



THE HOUSE PROJECT

GER C BOUT / KAISU KOIVISTO / MARIUS VOOGT

in co-operation with the pori art museum
and many others

Introduction

The idea for the house project in pori, finland is three years old. It came up during the construction and realisation of other installations, some years ago. Simply said it a reverse design proces: start with order and end with chaos. There were not many places where a project like this was possible. First of all there was the need for a clearly recognisable design and second for an object we could handle. A finnish wooden house was exactly what was needed. The pori art museum offered challenging possibilities for this plan.

A small group (bart bekooy, ger c. bout, aletta de jong and marius voogt) spent several months building models and taking them apart to find out how the project could be done and the idea realised. The small pictures on this page illustrate their way of working.

With these pictures it was possible to set up a working organisation in pori and start with the realisation of the project.

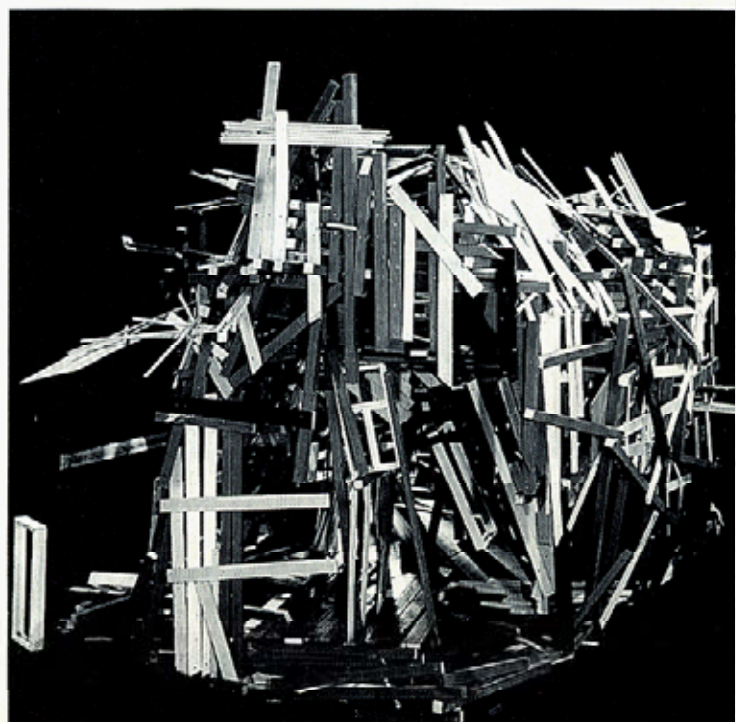
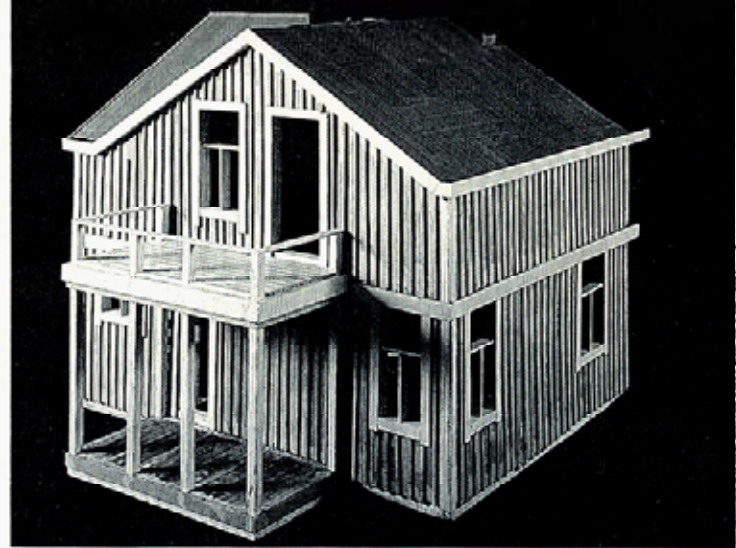
The staff of the art museum in pori and members of the nyte-group have played important roles in the preparation and realisation of the idea. A house was found, transport facilities, workers and equipment were organised and the project could be done.

