

After Architecture

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A moss-covered plaster model stands guard over sixteen drawings. The model has seen better days if viewed through a conventional exhibition lens, but here its state of weathering and erosion is precisely the point. It reminds the viewer that the passage of time must be read into the works it accompanies. Without our intervention, the model has gradually acquired a ‘face.’ Eyes, nose, and mouth have emerged as fragments have fallen away and new cavities have formed. It looks slightly sad. We imagine that it knows that architecture, as we have known it—stable and impermeable—is already in the process of dissolving.



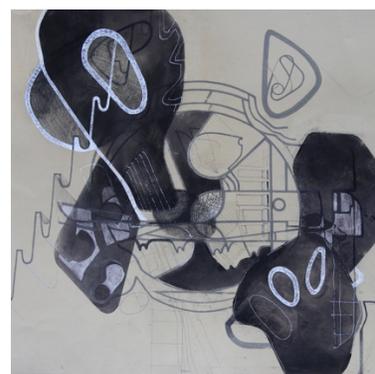
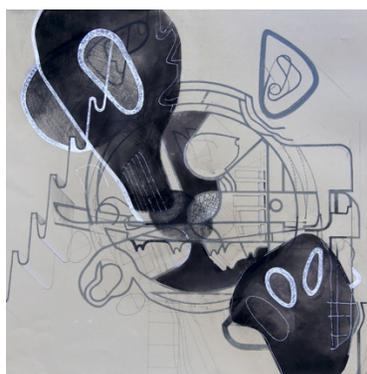
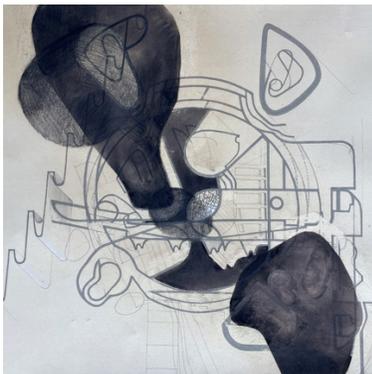
After Architecture explores architecture as a mutable condition shaped by water, unregulated growth, and weathering. In the drawings, architecture appears as matter permeated by time, where forms flow and lose their contours. The plaster model reinforces this understanding by allowing the material's own fragility and erosion to play an active role in the work.

This essay accompanies the work as a reflection on the questions embedded in the artistic practice. Central to the project is an understanding of drawing as a form of knowledge, in which insight is not formulated in advance but emerges through processes of repetition, material resistance, and loss of control. Method is inseparable from the project's thematic concerns: for us, the collective mode of working constitutes the very site where architecture's conditions after flooding and dissolution can be examined.

