located in a small area between Dyrehaven and the Sound, it has expanded over time into a large complex of buildings with white rendered walls and a central courtyard presenting a coherent whole facing onto Strandvejen. The new extension – also painted in white – inscribes itself into this tradition while underpinning the conglomerate nature of the complex through its particular proportions. This composite impression is reiterated in the interior – characterized by a sculptural central space containing the main pool – as well as by references to various bathhouse cultures including the Mediterranean. This creates a possibly unintended dialogue between the ionic columns of the old courtyard colonnade and the dream of another world expressed in the original historicist buildings.

This is the place and the architecture to which Malene Bach relates. At the entrance to the new section the colours of the landscape are drawn into the building by the painted walls of the two porches: green

Malene Bach works contextually at several levels. Her in situ work at Skodsborg Spa & Fitness not only relates subtly to the specific architectural setting of Henning Larsen's new pool building, her art also relates to the place itself and to the historic culture of bath houses around the world. Furthermore the art of Malene Bach enters into a dialogue with tendencies in 20th century modern art and architecture and the central notion of the Gesamtkunstwerk. Starting out as a painter, Malene Bach has become an artist who very much incorporates space, place and architecture into her work. Yet her project does not subscribe to the great utopian visions of modernism, relating instead to more local and specific issues. The concept of beauty – traditionally somewhat maligned in 20th century art – is reinstated in Malene Bach's carefully balanced and understated ornamentation.

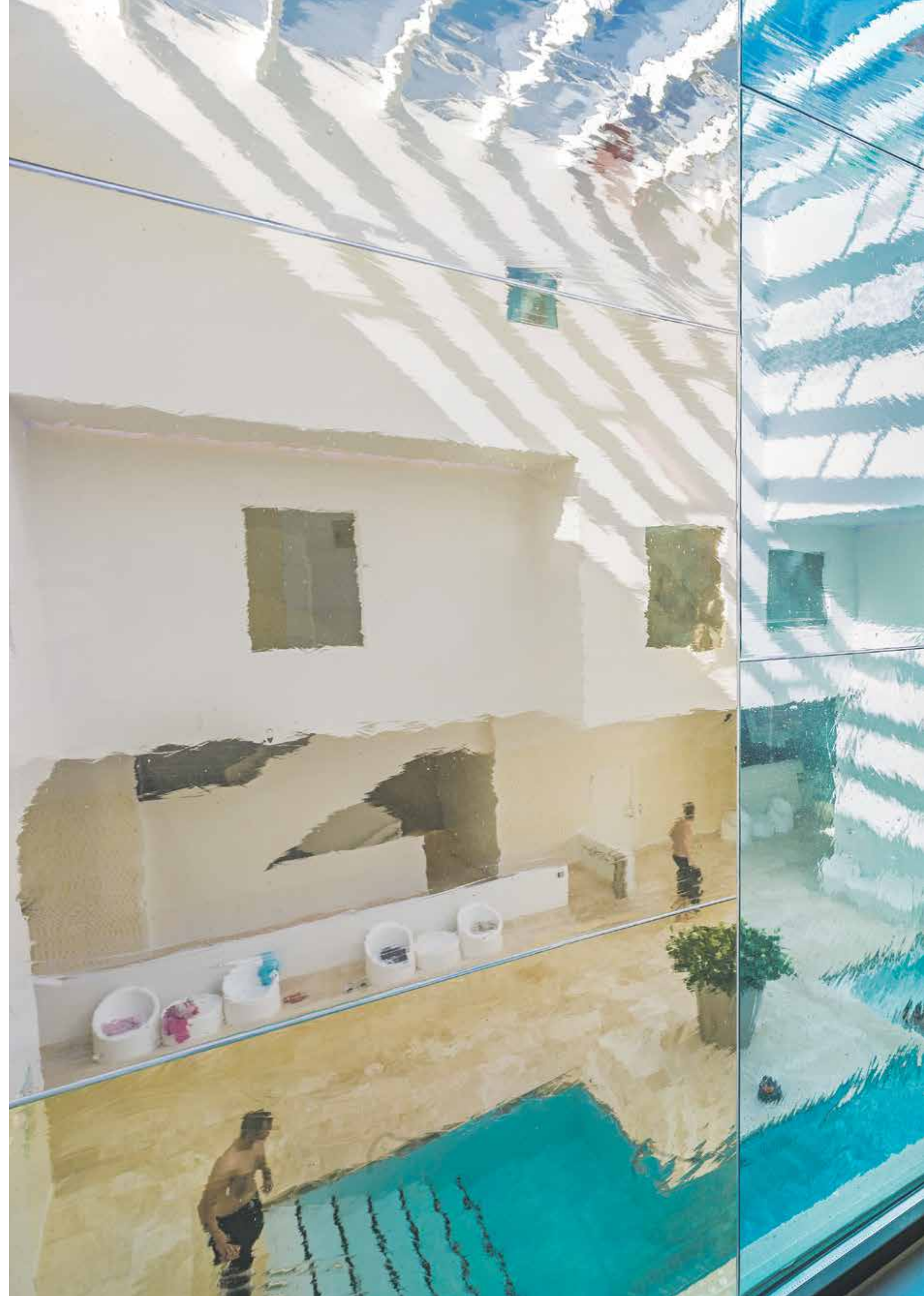
facing the trees of Dyrehaven and blue towards the Sound. The colours constitute a threshold in the general whiteness, while the almost imperceptibly coloured glass at the second storey level foreshadows the theme within. On entering visitors encounter a kind of artistic pause qua the jungle of fliers and accessories of the ticketing area – with the exception of silk-screen printed wave patterns on some of the glass walls; an element that recurs several places in the building, usually by peripheral or secondary spaces.