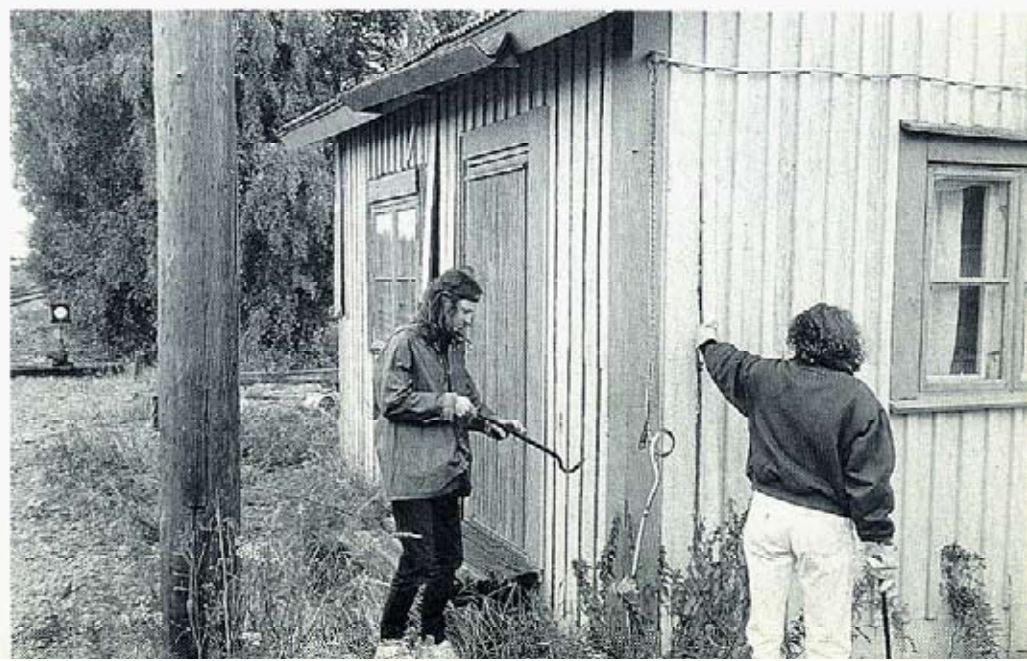
Without the support of marketta seppälä, anna teponoja and jari-pekka vanhala from the pori art museum this installation would not have been organised.

Without the support of kaisu koivisto and marius voogt the realisation of this installation would not have taken place.

Many others were helpful and I am grateful to everyone involved for their enthusiasm and support.