INTELLIGENT DRAWINGS – ONE PERSON'S ERROR, ANOTHER'S TRUTH

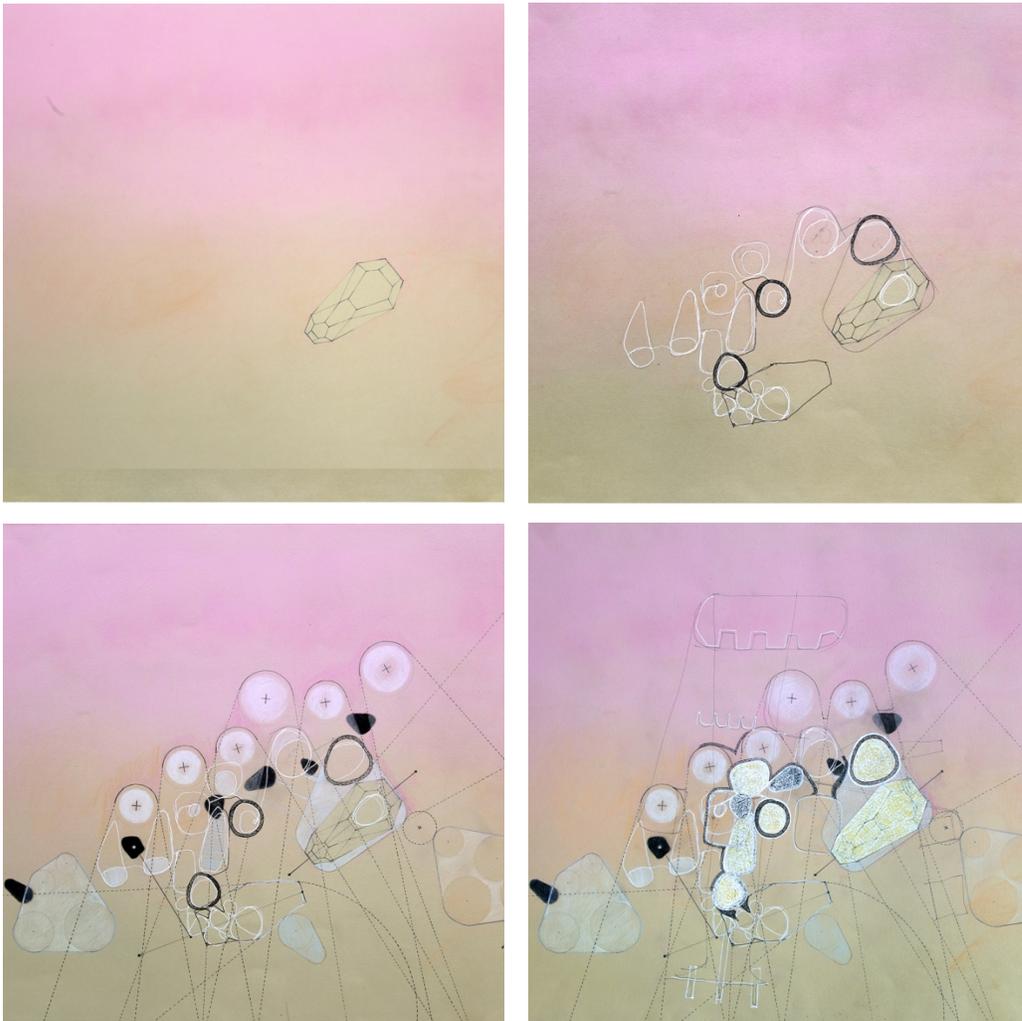
'The drawings are smarter than we are' is our mantra – an echo of Gerhard Richter's statement, "My paintings are much smarter than I am,"¹ and of Josefine Klougart's "my text is smarter than I am."² Our drawings function as a form of knowledge that cannot be reduced to fixed intention or prior understanding. They are neither sketches in a traditional sense nor preliminary studies for another project, but constitute an investigative field in their own right, in which architectural thinking unfolds over time and through the inherent resistance of techniques and materials.

The shared drawing process is central to this understanding. By repeatedly drawing on top of each other's marks, intention shifts from the individual idea toward a relational field. Forms emerge, disappear, and re-emerge in new variations, without any single gesture being identifiable as governing. What may appear as an error in one hand can, in the other, become a productive trace carried further into the drawing.



Drawing thus becomes a site where thinking takes place in and through action. Knowledge develops through repetition, displacement, and transformation of form; it does not move linearly toward a goal, but circles and returns. The drawing retains traces of this movement and therefore does not contain a single, unified meaning, but an open structure in which multiple readings can coexist.

This understanding of drawing as a form of knowledge aligns with an aesthetic mode of thinking in which the artwork is not primarily evaluated according to its motif or representational precision, but according to its capacity to bring forth a world of its own. As Josefine Klougart has formulated it, every artwork mirror nature's generative principle by establishing a self-contained space in which relations, materiality, and experience emerge in a form that remains fundamentally unfinished³.



ARCHITECTURE IN DISSOLUTION

With the title *After Nature*, Josefine Klougart curated an exhibition at the Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek in 2023–24 that explored humanity’s relationship with nature through the lens of art. Nature, as we once knew it, no longer exists, she wrote, and examined both its beauty and its disappearance in our contemporary reality.⁴ Our title carries a deliberate reference to Klougart and opens a related question: whether architecture, as we have known it, is also in the process of disappearing – and how its beauty and dissolution might be examined today.