The actual objects on the walls of the staircase and the massage rooms constitute a different kind of ornamentation. They generally take the form of variously sized icon-like planks of wood with the bark still on the sides and fronts featuring smoothly coloured areas, sometimes with painted geometric patterns. The bark is reminiscent of the trees outside, while the colours and the patterns echo the general ornamentation of the building. The objects are made from different types of wood, each room featuring its own sort.

Next stop is the changing room. Here visitors are introduced to another theme in the ornamentation of the building: a painted stencil pattern of golden, iridescent, fish-scale-like triangles against the white wall of the men's section. These warm, golden hues – which feel very comfortable in the changing situation – accompany visitors on their way in the shape of a large golden surface by the stairs to the pool.

Water

The ornamentation of the large double-height pool space is less intimate; relating to the orientation of the room and the light shimmering on the surface. The tiles at the bottom feature a pixel-like turquoise pattern to visually enhance the impression of moving water. This pattern is associated with the stencil patterns on the walls, which also feature light, flickering,



green- and greyish hues with a clear horizontal orientation, surrounding the pool to emphasize the main axes of the plan. The pattern is repeated in the wall niches, inversely oriented to emphasize a horizontal sensation. This horizontality is also emphasized in the double-height space surrounding the pool where five vertical yellow glass rods visually direct attention to the large skylight overhead where Malene Bach has placed little pieces of red, green, blue and yellow-hued glass in certain areas. These allow coloured flecks of light to be cast into the space on sunny days while functioning as coloured points of reference when the sky is overcast.

The water theme unfolds once more in a smaller space containing a long pool. This room, which might otherwise appear narrow and basement-like, is imbued with an air of ambiguity by a blue painted frieze running the length of the walls around the pool. The blue colour is somewhat transparent and the frieze features a pattern created by overlapping blue areas relating partially to the sectioning of the windows, and partially to an arbitrary displacement principle. Thus the ornamentation links the rhythm of the room to the flickering water and the limiting confines of the walls are all but cancelled out by the partially transparent iridescent colours.

The top floor surrounding the double-height space holds a series of exercise rooms with windows opening onto the main pool. Malene Bach has chosen to veil the view using squares of mouth-blown, semi-transparent glass. This glass possesses something of the same naturally irregular surface as the water and its almost imperceptibly blue, gold and green nuances enter into dialogue with the light iridescent hues of the stencil patterns without competing with the colours from the skylight.

