

Face-to-face: the story of the Baltic Exchange

Museum of Estonian Architecture

Eesti Arhitektuurimuseum

(6 May – 5 June 2016)



The monumental kinetic installation by Maarja Kask and Ralf Lööke of Salto Architects and artist Neeme Külm at the Museum of Estonian Architecture tells the story of a building that has lost its place. The visitors will be able for the first time to stand face-to-face with the fragment of the facade of the Baltic Exchange, a building which has stirred a good deal of controversy among the Estonian public.

The historical Exchange building in London was heavily damaged in a bomb attack and thus deprived of its site and context. Since 2007, when Estonian businessmen bought the salvaged parts of the Exchange, various efforts have been made to give new life to the building combining its façade with several new real estate developments. So far the façade fragments have waited for almost a decade in shipping containers in the port of Paldiski, in north-west Estonia.

Having addressed the issues of site-specificity already before, various authors have been intrigued by the story of the building with its unusual fate and detached fragments. Few monuments have undergone so many changes in context. But what about a building that loses its original site? How should connections with a new environment be created? Who is to pass judgement on the value of a piece of architecture? What value is there in salvaging a building? How do we develop emotional ties with architectural symbols and what role do such ties play as a means of exerting influence in society and politics?

In the exhibition the visitors will be able to stand face-to-face with the historic building's pediment, which has been arbitrarily displaced by terrorists, businessmen and now architects and artists. The sculptures symbolise the eminence of the British Empire and its maritime merchandise. In the center, the most prominent position is held by Goddess Britannia, a mythical female personification of the British Isles who became one of the state symbols during the Victorian Era.

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