

e r g e n
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A s s e m b l

Monday
Begins on
Saturday

31 August-27 October
2013

An International Exhibition, Publication, and Symposium 31 August- 27 October 2013



Monday Begins on Saturday is the title of the first edition of Bergen Assembly, and takes the form of an international art exhibition. It is a critical meditation on the potentials and pitfalls of the evermore ubiquitous yet at the same time elusive notion of “artistic research.” The project takes its title from a novel by Soviet sci-fi writers Arkady and Boris Strugatsky about a fictitious research institute staffed by a motley assemblage of fairytale beings and mad scientists who are trying to solve the problem of human happiness through magic. The first edition of Bergen’s new triennial is an oblique contemporary rewriting of this text as a multi-venue exhibition and book.

The Strugatsky brothers published *Monday Begins on Saturday* in 1964, at the height of the Cold War Soviet research boom. It tells the story of a programmer who gets sidetracked by hitchhikers while vacationing in the northern region of Karelia, and winds up working at the Research Institute for Wizardry and Sorcery, which is organized into sections such as the Department of Prophecies and Predictions or the Department of Linear Happiness. Its researchers are on a modest quest to solve all of humanity’s problems. The institute’s main philosophy is dialectical: positivism and vulgar materialism must be fought off at all costs and opposed with the weapons of magic and the imagination. Its ethic of incessant research—alluded to in the title of the novel—is similarly dialectical: an ideal life of perpetual inquiry and thinking, opposed to the quick fixes of consumerism and immediate satisfaction. Here even knowledge of the future should not be “consumed”—it must remain an open horizon. But this utopian atmosphere is secured by almost inexhaustible state support, propped up by an ever growing bureaucracy, and protected from the demands of the market. Although some institute researchers prove dedication by wanting even to work on New Year’s Eve, others nonetheless become terribly complacent, which leads to a profuse growth of hair from their ears...

This leads us, albeit circuitously and perhaps surprisingly, to the city of Bergen. From the outside, it looks at once like a utopian island for artistic research, paradoxically Hanseatic and Alpine, sailor's port and *Zauberberg* together, with an overdeveloped (or ideally saturated) artistic topography for a city of its size. Bergen has no single neglected postindustrial space of the type and scale normally repurposed for biennials—the kind of venue that often defines a project's topics, spatial structures, and politics. Instead, its artistic landscape is punctuated by many small art institutions, publicly funded to varying degrees, unburdened by the art market, precarious but very committed, often modest and always operating with humanistic aims, offering spaces for idiosyncratic, even wacky, pursuits. At the same time, all struggle against pressures which define cultural inquiry in the European post-welfare state more broadly: the tides of increasing academization, deliberative and strategic complicity with political or institutional agendas, and even complacency. In that sense, one could argue that there are analogies with the intellectual, economic, and ethical landscape of Soviet research institutes, ironically (but lovingly) described by the Strugatsky brothers.

The first iteration of Bergen Assembly attempts to “read” this narrative through a literary and intellectual reworking of the novel for today. A montage of newly commissioned artists' projects and historical material, punctuated with fragments from literature and quasi-fictional curatorial annotations, the Assembly is conceived as an aggregate or archipelago of fictitious research institutes—a little like the departments in the novel—“hosted” by existing institutions in Bergen. This constellation forms a retelling of the Strugatskys' animal fables, ethno-fictions, scams, and tall tales through the golems and projections of our own time, in this age of hyper-capitalist necromancy. To be clear, these are not direct responses to the novel, but rather juxtapositions in a visual essay of twisted analogies, probing the notion of artistic research from unexpected angles in curatorial framings that blur the distinctions between art history and art making, artist and curator.

The exhibition *Monday Begins on Saturday*, opening in late August 2013, presents the positions of more than 40 international artists working in a variety of media. Projects are distributed over eleven different locations in the city of Bergen, among them several buildings of the Bergen Art Museum and Bergen Kunsthall. Many projects are specially commissioned for the Bergen Assembly.

The exhibition is accompanied by a publication, a print version of the curatorial montage with newly commissioned and anthologized theoretical, literary, and artistic texts and contributions. In keeping with the concept of the overall project, the boundary between the exhibition and book is similarly fluid. An international symposium featuring artists' talks and panel discussions with the project's contributors also takes place during the opening days of Bergen Assembly.



Leningrad Electronical Institute, 1959

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Curators invited to convene the 2013 edition