Culture

Malene Bach's work also relates to a multitude of historical cultures associated with her assignment. This

includes old Moroccan public bath houses where geometric mosaics on the walls and floors may appear as stylised images of waves or running water. Similarly stylised patterns can be found in ancient Egyptian wall paintings. Likewise in traditional Japanese ornamentation where fish scales or waves may form the starting point for close-knit patterns – a reference which Malene Bach has used for her painted stencil ornamentation and silk-screen printed glass surfaces. Yet her patterns are not obviously metaphoric – merely hinting at associations such as water. Instead these references are used in an abstract manner bringing them into our modern age and veiling associations to the original model.

This transformation owes something to the inspiration of modern avant-garde movements – as is the case with Malene Bach's teacher at the Royal Academy in Copenhagen: artist and Professor Albert Mertz. Like Mertz, Bach is highly diverse in her choice of means and references while displaying a consistent love of abstract composition, challenging our sense of space not least through the use of colours. Their metallic sheen and their degree of transparency let the underlying material shine through, blurring the borders of space and materials alike. This is reminiscent of two directions in art to which Malene Bach has previously referred.⁽¹⁾ Russian suprematism and de Stijl both feature polychrome abstract paintings seeking to dissolve the borders between two- and multi-dimensionality. Malene Bach's interventions (such as the coloured glass in the skylight) are not quite as emblematic. Her iridescent colours indicate an entirely different direction from that of the clear primaries frequently preferred by the avant-garde. Furthermore Bach's art is free from the underlying tone of metaphysics that characterises these movements. This is more about allowing observers to reflect on their senses and activate common cultural memories.

Her interventions may slide into the background or simply arouse pleasure devoid of interest. This, according to the

philosopher Immanuel Kant, is what characterises our encounter with beauty;⁽²⁾ a concept which has been somewhat maligned since the prominence of the picturesque and the sublime during the Romantic era. Yet we experience a pleasant sensation on seeing the flecks of colour from the skylight or the patterns on the wall. Wellness, which is all about feeling comfortable in our bodies, assumes a new dimension and begins to be about considering our bodies in connection with different cultures and eras.

Another characteristic of much modern avant-garde art is the reuse of everyday objects that springs from a desire to unite art and everyday culture. This urge is also evident in Malene Bach's work: At Skodsborg her services have extended to include the purchase of antique etchings and she has used patterns, ornaments and iridescent colours; all of which have otherwise been considered no-go in "high culture". Yet her use of ornament seems neither ironic nor subversive in the manner of Postmodernism or Pop Art, appearing instead to mirror a genuine interest in the optic effects of patterns in their spatial contexts and in relation to the water.

Gesamtkunstwerk

The concept of the Gesamtkunstwerk is also associated with modern art and could well be considered a framework for the Skodsborg project. The concept first became known when the composer Richard Wagner used it to characterise his own production, drawing parallels to i.a. Greek tragedy where free Athenians gathered to celebrate their myths through song, music, dance, dress and dialogue.⁽³⁾ Hence the Gesamtkunstwerk also has political implications and can be considered a kind of "transformation machine" gathering different art forms around the common endeavour of uniting and changing society through art. In a Danish context Gottlieb Bindesbøll's polychrome Thorvaldsen Museum from 1848 constitutes one of the first and



Bordering both the dense forest and the vast sea, Skodsborg Kurhotel & Spa is a meeting point between two worlds. Informed by properties from land and water, this site-specific reinterpretation of bath house traditions from around the world, is an exploration of light and colour paired with cultural and nurturing aspects. Working with a pale colour setting, shimmering ornamentation and refracting glass mosaics, it is the desire that the space comes together as a whole with a focus on movement and contemplation. Antique charts of the surrounding Øresund sea and prints mapping the Danish flora are framed and installed as cultural ready-mades to instil a sense of wayfinding and perspective.

In collaboration with Henning Larsen Architects who designed the new spa building and renovation

Material Paint, coloured glass mosaic and objects, silkscreen ornamentation, Flora Danica copper prints from 1761–1883, historical nautical charts from 1598–1800 and icons by Malene Bach
Photographer Jens Lindhe
Details Skodsborg Kurhotel & Spa, Skodsborg Strandvej, Skodsborg, Denmark
Owner Skodsborg Sundhedscenter A/S
Completed 2012

most consistent Danish examples; uniting architecture, painting and sculpture to create a memorial to the free common-born artist. Arne Jacobsen's SAS-hotel from 1960 presents a more modern version of the Gesamtkunstwerk: Everything – from the windows to the cutlery and the flower arrangements – was designed by the architect himself. Here Jacobsen introduced a new, cool world; seductive in its absolute consistency. Although no specific references can be singled out Malene Bach's ornamentation appears to relate to these heirlooms: Like the spa they demonstrate the use of historic pattern and colour to produce modern buildings.

