

Industry Muscle: Five Scores for Architecture

Nordic Countries Pavilion
at the 19th International Architecture Exhibition of La Biennale di Venezia

Can performance art expose architecture's relationship with the body? Industry Muscle examines architecture using the trans body as a lens, presenting five speculative scores that serve as critical prompts for future practice.

With a team of collaborators, exhibitor Teo Ala-Ruona combines architecture, performance, and installation art. The exhibition in Sverre Fehn's celebrated pavilion exposes the built environment as a stage for the sociopolitical norms of fossil-based culture.

As Carlo Ratti, curator of the 19th International Architecture Exhibition, states: "When the systems that have long guided our understanding begin to fail, new forms of thinking are needed."

The Commissioners of the Nordic Countries Pavilion present an installation and new performance work by the Finnish artist Teo Ala-Ruona and his multidisciplinary team at the 19th International Architecture Exhibition of La Biennale di Venezia.

Curated by Kaisa Karvinen, for Architecture & Design Museum Helsinki, *Industry Muscle: Five Scores for Architecture* continues Teo Ala-Ruona's work on trans embodiment and ecology, expanding his focus into architecture.

Industry Muscle considers the trans body as a lens through which to examine modern architecture and the built environment, establishing a dialogue with the celebrated architecture of the Nordic Countries Pavilion, designed by Sverre Fehn and completed in 1962. By contrasting Fehn's canonical work of modernism against an alternative model for architectural practice that takes the trans body as its starting point, the exhibition will offer insights into the relationships between architecture, the body, and ecological collapse.

In *Industry Muscle* the audience is invited to consider the Nordic Pavilion, as well as architecture more broadly, as a stage for sociopolitical norms that are embedded in fossil-based culture. The staging of the exhibition places the visitor at the centre of an architectural experience where all participants are on display, enacting everyday performances. In Ala-Ruona's interventions, the trans body crowbars its way into this structure and reveals the blueprint within.

Industry Muscle unfolds through five speculative scores that serve as critical prompts for future architectural practice. Scores are used in performance art as tasks, notations, and exercises that provide instructions for a performer. The exhibition brings this concept to the field of architecture, using the following themes:

Impurity: Questioning the modernist ideal of purity inherent in both architecture and lifestyle.

Decategorisation: Challenging practices based on categorisation and separation within the built environment.

Performance: Investigating how architecture and spatial design shape everyday performances of gender and identity.

Techno-body: Recognising the dynamic interaction between body, building, and technology, while advocating for bodily autonomy.

Reuse: Approaching the trans body as a form of reuse and a tool for ecological thinking.

Teo Ala-Ruona works at the intersection of performance art, theatre and choreography, with a focus on trans embodiment and ecology. For *Industry Muscle*, he has assembled a multidisciplinary team of collaborators including architect A.L. Hu, set designer and artist Teo Paaer, sound designer Tuukka Haapakorpi, dramaturge Even Minn, visual artist Venla Helenius, fashion designer Ervin Latimer, graphic designer Kiia Beilinson and performers Kid Kokko, Caroline Suinner, and Romeo Roxman Gatt. Collaboration plays a central role in Ala-Ruona's work. Each member of the working group contributes their own artistic part to the exhibition, such as the installations created by artist and spatial designer Teo Paaer.

Kaisa Karvinen, Curator of the Nordic Countries Pavilion on behalf of Architecture and Design Museum Helsinki, said:

“Sverre Fehn's Nordic Countries Pavilion is a canonical work of modernist architecture that provides the perfect setting for Teo Ala-Ruona, an artist whose practice deals with the materiality of bodies and ecological questions. Combining Ala-Ruona's practice with the architecture of the pavilion provides new insights about our built environment more generally, from the perspective of how the image of the body in fossil fuel-based culture has influenced architecture.”

The transformative potential of the stage and performance is central to Ala-Ruona's work. In the field of performance art, bodily experience is studied, explored, and valued in a way that is meaningful also for contemporary architectural practice. I'm fascinated by the way Ala-Ruona has approached architecture by using the techniques of theatre, expanding his practice into architecture."