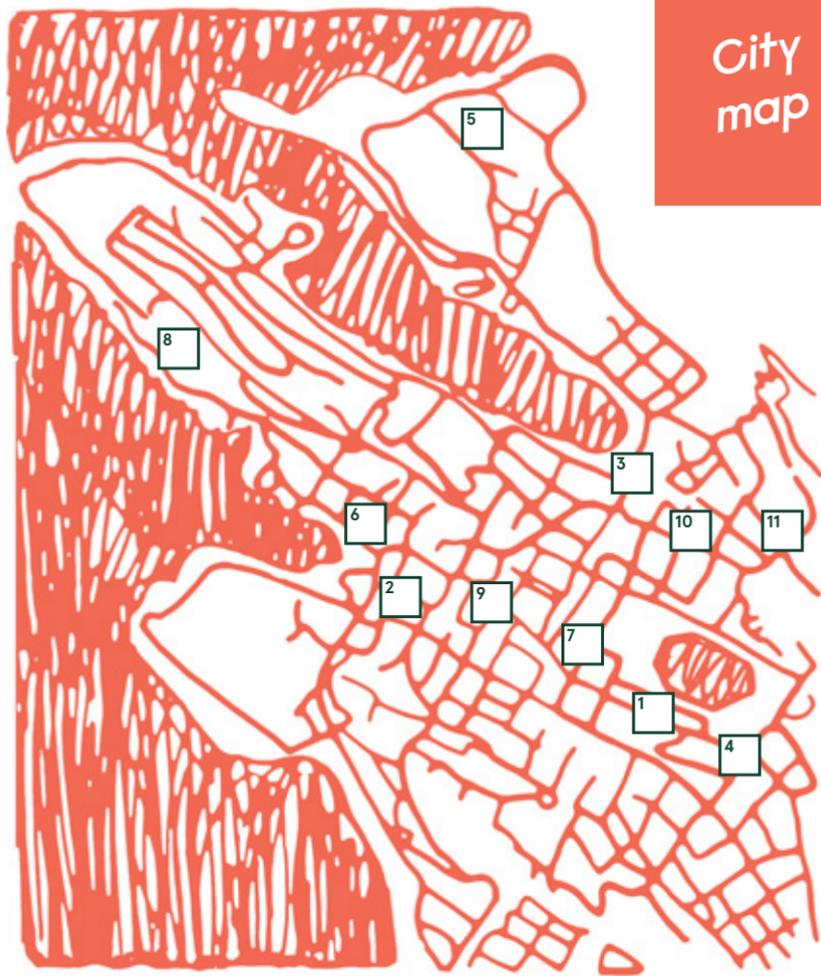


Ekaterina Degot, Ph.D. is an art historian, writer, and curator based in Moscow. For many years a journalist and art critic with a sharp political position, she has also written for several international publications about Soviet modernism, contemporary Russian society, and its art scene. She has been a guest professor at various American and European universities and is currently a professor at the Rodchenko Moscow School of Photography and Multimedia. Besides many art historical and anthropological shows based on research, she curated (with Cosmin Costinas and David Riff), the first *Ural Industrial Biennial* in Ekaterinburg, 2010; the discussion platform of the first *Kiev Biennial of Contemporary Art*, 2012; and was co-curator of *Time/Food* at Stella Art Foundation in Moscow, 2012. She recently co-edited the book *Post-Post-Soviet?: Art, Politics and Society in Russia at the Turn of the Decade* (2013).

David Riff is a writer, translator, artist, and curator based in Moscow and Berlin. He has written widely on the history and present of contemporary art in Russia as an art critic, and has translated extensively, his most recent project a forthcoming volume of the work of Soviet aesthetic philosopher Mikhail Lifshitz. He is a member of the workgroup *Chto delat/What is to be done?* and has been involved in other artistic collaborations such as the Learning Film Group or the Karl Marx School of the English Language. Recent curatorial projects have included the international exhibition *The Potosi Principle* (as a curatorial correspondent), 2010–2011; the *Ural Industrial Biennial* (with Cosmin Costinas and Ekaterina Degot), 2010; and *Auditorium Moscow*, a discussion platform and exhibition (with Ekaterina Degot and Joanna Mytkowska), 2011. Riff is a professor at the Rodchenko Moscow School of Photography and Multimedia.



City map



Hosting venues of the exhibition

1 **Bergen Kunsthall**
Rasmus Meyers allé 5,
5015 Bergen
www.kunsthall.no

2 **KNIPSU**
Komediebakken 9,
5010 Bergen
www.knipsu.no

3 **Stiftelsen 3,14**
Vågsallmenningen 12,
5014 Bergen
www.stiftelsen314.com

4 **KODE**
KODE 4
Rasmus Meyers allé 9,
5015 Bergen
www.kodebergen.no

5 **Bergen Kjøtt**
Skutevikstorget 1,
5032 Bergen
www.bergenkjott.com

6 **Entrée**
Nøstegaten 42,
5011 Bergen
www.entreebergen.no

7 **KODE**
KODE 1
Nordahl Bruns gate 9,
5014 Bergen
www.kodebergen.no

8 **Visningsrommet USF**
Georgernes Verft 12,
5011 Bergen
www.usf.no

9 **Rom8**
Vaskerelven 8,
5017 Bergen
www.khib.no

10 **Østre**
Østre Skostredet 3,
5017 Bergen
www.oestre.no

11 **The School Museum**
Lille Øvregate 38
5018 Bergen
www.bymuseet.no

Researchers



Announced in June

About Bergen Assembly



Following a proposal put forth by the City of Bergen to establish a biennial, the idea was thoroughly discussed during the Bergen Biennial Conference (fall 2009). The conference, organized by Bergen Kunsthall, aimed to generate new research and critical discourse around the model of the biennial and its proliferation worldwide. Titled *To biennial or not to biennial?*, this key question and related issues were debated in detail through a series of presentations by international curators, art historians, artists, and other thinkers. The publication *The Biennial Reader* (Hatje Cantz/Bergen Kunsthall), which followed in 2010, gathered contributions to the conference and other research materials into the most comprehensive survey of the biennial topic published to date.

Building upon the insights generated through these initial activities, a decision was made to turn the planned biennial into a triennial. The Bergen Assembly – An Initiative for Art and Research is the outcome of a long process of reflection and deliberation. This model was proposed by an advisory board consisting of participants from the Bergen Biennial Conference. Breaking away from the quick turnover cycle of perennial exhibitions, the aim is to allow more time for artistic research and thinking.

Furthermore, in lieu of a conventional curatorial model, the advisory board named two conveners to establish an assembly of artists, cultural producers and other intellectuals to create the inaugural edition, with the aim of addressing possible futures rather than simply summarizing or diagnosing present conditions.

**Bergen Assembly –
An Initiative for
Art and Research**

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Opening Hours:
Tue–Sun: 11 am–5 pm
Mon: closed

Tickets:
Exhibition pass (unlimited entrance to
all venues for the entire duration of the
exhibition): 100 NOK
(Reduced prices for students & seniors;
entrance is free for children up to 16.)

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