Yet the art and architecture of the bath house do not aim to alter society in the manner of the traditional Gesamtkunstwerk, nor was Malene Bach's work included in the project design from the outset. Still her intervention has introduced an element which can hardly be separated from the architecture precisely because she works with such a great level of contextual awareness. She is no totalitarian: Her interventions have a certain frailty about them. The flecks of light moving on the wall and the ripples on the surface of the water illustrate the absence of a clear delimitation between the elements. Here the body simply exists in a clearing where art and architecture briefly meld with the light and the sound of water – and time stands still.

Notes

(1) See the flier for the exhibition "Malene Bach – Extended Color", August 22nd – October 4th 2009, Kunsthal Brændergården, Viborg

(2) Immanuel Kant, *Kritik der Urteilskraft*, Berlin & Libau 1790

(3) The concept *Gesamtkunstwerk* was launched in: Karl Friedrich Eusebius Trahdorff, *Aesthetik oder Lehre von der Weltanschauung und Kunst*, 2 volumes, Berlin 1827. For example Wagner uses the concept in the article "Kunstwerk der Zukunfts" (1849) in *Sämtliche Schriften und Dichtungen*, vol. 3, Leipzig 1911.

Rikke Stenbro / Art historian mag.art.,
PhD in architecture

AN ARTISTIC ACHIEVEMENT THAT OPENS DOORS ... AND TUNES THE MIND FOR PLAYING AND LEARNING

The present article describes an integrated art project at Nørrebro Park School, Copenhagen. The ambitious project, for which the artist Malene Bach is responsible, weaves its way into the architecture and the life that unfolds within it, in a most exemplary way.

Project and potential

Nørrebro Park School constitutes an integrated art project, emphasizing the architectonic qualities of the buildings through genuine, creative colouristic and ornamental solutions to stimulate play and learning. The project was created by visual artist Malene Bach in collaboration with Copenhagen City Properties, The Children and Youth Administration, and NOVA5 Architects A/S. The project came into being in connection with the 2010 merger between Jagtvejen School and Havremarken School.

After the merger Nørrebro Park School consists of three school buildings from three different periods: two older constructions and a new building. NOVA5 Architects A/S has been responsible for both the expansion and the renovation. Each building possesses its own distinct character. Each was, to a certain extent, constructed according to the dominant architectonic and didactic principles of its day. The oldest school building dates back to 1888: a stately red brick building, rich in detailing. This building was accompanied in 1977 by yet another building in red brick; clad *only* with bricks this time. Architecturally, this additional building presents a simpler expression due to the profusion of *in situ*-cast concrete surfaces. Nova5's new school building, which has now been added to the two others, is also a concrete construction. Here the *in situ*-cast concrete of the 1970s' building has been replaced by prefabricated concrete elements with a slate-grey brick facing. Like the two older buildings, the arrangement of the plan and the choice of materials used in its elaboration are typical of its period complying with the prevalent architectonic and pedagogical requirements and ideals prevalent at the time of construction.

In the architectonic and artistic treatment of the buildings, which transpired in connection with the merger of the schools, the salient characteristics of the two older



buildings were sought preserved while a great sense of internal coherence simultaneously was created.