At first glance, architecture appears to be thriving. It presents itself as a tangible reality that generates market value, functions as an object of investment, and is often framed as part of the solution to future demographic, energy, and welfare challenges. In Copenhagen, thousands of new housing units, public transport systems, and extensive infrastructural projects are being planned, not least with the purpose of keeping water out of buildings and public space. In this sense, architecture very much exists.

At the same time, architecture’s role and future are marked by growing uncertainty. Calls for building stop, green transition, and changing climatic, political, and economic conditions destabilize the fundamental premises of architecture. Despite its visible presence in society, our understanding of architecture is increasingly open to negotiation. Just as the nature–culture dichotomy is widely perceived as insufficient, *After Architecture* investigates how established distinctions between architecture and landscape, figure and ground, are losing their explanatory power.

Taking Klougart’s exhibition as a point of departure, we are inspired to examine architectural dissolution as an artistic, aesthetic, and organizational concern. We engage with the concrete reality that lies ahead. It is vividly described in Louise Fogh Hansen’s article “The Little Deluge,”⁵ which recounts a “historically large cloudburst” hitting eastern Jutland and offering a glimpse of a future in which Danes will increasingly have to contend with water – water falling from above, seeping up from below, and pressing in from the sides; water in basements and on fields turned into mud.

In short, we will have a wet country. Water is already one of architecture’s major challenges, and efforts to keep it outside the building envelope, foundations stable and dry, and houses free from flooding are fundamental characteristics of construction in our latitudes. If our understanding of architecture is expanded to include infrastructure, dikes, dams, and stormwater systems appear as massive defensive structures against the wet element.

As a discipline and in public discourse, we have already seen numerous visualisations of wet future scenarios, just as science produces qualified maps showing which areas will be flooded and when. With *After Architecture*, however, we examine these conditions through artistic methods. By incorporating complexity and unpredictability into both method and motif, we seek to evoke imaginaries of an architecture that may have to give up, dissolve, and change character – and to imagine what expressions, geometries, forms, and organisations might emerge instead.

