

MICHAEL SPENS

LANDWORKERS

The idea for this Symposium sprang from informal talks with Arthur Watson who was developing a series of collaborations in consideration of a more public expression of the meaning of Cairn Gorm Mountain in the Scottish Highlands, described in *Hidden Landscapes: Text and Image*. (1) As part of this project architect Fergus Purdie had designed a camera obscura for Cairn Gorm which would also serve to project a new video work, by artists Mel Woods and Lei Cox, locating Cairn Gorm in a wider Scottish context. At the same time Gavin Renwick was advancing his own collaboration in Dene First Nation communities within Canada's Northwest Territories, in his research into a flexible prototype habitat to meet their particular patterns of life and movement closer to their cultural values. Will Maclean and Marian Leven had been invited as an artists' collaboration by a small community on the Isle of Lewis to create the fourth in a series of memorials to the Lewis land raids of the late 19th and 20th Centuries. They have worked with the community of Reef on the Northern edge of Lewis to define a viewpoint and focus for memory. Later it transpired that architect Graeme Hutton (Dean, School of Architecture, Dundee University) had worked closely on a self-build basis with his clients to complete a 'new vernacular' house at Meigle, Perthshire (now short-listed for an RIBA Award).

Collaboration in all these varied ways is a deep commitment, one-to-one, based on shared and strongly held ideals rather than corporate imperatives. Human compatibility seems to represent a common strand, through each of the projects above, and in others included in this related exhibition. In Maltese architect and poet Richard England's now famous Manikata Church high on the Island of Malta, there has evolved a strain of common acceptance of the religious codes; giving the architect an opportunity for innovation in design where, as on Lewis, the past resonates.

This widening spectrum focuses also on the timeless value of gardens, as a small-scale inner landscape seen in contrast to the wider world. Tracy Mackenna and Edwin Janssen, as a partnership, have worked with landscape architect John Richards to successfully create a garden for The Merchant's House in Kirkcaldy. In a different context architect Thomas Deckker had turned his efforts to the creation of a series of rooftop gardens in Brasilia, so mitigating these monolithic

apartment blocks - a kind of palliative to modernism. From site-specific drawings to collaborations with major architects, Alan Johnston's practice extends across Europe, and now focuses on Australia and the Far East - particularly through his Nazomi research project uniting fine artists and architects in Scotland and Japan. He has also pioneered the ground-breaking Art, Space and Nature masters programme between art and landscape architecture at Edinburgh College of Art.

Collaboration in one form or another has successfully brought these numerous projects close to fruition. Between artists and architects this seems to have moved the goalposts to catalyse that creative fission that is as equally vital in architecture as in art, yet is also often found wanting despite the lessons of today. The Landworkers exhibition and symposium coincides with the Royal Incorporation of Architects in Scotland (RIAS) holding their annual conference in Dundee. It therefore seems all the more valuable to emphasise this need for such partnerships.

It is particularly valuable to engage with our guest architect, artist and poet Juhani Pallasmaa. With reference, in this instance, to his dedicated work with the Lappi community in Arctic Finland, not only as architect but also as adjudicator and motivator for younger architects. As Pallasmaa says:

"Architecture as with all artistic work, is essentially the product of collaboration. Collaboration occurs in the obvious and practical sense of the word, such as in the interaction with numerous professionals, workmen and craftsmen, but collaboration occurs as well with other artists, architects and landscape architects, not only one's contemporaries and the living, but perhaps more importantly with predecessors who have been dead for decades or centuries. Any authentic work is set into the timeless tradition of artistic works and the work is meaningful only if it presents itself humbly to this tradition and becomes part of that continuum." (2) This is the coda of the true 'Landworker'.

(1) Watson, A., *Hidden Landscape: Text & Image*, Cairn Gorm Mountain Trust, Aviemore, 2007.

(2) Pallasmaa, J. in *Landscape Architecture Site/Non-Site Architectural Design*, London, April 2007, Vol. 77 No 2, *New Architectural Horizons*, pp.17 -22. (Michael Spens, Guest Editor.)