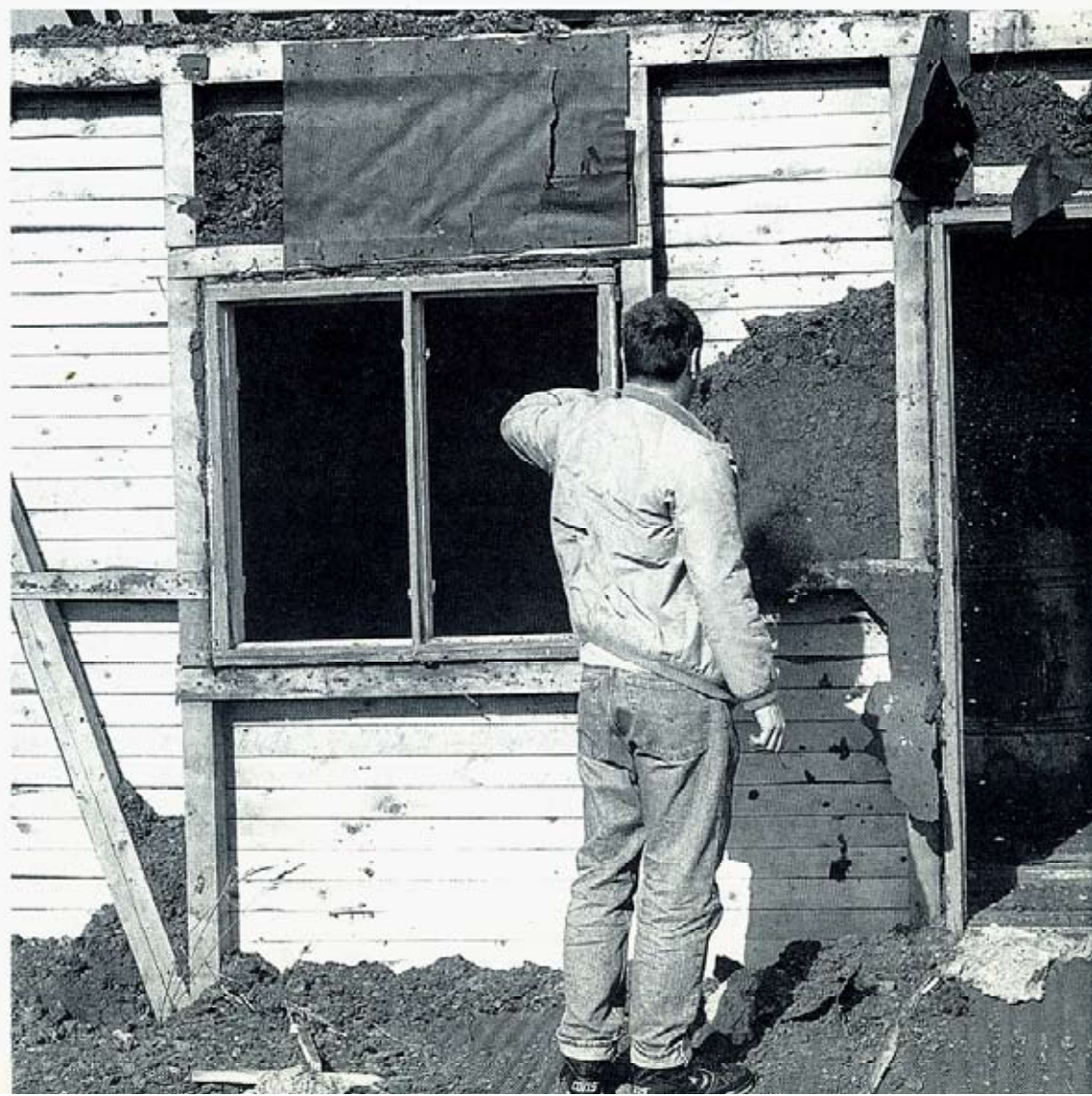
ger c. bout, pori, finland, august 1993















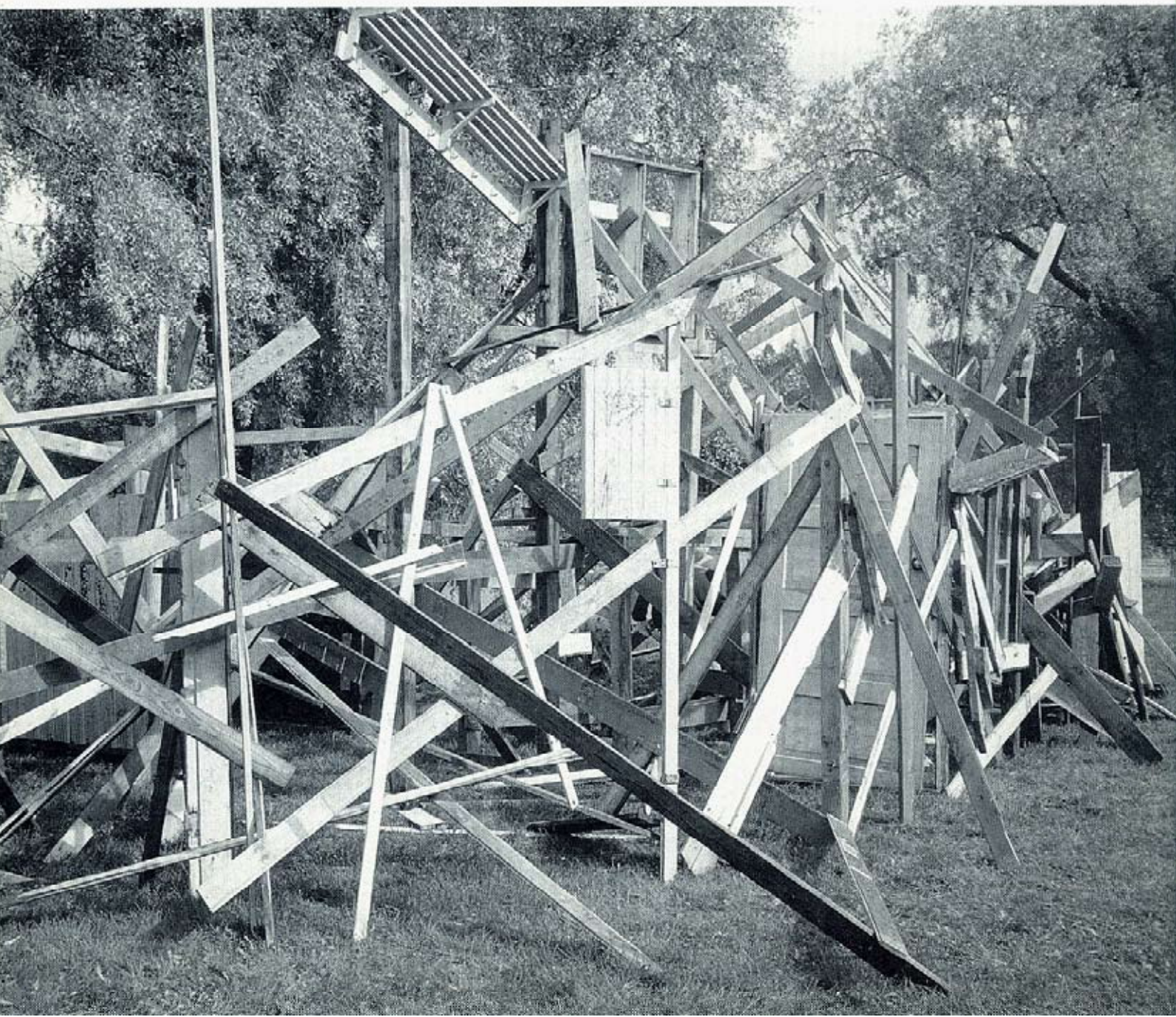












Standards and Arbitrariness: A Suggestion by Ger Bout

The first and foremost objective of architecture is: accommodation. In every case, whether simple or complex, whether it concerns a house, a public building or an office block, a space is enclosed (or: created) for accommodation. Function, ideology and esthetics are closely related in architecture, much closer than in the 'autonomous' visual arts, which, so to speak, do not have to care about anything, having no client and demands, no specific location and carrying no other significance than the artists intention.

Architecture is therefore not an 'autonomous' discipline and is obliged to consider restrictive conditions. A change occurs when the architect creates work which does not concern itself with these conditions, but still has architectural particulars and data for a starting point. The architect becomes autonomous, he actually turns into an artist.

Ger Bout is an architect. Furthermore, he made a number of works which do incorporate architectonic motifs but do not belong to the field of architecture in any other sense: they do not provide accommodation. Therefore they are works of art.

The work discussed here concerns the dismantling of a standard Finnish wooden house, a construction which has involved no individual designer. When the house has been disassembled it will be rebuilt, but not as an architectonic structure, as it will not enclose or create a space. The original architectonic data (windows, doors, beams, ridge-piece, window frames, floorboards etc.) remain recognizable, but are now being handled as non-functional elements to create a construction which is best characterised as a sculpture: space is replaced by mass.

The first phase of this work is literally one of deconstruction: the existing construction is disassembled. This does not necessarily imply deconstruction in a philosophical sense; at most the former unity is unraveled, split into fragments. It would be equally justifiable to say that a kind of exemplary inventory is made, a reversed application of the technique of a building kit: when a house is dissected this way the constituent parts are yielded. If one would put them together again in the 'right' way, the same house would be produced.