ORNAMENTATION

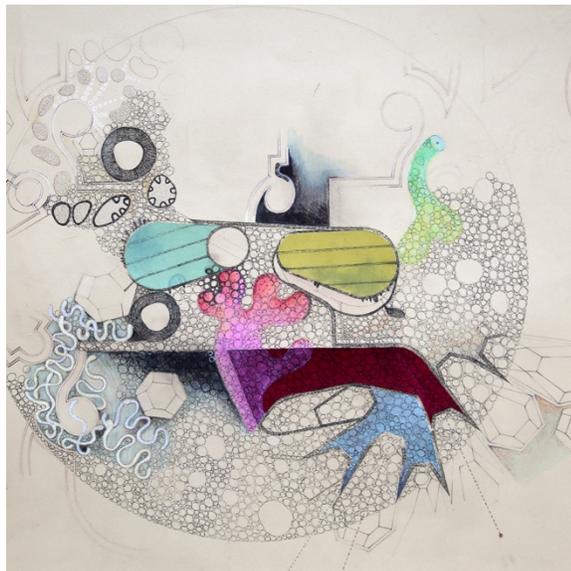
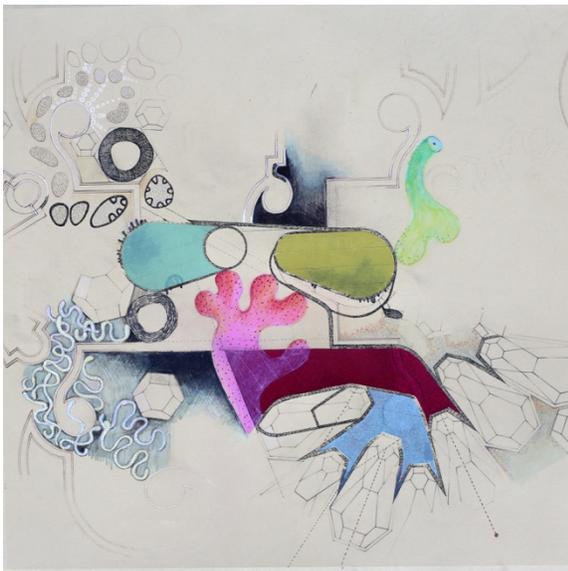
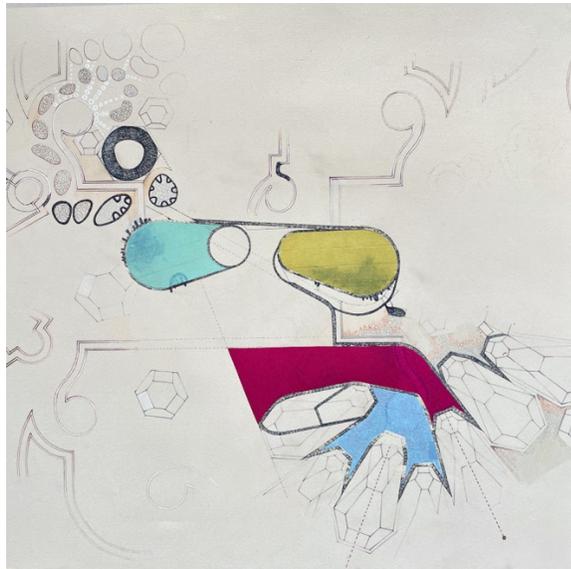
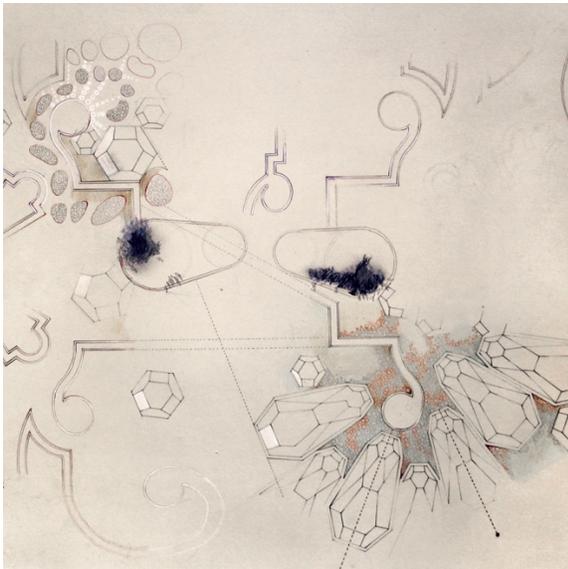
When architecture can no longer be sustained as a stable form, other principles of coherence and order become necessary. In *After Architecture*, ornament emerges as such a principle. In modernism, ornament was often dismissed as superficial and merely decorative, whereas in, for example, Baroque architecture it was an integral component. In our work, ornament arises both as a result of the working process itself and through the incorporation of fragments from the plant world and from Baroque modes of stylised nature.

In nature, ornament is not an optional addition, but a fundamental condition. Repetition, variation, and abundance are not exceptions, but ways in which the world organises itself. Surfaces differentiate, patterns emerge, repeat, and shift without submitting to an overarching plan. In this sense, nature is always already decorative. In our drawings, ornament functions in a corresponding way as a structuring principle. Repeated motifs and patterns organise the drawing without consolidating it into a stable whole. The Danish writer Theis Ørntoft writes of ornamentation as a mode of meaning-making. “Humanity has always decorated its world. Since the beginning of time [...] Why did we begin to do so? Why did we retreat into stories? Why did we fold the world into patterns and narratives? Weaving lives into myths and ornaments. Decorating weapons. Decorating life. Meaning as ornamentation. Something that conceals emptiness.”⁶

We, too, find a narrative in ornament. When imagining a flooded world, it makes sense to imagine architecture yielding to nature – working with it rather than against it, and learning from its principles of organisation and construction. Here we perhaps diverge from Ørntoft. For us, ornament does not conceal emptiness; it grows out of it. In this emerging ornament lies a possible understanding of how architecture in a wet world might take form.

A WET LAND, WET TECHNIQUES – INSPIRATION FROM SURREALIST METHODS

Let us explain how the drawings are made in concrete terms. The process begins with Anne selecting specific motifs from Jacob’s archive of drawings—typically fragments of curved sequences or smaller organic figures taken from larger, composite works. The selection takes place without Jacob’s involvement, allowing the original drawings’ meanings to be displaced and partially lost. At the same time, section drawings are extracted from our shared reservoir of three-dimensional computer drawings. Through nearly ten years of collaboration, we have built up an extensive archive of digital models, which themselves have emerged through the recombination of earlier works.