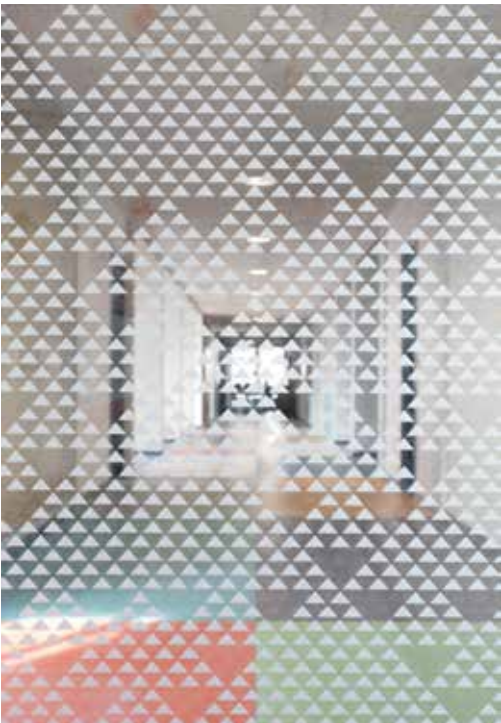
The programme underlying the architectonic and artistic project sought to preserve the salient characteristics of the two older buildings while simultaneously increasing internal coherence between the two existing constructions and the new addition. Although the colouristic and ornamental solutions vary, there is a distinct sense of cohesion between all three buildings both in terms of colour scheme and the choice of materials.

Malene Bach's project includes:

- The colour scheme of the linoleum- and vinyl-floors
- Painted walls: layouts and compositions
- Acoustic panels: layouts, colours and geometric compositions
- Bulletin boards: layouts and colour compositions
- Tiling in changing rooms, bathrooms and around toilets: colour compositions
- Silk-screen prints on glass doors and -walls: geometric patterns and colours
- Colour scheme for equipment and furniture
- Pictograms for toilet doors

Linoleum is a recurrent material throughout the school. It has been used on floors, folding doors and bulletin boards. Linoleum is an environmentally friendly and hard-wearing material, an obvious choice for institutional constructions. It is available in a wide variety of colour nuances, colour mixtures and textures. These material properties offer the possibility of integrating linoleum products into the decor in a way that fuses the aesthetic and functional aspects of the building into a synthesis.

Malene Bach's artistic work at Nørrebro Park School is groundbreaking and innovative in the sense that it comprises a vital renewal of the standard architectonic repertoire.



She is acutely aware of the aesthetic and functional potential of the different building elements and manages to utilise them to their optimal effect. A case in point is that of the folding doors, which were custom-made for this project. They constitute an integral part of the overall artistic program. However, since their surfaces are panelled with coloured bulletin boards, they also serve an additional practical purpose. Another example of this double (if not triple) function is articulated in the acoustic panels that function as part of the school's integrated décor with colour schemes and geometric designs that simultaneously explicate specific places and define their atmosphere – creating a pleasant environment in both an aesthetic and acoustic sense. The acoustic panels – which were devised and developed in collaboration with the manufacturer, stand forth as a prime example of important contributions to be made by visual artists in developing and shaping the architectonic framework of everyday life.

Objectives of the collaboration

In connection with the renovation and expansion of Nørrebro Park School, the Municipality of Copenhagen set aside funds for artistic work. Nova5 invited Malene Bach to be in charge of this part of the project. The fact that Malene Bach was involved at a very early phase of the process allowed the artistic side of the project to be developed in close dialogue with all stakeholders: the users, the entrepreneur and the architects. Thus the artistic processes were integrated into the actual architectural design and construction project, rather than constituting an afterthought or a supplement. The result is so well integrated into the architecture that it can barely be referred to as a “work of art” in the conventional sense. The artwork simply cannot be distinguished or isolated from its site-specific context. This type of intervention is special in the sense that it constitutes an integral and

inseparable part of the environment which it serves to simultaneously shape and amplify. The art weaves its way into the architectural form and function – on both a concrete and abstract level – and cannot be dissociated from it. Hence the artistic work can no longer be considered a mere decorative supplement to architecture.

Neither colour nor ornament are employed in a schematic fashion. Their application is based on a sensitive registration and interpretation of past, present and possible future. The artist's intention behind the artistically integrated colour scheme is to call forth a stimulating environment to encourage pupils and teachers to use their sense of reason while enlivening their imagination. The programmatic objective is to welcome and embrace the pupils without fencing them in. The school is intended to be a pleasant place, promoting work and concentration. In a school environment for children ranging in ages from 5-16 years, it is important that the children – as well as the adults, of course – are stimulated, not only intellectually but also through their senses and intuition.

Malene Bach has previously expressed that one of her artistic ambitions is to “open up a space for reflection, where the formation of meaning can take place”. What better or more obvious place to act on such an ambition than in a school? Malene Bach's intervention at Nørrebro Park School challenges and stimulates the pupils' senses, motivating them to mobilize their imagination as well as their sense of reason.

