



THE ARCHITECTURE
OF BATHING

Body, Landscape, Art

CHRISTIE PEARSON

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13.18 Pia Lindman, *Public Sauna*, 2000, PS1 Contemporary Art Center. Artist's image. Participatory performance, materials variable. Courtesy of the artist Pia Lindman and MoMA PS1, NY, 2000. Photograph Grady Gerbracht.

Finnish-born artist Pia Lindman brings a critical eye to North American attitudes to the body in her projects and writings while she was a visiting student. She describes the Finnish sauna:

a sensual yet non-sexual space, where corporeality is accepted as a shared human condition, existing without sexual politics. Bathers share the vulnerability of nakedness . . . socially constructed positions are left behind with the clothing . . . saunas are perceived as truly democratic public forums where corporeality is included as part of public discourse.¹³

By contrast, she goes on to describe a health club sauna in America she used while residing there as “a Foucauldian play of surveillance. . . . Silence and paranoia dominated the

space.”¹⁴ The American women lacked a sense of collectivity and “sisterhood,” which could be a possible source of political power. An early project at an American health club was a staring performance from a clear glass sauna in an effort to confront other sauna users’ lack of social engagement. For her 2000 installation of a public sauna in the courtyard of the New York City museum MoMA PS1, she brought the environment of the bath into art space. Dressed in a pseudo-medical costume, she received the gallery-going participants and helped them take a sauna in a small portable unit screened off by a crimson velvet curtain. This separation dramatized the preference for solitary bathing, and fear of other bodies. Its relative absurdity was evidenced by the fact that the steam and heat distribution in the whole space required cooperation from both sides. In her excellent essay analyzing the projects and the reactions she was faced with, she determined that the social difficulty that seemed to arise from puritan morality around sexual difference in America was only superficial. The major tensions centered on race, class, and economics, as capitalism’s structural violence of segregation and isolation was revealed in her temporary bathing theater.

"This engaging volume has no peer. I know of no other work of its scope or mission. If your architectural interest is communal bathing, this is your book."

LEONARD KOREN, author of *Making WET: The Magazine of Gourmet Bathing* and *Undesigning the Bath*

"This unique and impressive publication explores a dizzying array of bathing architectures, traversing buildings, landscapes, people, practices, theories, and art. At once detailed, beguiling, and thought-provoking, Pearson's polyamorous engagement with bathing lets the reader both learn and take delight."

IAIN BORDEN, Vice-Dean Education and Professor of Architecture & Urban Culture, The Bartlett, University College London

"Christie Pearson's *The Architecture of Bathing* is an enthusiastic, engaged, and adventurous journey through the hydraulic world. With gusto and refined physical knowledge she guides the reader through the architecture of the senses, a field neglected for ages and badly needed today."

THOMAS A. P. VAN LEEUWEN, author of *The Springboard in the Pond*

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