Teo Ala-Ruona said:

"Industry Muscle proposes a model for architecture grounded in my artistic practice and experience as both a trans person and a performance maker who uses the body as a site of research. This can be as fundamental as creating a sense of comfort in a space that doesn't highlight the silhouette of the body, but instead offers an adaptive environment. This stands in contrast to the modernist ideal of reduction, which is also reflected in the architecture of the pavilion."

"The built environment is largely shaped by prevailing cultural norms. These norms play a significant role in how bodies are presented in everyday life, as well as in the ecological burden of the construction industry. Together with my team, I want to spark new conversations and explore how architecture can challenge the status quo."

The Nordic Countries Pavilion is commissioned by an alliance formed of Architecture & Design Museum Helsinki (Finland), The National Museum of Norway and ArkDes (Sweden). The three commissioning bodies rotate the leadership of the commissioning process, which for the 19th International Architecture Exhibition has been led by Architecture & Design Museum Helsinki.

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Media Contacts

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Notes to editors

Title of the exhibition	Industry Muscle: Five Scores for Architecture	
Commissioners	Carina Jaatinen, Architecture & Design Museum Helsinki, Finland Yngvill Aagaard Sjöösten, The National Museum of Norway Karin Nilsson, ArkDes, Sweden	
Curator	Kaisa Karvinen, Architecture & Design Museum Helsinki	
Exhibitor	Teo Ala-Ruona	
Exhibitor's Collaborators	Dialogue Architect: Spatial Designer and Artist: Sound Artist: Visual Artist: Graphic Designer: Fashion Designer: Dramaturge: Performers:	A.L. Hu Teo Paaer Tuukka Haapakorpi Venla Helenius Kiia Beilinson Ervin Latimer Even Minn Romeo Roxman Gatt, Kid Kokko, Caroline Suinner
Project manager	Luba Kuzovnikova	
Curatorial Advisor	Suvi Saloniemi	
Advisory Board	Nick Axel, Eva Franch i Gilabert, Panu Savolainen	
AV Installation	Pro Av Art Oy	
Film Production	Director / Cinematographer / Camera / Editor: Venla Helenius Tattoo Artist: Spider Nykänen	
Local Production	M+B Studio	
Communications & PR	ING Media	
Partners	Elektronmusikstudion EMS Cocoa Genelec Vihdin Betoni / Hannu Kaikkonen Zodiak - Center for New Dance	
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About La Biennale di Venezia

The International Architecture Exhibition, has been organised in Venice since 1980. It alternates with the International Art Exhibition, which was established in 1895. The Biennale Architettura has developed into the most esteemed international arena for showcasing architecture, with almost 300,000 visitors in the last edition in 2023. In 2025, the exhibition will open to the public on 10 May and remain open until 23 November 2025.

About the Nordic Countries Pavilion

The Nordic Countries Pavilion, designed by Sverre Fehn in 1962, is a concrete masterpiece in Giardini Park. Carefully crafted to blend with the surrounding nature, it's one of most central pavilions. Co-owned by Norway, Sweden, and Finland, the pavilion hosts exhibitions curated by each country in rotation. The upcoming exhibition is produced by the Architecture & Design Museum Helsinki in collaboration with Sweden's ArkDes and Norway's National Museum.

Biographies

Kaisa Karvinen works as a curator at Architecture and Design Museum Helsinki. She is a curator and researcher who graduated as an architect from Aalto University and obtained a Master in Research in art and design from St. Lucas School of Arts Antwerp. In recent years, Karvinen has been preparing her doctoral dissertation at the University of Oulu, working on exhibition and research projects, and focusing on modern architecture and the role of concrete as a material in urban environments.

Teo Ala-Ruona is an interdisciplinary artist based in Helsinki, working internationally within the expanded field of performance. Ala-Ruona's work is strongly tied to theory, and he uses the performing body in his art as a reflective surface for the impacts of various societal, sociopolitical, and historical forms of power. Ala-Ruona's work has recently been shown e.g. in Performa Biennial, New York; The Vilnius Biennial of Performance Art; The Finnish National Gallery Kiasma, Helsinki; and The Institute of Contemporary Arts in London. Ala-Ruona holds an MA in Art Education and an MA in Ecology and Contemporary Performance.