Folly for a Flyover: Non-profit organisation Assemble have constructed a temporary canal-side cinema under a London motorway

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Assemble becomes first design studio shortlisted for the Turner Prize

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Assemble: Making Things Happen

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Assemble: from pop-ups to grown-ups

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The power of many

Since their 2015 Turner Prize nomination shook up the international art and

designs, its eighteen members have a shared interest in creating works of

members, something was pointed out that is evidently nonessential when

architecture world, Assemble seems to be everywhere. But the collective has

been around for a few years now. Working on projects of very different scales,

from public realm improvement strategies to building renovations or exhibition

real social value. In a conversation with Amica Dall, one of Assemble's founding

revolutionizing the UK's emerging architectural scene: 'None of us is officially

From their working space in London, Sugarhouse Studios, the collective usually self-initiates its own projects, instead of waiting for commissions to come to them. They jointly work with communities, institutions, and other clients to make things happen. In many cases, this means building themselves, and learning as they go along.

qualified as an architect.'

How did this all get started?

It was in 2009, when the majority of people that later became Assemble were starting out working on small parts of big projects; we all had some kind of collective desire to understand projects in a more holistic way and have a hands-on role, to experiment and try things. There was a collective dissatisfaction. At that moment, we didn't have any sense of a group, or any future aside from the joy of experimenting or trying something together. That discussion lead us to The Cineroleum, which started as an idea to reuse a petrol station and turn it into a cinema. The fact that it got booked out was a real surprise for us, and gave us enough momentum to carry on meeting after the project, and to think that maybe we could do something else.

Why the name Assemble?

After The Cineroleum, we entered a competition for a public art grant, which funded a piece of work which became Folly for a Flyover. We were very excited and surprised when it was given to us. Then, we had to choose a name, because we also had to be legally formalized in order to accept the grant, but at the time we were never expecting to actually use the name. After Folly for a Flyover, we were made an offer to compete for a quite traditional public realm job (New Addington Town Square, 2011), and from that point the office was formalized. Since then Assemble has been used as an infrastructure for the people involved to do work they want to do and believe in, and for collective projects.

Is there a leitmotif in your projects?

Firstly, that we all really want to do them. Secondly, Assemble is a broad group, and people here act in many different ways, for many different reasons. We don't try to push a manifesto, but give people as much freedom, resources, and critical support as possible to do the work they want to do in the best way they can - and in ways this isn't necessarily possible within a traditional practice.

It's very important that Assemble works as a horizontal structure where everyone has their own responsibility for what they do and think.

What conditions should your commissions include? Actually, they just have to be something that two or more people want to do - enough to take on the management responsibility for delivery. So if two people think is worthwhile and interesting, and they want to commit to it, then Assemble will take it on, and that is enough. There is also a collective discussion process, but this is primarily based on analysis of the resources we have at any given moment. At the moment we are extremely lucky in having enough possibilities of commissions and because we don't have the pressure of taking on work to sustain the practice; as individuals we tend to only choose the commissions that are more interesting to us, something that is a nice privilege to have, but it also means that we are individually much more in control of how we want to be involved with every project.

Do you think there is a shared philosophy among

From our experience talking to other practices or groups that are in a similar position and make similar things, we see that there's a shared ambition and dissatisfaction that can probably be related with a lack of opportunities. When you talk to people, they seem fairly into innovation, have a shared interest in making things differently, mixing life and work in an alternative way, and having control of your own projects.

This year, Assemble is the first architecture or design studio ever to be shortlisted for the Turner Prize. What was the reaction at Sugarhouse after the announcement?

We got a few days' notice before the announcement, because obviously we had to accept the nomination. It's not the kind of context that we were particularly familiar with, and it was a surprise. We decided that if this encouraged further discussion about the role of art in society, then it was good.

The project that brought your nomination is done in collaboration with the residents of a run-down

council housing estate. Can you explain it further detail?

The Granby Four Streets in Liverpool is a refurbishment project of a row of derelict terrace houses. These spaces have been abandoned for a number of years, but were once the nicest waterfront houses in the area The council wanted to demolish them and build new homes from scratch, so we proposed to keep them and fix them up. We didn't create a design brief, but designed a delivery method, working closely with the project manager and being on site every week, taking an active role in the project. This also extended to hand-producing a lot of things, working on a very detailed scale. Our role was not a traditional design role, it was more expanded, and we suppose that is what makes the project more interesting, and is also what interested the Turner Prize.

How would you describe the state of architectural education?

It is worthwhile to say that we are not all architects in Assemble, and none of us is officially qualified as an architect. We are very active and engaged with schools, and some of us are currently teaching. Training nowadays in the UK is really good in preparing students for traditional practice. But the training may be also limiting in some way, because this is a difficult job. The thing is, right now, architecture schools have a much wider infrastructure. and there are many people doing a great job and finding active tools, but only a few are investing in what it means to teach. There is less concern about re-examining this to make things better.

What projects is Assemble currently working on?

We are working on the renovation of an old Victorian bathhouse, to transform it into a public gallery space for Goldsmiths University in London. It is expected to start next January. We also have an ongoing project in Tottenham, a chicken shop. This particular location will serve 'healthy' food with a third less salt and fat than traditional fried chicken. But what is more relevant is the fact that there is no secondary school in London further than 500 metres from a chicken shop. This has led to the highest levels of obesity in the country, so it's is a very

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