The fragment from Jacob's drawing and the section drawing are combined into a digital collage, which is printed on ordinary photocopier paper. Acetone transfer is then used to transfer the collage to the final drawing surface – a thick paper of a pale grey-brown tone. Acetone transfer is a simple and inefficient technique: colours are lost and motifs incomplete. The fragmented, blurred imprint then forms the starting point for the drawing process itself, during which the drawing changes hands repeatedly.

Both of us can recognise traces of earlier motifs – Jacob from his own drawings and Anne from the process – but we also exploit the drawing's unfinished and contingent character to invent new forms. We allow the embedded 'intelligence' of the drawing to guide the process. If the drawing appears too fragmented, larger fields of colour or hatching are used to bind it together. If a motif, by contrast, becomes too dominant, it is dissolved by drawing over it or covering it with tape.

From September 2025 to January 2026, the National Gallery of Denmark (SMK) presented the exhibition *Surrealism on Paper*. For the surrealists, who emerged as a movement in France in the 1920s in response to the atrocities of the First World War, drawing became a central tool for questioning the world as it was known and the ways in which it was represented. Rather than illustrating a given reality, the surrealists used drawing as an experimental field in which meaning, coherence, and intention could be suspended.⁷

The exhibition offered insight into surrealism's playful experiments and collective modes of production. We visited the exhibition together and we immersed ourselves in the works, indulging in their excesses and experimental freedom: a treasure trove of collective, control-abandoning processes in which meanings, structures, scales, and motifs are playfully and experimentally juxtaposed without being subordinated to a unified whole. Beyond serving as a mental catalogue of techniques that can be activated in our own work, the exhibition also provided an occasion for methodological reflection on *After Architecture*.

Surrealist drawings are often without plot, orientation, or closure, precisely because they are not produced on the basis of a well-defined intention, but in order to unfold a process. Automatic drawing, *cadavre exquis*, and other collective drawing practices rely on simple creative constraints to propel the drawing forward. The suspension of the artist's deliberate intention is a key operation⁸. Recognizable motifs – a figure, a face – often emerge, but they do not function as organizing wholes. Instead, the heterogeneous elements tend to undermine any unified reading⁹, often provoking humorous or unsettling responses in the viewer.

The drawings in *After Architecture* likewise emerge through a series of techniques and actions. The alternating act of drawing on each other's work renders both process and result unpredictable. In addition, we employ our own form of automation, in which the drawing hand blindly follows flowing movements, applies repetitive marks, or deliberately misreads boundaries. We attempt, so to speak, to invent what might be called *wet techniques*.

At the same time, recognizable motifs appear: geometric configurations that can be read as constructions – not necessarily conventional buildings, but inhabitable structures; natural elements such as seaweed, seeds, and plants; and historical references, for instance Lauritz de Thurah's Baroque garden design at Gl. Holtegaard. These elements function as fragments within a field in which architectural forms remain in motion.

Architecture is usually represented as a tangible physical reality – figure, mass, and materiality – and drawn accordingly in plans, sections, and visualisations that position the building as an object within its context. In *After Architecture*, we instead seek to automate a drawing process in which figure and mass dissolve and fragments are recomposed in new ways. On this basis, we recognise a clear methodological affinity with surrealist drawing practices.

BIOLOGY AND MIMICRY

Beyond the technical and methodological affinity with Surrealist drawing practices, biology functions as a central source of inspiration in *After Architecture*. In the essay "*The Biology of Dreams – Surrealism and Nature*", art historian Emil Leth Meilvang describes how Surrealist artists, across differing positions, were united by a desire to dissolve the boundaries between the organic and the inorganic, the living and the lifeless.¹⁰