In this sense one could speak of an objet trouvé, or, more accurately, of a kind of a reversed 'assisted ready-made': a constructed object of which the constituent parts are used in a different context, invoking a change of significance. This line of reasoning would sooner relate to Duchamp than to Derrida. The pieces of the puzzle are fitted in another way than usual. The result is, to continue the analogy, a different 'picture', a different image, a different meaning. However, the original meaning keeps its reference: the 'house-ness' of the entity remains visible in its parts, still is part of the history of the new object.

In itself this is not an uncommon use of material in the arts. Every piece of wood harbours as pars pro toto a tree, in every piece of metal the industrial background is featured, and, more specific, an objet trouvé can only function in art just because its previous function remains a referent in the transformed situation.

However, in this case we encounter an intervention which is not quite covered by these terms. After all, the object used by Bout remains the same, while it also changes and vice versa: literally the object changes (contrary to the usual objet trouvé), but it stays the same to itself simultaneously.

The predominant analogy to be found in the arts is the work by Gordon Matta-Clark, who also constructed sculptures out of houses. Again, close consideration reveals more differences than similarities. Matta-Clark actually intervened and transformed the buildings into art-objects by sawing off parts of them: he changed the existing building irreversibly into another (kind of) building. Moreover, Matta-Clark left these buildings at their own site, while Bout will move it to another location.

The nature of the process operated by Bout to turn a house into a sculpture is extraordinary in itself: the result is unpredictable, there are no sketches or working plans and, in a way, the artist does not control the process. Bout is using a method he has used before: the elements which once formed a house is the given material, which he will put together again in a non-hierarchical, absolutely arbitrary way. What emerges is a 'random structure'.

There are precedents to this method, although less succinct in the visual arts than in other disciplines. John Cage made a composition consisting of sound tapes, cut up in a large number of pieces which were then put together again at random, constructing a new tape which would have been unthinkable without the original sounds, yet functioning independent from these: a totally new structure. In literature William Burroughs used a same procedure, since then known as the 'cut up'-technique.

There are differences with these examples, which possibly have to do with the static aspect of visual art. It is hard to retrieve the elements of the original structure in the new constructions by Cage and Burroughs, especially when this first structure is not given along the second (if that would be the case, the work would have an unwanted, educative side-effect). These works are primarily relevant in a conceptional sense, the knowledge of the technique used is essential to the appreciation of the result, whereas this technique is not directly identifiable in the result. In this work by Bout the visibility of the original elements, the direct reducibility of the new structure to the former is one of its most important *raison d'être*: the work depicts its own origins.

The specific material which Bout uses in this work has another, less conspicuous relevance. It concerns a house, but not a piece of architecture in the sense of a well-considered individual design: everything about it is standardized anonymously. The outcome of the transformation into a new structure produces the exact opposite: it is no longer a house, but the material is used as a design. The fact that this design is inherent to a more or less random construction does not impair this notion (of course coincidence itself is a very manageable factor, a material of its own). On the contrary, the reversal is formulated even more poignant: from a standardised object which was not designed, but had to be rational and functional, a non-functional, collectively designed construction of a completely random nature is created. By the opposition of functionality and non-functionality, and of a standard construction and random structure the work achieves its radical quality.

It is, perhaps, also an image of the world (or: a world view, a suggestion about and occasioned by reality): the pieces of the puzzle can be arranged in various ways with various results, introducing different areas of meaning. This allows the structure of this work to be very open: it does not exclude other possibilities, which is why it has the nature of a suggestion. On the one hand it is a completed product, a finished object, on the other hand it is not an authoritative statement with a definite form. The essential characteristic of a suggestion is, that it is temporary in principle:

everything could be different. Which is why it is, as in this case, exemplary. This work provides us, viewers, with the possibility to think about design and arrangement, about standards and arbitrariness, about definition and coincidence. The aspect of the work which invokes this, is the process, which is furthermore distinguishable in the product itself. In this sense it is an exemplary exercise of creating art with an 'open end'.

Philip Peters

(translation Cathelijne Dommerholt, The Hague)



preparation of the model: bart bekooy, ger c. bout, aletta de jong, tom rubingh and marius voogt

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This project would have been impossible without the support of all these people and institutions and many others especially the crew and staff of the art museum in pori.

ger c. bout, pori, finland, august 1993