Transfer Laban
Wolfgang Weileder

Montgomery Square
Canary Wharf, London E14 5JJ
13-24 June 2016
Monday-Friday 7.30am-4.30pm
Performances by students from Trinity Laban Conservatoire of Music and Dance
12.30pm + 4.30pm daily

Transfer Laban has been commissioned by Locus+ and is part of the London Festival of Architecture 2016

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Wolfgang Weileder Transfer Laban 2016
Chris Fite-Wassilak

In the city, we’re constantly surrounded by surfaces. Stone, glass, metal, concrete, brick and tarmac shape the roads and buildings that we navigate. Wood, plaster and plastics cover our interiors. Assembled in such a way, these constructions have a sense of permanence – or at least longevity, that they will hold together in this way for at least a few years. Walking among the shining silver, black and blue structures of Canary Wharf, passers-by might, for ten days in the middle of June, notice another surface being set up: a stack of white concrete blocks, backed by a web of scaffolding. Passing by in the morning, you might see a short square of them, like a small wall; by the evening you would see an over two metre high stretch, perhaps a square gap in its otherwise uniform shape. It’s an odd sort of construction site, positioned on Montgomery Square, a plaza just outside the tube entrance. The builders are fenced off, but they’re not digging below the pavement at all, not putting any foundations down. The next day, it will have moved on, the previous section disassembled, and a new, similar sized stack being erected just next to the previous one. This daily constructed surface is Transfer Laban, a temporary outdoor artwork by German sculptor Wolfgang Weileder.

The propped up surface might look like a part of a film set, a reminder of old Hollywood sets where whole towns were simply the two-dimensional fronts of buildings held up by bits of wood. But the performance going on here is more of a slow dance: each daily stack of concrete is an excerpt, that together over the ten days form a full-size replica of the single façade of a building. The building being replicated – or, as the title says, transferred – might be difficult to recognise in pieces, but it is in fact a building that is situated less than two miles away almost directly due south, just on the other side of the river in Deptford. The Trinity Laban Conservatoire of Music & Dance (Laban Building) was opened in 2002, designed by the Swiss architects Herzog & de Meuron. At the time, when it opened on the bank of Deptford Creek, the sleek modern building was relatively on its own in the area, with its curved front of glass and plastic panels tinted pink, green and purple. The interior of the Laban Building was modelled as an ‘urban streetscape’, with unruly surfaces and unexpected areas where the students might meet, the bright colour palette chosen in collaboration with artist Michael Craig-Martin.

Weileder’s re-placement of the Laban Building is all surface; the urban streetscape of the interior becomes the actual streetscape of Canary Wharf. The performances that normally take place contained within the building escape its confines: students from the conservatoire itself, led by choreographer Charles Linehan, will be on site in Montgomery Square responding to the artwork each of the ten days. The building’s performativity becomes infectious: the people setting up the scaffolding and placing the concrete bricks become dancers; we, even just walking by inadvertently, do too.

This isn’t Weileder’s first such transfer; his work has seen temporary structures built both inside galleries and outdoors, as a way of undermining our understanding of architecture as a fixed, seemingly permanent entity, and as examinations of how we understand space. Weileder’s transfers are often situated in public thoroughfares, construction that isn’t hidden with hoardings, being built in front of anyone who stops to watch, and that also has no apparent function. In Milton Keynes in 2006, Weileder built a similarly staged replica of the Milton Keynes Gallery, just down the road in front of the town’s train station. Last year, his wooden structure gap (2015) was a 1:4 scale reproduction of a section of the Dunston Staiths, an old riverside cargo loading structure in Newcastle that had been destroyed by fire, remade in smaller size and displayed for a short time in the Great North Museum. Weileder’s building-performances become almost existential questions: why do we build at all? How long do all these other buildings last anyway?

Weileder’s deliberate transpositions recall other such temporary gestures and architectural misplacements – such as Rachel Whiteread’s House (1993), a concrete cast of the interior spaces of an entire terraced house in Mile End. The building itself demolished, the stern, grey boxes of its former spaces that remained became a structure that sat on its own for just eleven weeks before...
itself being torn down, a short term monumental elegy to a wartime bomb-ravaged and now renovated area. In Detroit, USA, the late artist Mike Kelley created a portable replica of his suburban childhood home in the industrial centre of the city, plonking its white-panelled family ideal amidst dirty brick former factory buildings that tower over it. His Mobile Homestead (2012) is still used as a community centre. Weileder’s work is often compared to the architectural incisions of American artist Gordon Matta-Clark – who made large geometric holes and precise gaps in abandoned buildings as site-specific installations – but there is more civic concern at the heart of his practice. Weileder’s transfers become open-ended questions into how we feel a part of the buildings that surround us, how we all, whether we like it or not, take part in architecture. The replica of the Laban Building appearing in Montgomery Square this summer takes an educational institution and places it in the outdoor space of a business centre, in a space that is ostensibly public; though it isn’t public as such – it’s private land, owned by the Canary Wharf Group plc, through which we have temporary ‘right of way’. Our encounter with this version of the Laban Building is of a meeting of concrete and flesh, on territory where we are both equally transient. The encounter implies, too, the dissolution of the buildings that surround it, imagining a time when these buildings might also be disassembled. All architecture, Weileder implies – all these surfaces – are temporary.

Chris Fite-Wassilak is a writer, critic and curator based in London. He is a contributor to Art Monthly, Art Papers, Art Review, frieze and other publications, and is contributing editor to Tate Etc.
Charles Linehan and students from Trinity Laban Conservatoire of Music and Dance, a series of new dance performances is being developed in response to the work and will be presented on site each day during intervals in the construction process.

The project is being realised with support from students at Tower Hamlets, Barking & Dagenham and Havering Colleges who are engaging as volunteers on all aspects of the event, offering them an invaluable opportunity to learn new skills and engage with an exceptional art/architectural project. The Ytong blocks, supplied by Xella UK will be distributed to the colleges after the event to be used for future training.

Wolfgang Weileder is originally from Munich, Germany, and moved to the UK in 2000. He is currently Professor in Contemporary Sculpture at Newcastle University. His work is primarily concerned with the examination and critical deconstruction of architecture, public spaces and the interactions we have with the urban environment. His works are investigations into the relationship between time and space, the interface between permanence and transience, and how these can be explored to question our understanding of the landscape, both built and natural. His work engages with the world through large-scale temporary site-specific installation and sculpture; temporary recordings of spaces and environments through photography, film, performance and sound installation.

www.wolfgangweileder.com

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