This ambition resonates in *After Architecture*, where architecture no longer stands in opposition to biological processes but enters into them. The forms and motifs that emerge in the drawings often evoke biological associations, partly through recognisable organic elements and partly because the drawing process itself seeks to mimic biological principles of growth. Rather than understanding architecture as an autonomous and stable object separated from nature and biology, the drawings articulate an architecture that mimics its surroundings. In this respect, the project aligns with Surrealism's interest in mimicry, which Roger Caillois described as a condition in which the boundaries between figure and environment dissolve, and form relinquishes its autonomy in favour of a surrender to the world.¹¹

When form is no longer maintained as an autonomous structure but instead mimics and adapts to its surroundings, the logic of the drawing process also shifts. Connections emerge between the drawings as a form of slow growth, where forms, types, and motifs migrate from one drawing to another and take root across the work as a whole. These connections can be understood as a slow, unregulated growth – akin to the botanist Ken Thompson’s evocative description of weeds: plants that are not necessarily unwanted, but that grow where they were not planned.¹² The drawings in *After Architecture* work with such unruly forms: traces, seeds, and shoots that arise in the interstices between intentions and techniques and are carried forward into new contexts.

AFTER ARCHITECTURE

After Architecture is developed as an artistic research project in which drawing functions as a site of knowledge rather than representation. Through a collective and unfinished practice, the project investigates how architecture may be conceived as a condition in motion and transformation.

The drawings do not point directly toward a new architectural typology, nor do they offer solutions to the challenges from which they emerge. Instead, they operate as an open field in which the conditions of architecture can be examined. Through a loss of control, a form of knowledge arises that cannot be reduced to intention or plan, but instead unfolds in and through the process itself – in repetitions, displacements, and modes of growth that are not fully governed.

After Architecture concerns the dissolution of architecture. We understand the drawings as hopeful: as a potential for an architecture that does not merely seek to resist transformation, but that may also find form by entering into biological and material processes. Perhaps that is the message the plaster figure has for us.

Notes

- ¹ Gerhard Richter, quoted in “An Artist,” *The Brooklyn Rail*, June 2020, <https://brooklynrail.org/2020/06/criticspage/An-Artist/> (accessed January 14, 2026).
- ² Klougart, Josefine. *Samtale om natur, æstetik og litteratur* [Conversation about Nature, Aesthetics and Literature]. Public conversation, Gentofte Bibliotek, 6 November 2025.
- ³ Josefine Klougart, *Efter Naturen* [*After Nature*, excerpt; our translation], in *Poetik* (Copenhagen: Gladiator, 2024), 311, 314, 318.
- ⁴ “Efter Naturen,” Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek, <https://glyptoteket.dk/udstillinger/tidligere-udstillinger/efter-naturen> (accessed January 14, 2026).
- ⁵ Louise Fogh Hansen, “Den lille Syndflod,” *Weekendavisen Idéer*, October 19, 2023 (our translation).
- ⁶ Theis Ørntoft, *Solar* (Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 2018), 43.
- ⁷ “Surrealism on paper,” Statens Museum for Kunst, <https://www.smk.dk/exhibition/surrealisme/> (accessed January 14, 2026).
- ⁸ Thomas Lerballe, “Malerens Endeligt,” in *Surrealisme på Papir*, The National Gallery of Denmark and Strandberg Publishing, 2025, 35.
- ⁹ Thomas Lerballe, “Malerens Endeligt,” in *Surrealisme på Papir*, The National Gallery of Denmark and Strandberg Publishing, 2025, 42.
- ¹⁰ Emil Leth Meilvang, “Drømmenes biologi: Surrealismen og naturen,” in *Surrealisme på Papir*, exhibition catalogue for *The National Gallery of Denmark*, edited by Astrid la Cour et al. (Copenhagen: Strandberg Publishing, 2025).
- ¹¹ For a discussion of Roger Caillois’s concept of mimetism in relation to surrealism, see Emil Leth Meilvang, “Drømmenes biologi: Surrealismen og naturen,” in *Surrealisme på Papir* (Copenhagen: Strandberg Publishing, 2025).
- ¹² Ken Thompson, *The Book of Weeds: How to Deal with Plants That Behave Badly* (London: Dorling Kindersley, 2009).

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BIOs:

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His research and artistic practice focus on architecture and representation, with particular emphasis on artistic methodology. He works across multiple media, including painting, drawing, model-making, and graphic techniques.

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