The value of colour

In architecture colour is used to emphasize the character of a building, to accentuate its form and material, and to elucidate its divisions.

Steen Eiler Rasmussen, Chapter IX – “Color in Architecture”, from *Experiencing Architecture*, M.I.T. Press 1959, p. 215

The value of ornament

Pattern recognition may be innate; it may be necessary for coping with complexity. But we demand more of existence than mere survival. When we recognize relationships among things, we interpret what we see, and add other layers of meaning that embellish and corroborate our encounters.

Susan Yelavich: “Deep Surface: Contemporary Ornament and Pattern” (<http://camraleigh.org/exhibitions/2011deepsurface/ornament-and-pattern/>)

At Nørrebro Park School, silk-screen printed ornamentation is used on glass doors and -walls, distinguishing classrooms from hallways and assembly rooms and providing shelter from the exterior surroundings. The patterns inform the pupils of their position within the school complex. The ornamentations frame the learning situation while simultaneously providing the opportunity for an occasional break. Generally speaking, it could be said that the ornamentations put the pupils in touch with something beyond the narratives that inform many of the lessons. Their repetitions and variations embody a meditative and liberating potential that can be explored impartially and without biases. The pupils can let their gaze – or even their thoughts – come to rest.

Malene Bach draws different references into her ornamental work, coupling inspiration gathered from a local context and from other cultures. Thus there are features and elements that are recognizable regardless of age, cultural origin or ethnic background, while others appear more unusual: One person might notice that the geometrical shapes on the door of a classroom resemble those encountered in today's maths class, while another is struck by the fact that the pattern on the very same door looks just like the brick facade of the building.

The recognition of patterns is characterized by the fact that we, as viewers, add something to what we see – attaching meaning. The ornaments developed for Nørrebro Park School provide ample opportunity for making such experiences and for dealing with complexity.



Utilizing extensive colour compositions, visual patterns and culturally inspired ornamentations, this site-specific colour project seeks to evoke cultural openness as well as being a framework for keeping focus and feeling inspired within a supportive and dynamic educational setting. With an appreciation of the existing architecture, and a wish to merge it with contemporary didactic principles, the work is intended as an integrated part of the three buildings, their different time periods and their daily use.

In collaboration with Nova5 Architects who designed the extension and renovation

Award The Colour Award 2012

Material Colour scheme of the linoleum and vinyl floors
Photographer Tine Juel
Details Nørrebro Park Skole, Copenhagen, Denmark
Owner Copenhagen City Properties, Københavns Ejendomme
Completed 2012



ABOUT

Malene Bach's work explores perception and the conditional in art – often through site-specific, colouristic and architectural interventions. With colour as the primary vehicle, she experiments across mediums and scales, moving fluidly between art and architecture. In her in-situ works she explores and evolves in a dialogical and dynamic process, baring the potentiality of the specific sites. Working artistically and colouristically – in and with architecture, her interventions can thus be seen as a direct and subtle response to material, spatial and architectonic qualities and local techniques.

The experimental and often also dynamic investigations of how spatial relations can be affected by colour are also a guiding principle in her studio works. Although the studio objects and artefacts produced by Malene Bach may at first appear as pure formalistic investigations of compositional elements such as colour, line, shape, texture and other perceptual aspects, they always transcend form in one way or the other – revealing a contingent and playful relation with both viewers and surroundings.

Malene Bach's studio works are exhibited in galleries and museums, internationally and are represented in both private and public collections. Malene Bach is a recipient of several grants and awards.



In the Copenhagen studio at Atelierhusene

Photographer Nicoline Olsen

Malene Bach is a visual artist, born in Denmark 4th of June 1967. She lives and works in Copenhagen, Denmark



Site-Specific Light Object. 1 of 6, installation view from Danish Architectural Centre (DAC)

Details Danish Centre for Particle Therapy at Aarhus University Hospital, Aarhus, Denmark

Material Mock up, steel, acrylic paint, LED strips, MDF board

Photographer Morten Kamper Jakobsen

H 135 **W** 172 **D** 14,5 cm (total installation 60 m)

Work in progress 2017–18