*Skivevej 13* in Selde

To begin with, we have to go back to 2013, where a small group of residents from Selde insisted that art should be included as part of an ongoing EU-funded project on the future of rural villages. The residents of Selde recalled how artists, and in particular the artist Richard Winter, had over the years brought life and vitality to the area, contributing to the social life of the village through both his art and his presence.

The group from Selde contacted the Aarhus Academy of Art and artists Birgitte Ejdrup Kristensen and Lene Noer where hired as a team; Lene as Head of a teaching program on Art in the Public Space and Birgitte, tasked with creating a work in the public space in Selde.

On a cold day in February, we visited, with the students, the village that we would come to spend, many other, long cold days in, over the following icy spring. One of the first things we encountered in our conversations with people in the village was that many felt hurt and belittled by a feature in a Danish television program, “Money”. This particular program had singled out a specific house in Selde, namely, the empty and dilapidated house at Skivevej 13.

Inspired by Theaster Gates work *12 Ballads for Huguenot House[[1]](#endnote-1)* we were on the lookout for a house that could be transformed so that it could be both an art installation and artists residency. But research quickly revealed that the house at Skivevej 13 was only suitable for demolition and that there were no other suitable vacant houses in the village. The proposal, therefore, had to be reassessed.

In March, the day arrived where the final concept was to be presented to the residents after many months of visits, coffee mornings and homemade cakes. The residents fell silent as we detailed our plans for *Skivevej 13.* It was, to put it mildly, very far from what they had imagined. Fortunately, just before we began, the good Seldeman Kjeld Petersen had opportunely stated; “Now I hope you are going to present something we couldn’t have thought of ourselves!” So the citizens’ veto was not used.

We succeeded (where all others had failed) in buying the house Skivevej 13 for a reasonable price. We visited the owner Eva Tved and discovered that she was a very fine, but locally overlooked artist. We arranged an exhibition of her paintings at the Aarhus Academy of Art[[2]](#endnote-2) and were allowed to buy the house for the price demanded by the bank and which we could just about afford. Following negotiations with Skive municipality we received permission to demolish the house and fill the foundations with rubble. Local volunteer tradesman, led by Bjarne Christensen, began this work while students Pia Møller-Light, Faranak Sohi, Leonardo Sagastuy and Anne Katrine Graah Rasmussen together with a group of students from the Experience Economy, Aalborg University conducted interviews, created citizen-engaging works and activities, published public shares, directed a mockumentary and planned a wake with sound installations in the house, on the eve of its demolition. We became aware, at an early stage, that frequent activities and physically presence were necessary to keep the momentum going.

In connection with the demolition, the base of the house was reconstructed in brick and painted white. The former rooms in the house and the doorways are marked by slight variations in the level of the new base. Today, the work stands as a contemporary art monument on the roadside leading through the village and at the same time constitutes a stage, where a wide variety of activities can take place.

At the outset, the number of residents enamoured with the project was tiny – ten or fifteen persons at most. And the hard-core group who had set the wheels in motion, Herman Jensen, Gunhild Juhr and Margrete Møller had to persevere when the more negative elements expressed their views on “The Plinth”, as the work had quickly been dubbed by locals. But as the students activities unfolded, more and more people began to participate and support grew. And at the actual unveiling, some 150 local residents joined the invited guests from elsewhere, at the red and white checked tablecloths on tables in the middle of Skivevej, and ate whole roasted pig and celebrated. A local youth band performed on the plinth, and a group of residents presented a sketch about the house’s past as Tatol and local gossip centre. Many had become involved in the days leading up to this; flagpoles had been set up along the street, front gardens had been weeded and everyone who could, had joined in. We learnt from this that combining citizen-involvement and contemporary art primarily takes time and requires persistence and familiarisation. And that many would like to participate and help, if they were asked directly.

Subsequently, full-page articles about the work and the village appeared in several national newspapers. These articles rebuffed the unfair picture of the village that DR’s (Danish State Television) “Money” program had presented. Which in turn helped to appease some of the sceptics. The project also led to a number of new community-driven initiatives, such as the *Seldeco* shop which serves coffee and sells local handicrafts. Visual artist Marianne Jørgensen subsequently realised her work *Utopia* and continues the engagement with contemporary art in Selde as initiator and curator of *Sculpture Village Selde*.

Lene Noer and Birgitte Ejdrup Kristensen, 2019.

1. Theaster Gates *12 Ballads for Huguenot House,* Dokumenta (13), 2012 in Kassel [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. Eva Tved died shortly after her exhibition at the Aarhus Academy of Art [↑](#endnote-ref-2)