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'For me, France
is all about Paris;
England, it's about
the countryside.
To me every English
person is a gardener'
Luis Laplace, p66

'If wit is the unlikely
copulation of ideas and
forms together, then
Stirling was the most
sparkling intelligence
of his generation'
Charles Jencks, p96

'Merrifield has
constructed a robust
narrative whose
only problem
seems to be that it
is complete fiction'
Austin Williams, p106

'Gorilla masks worn
by the Guerrilla Girls
are displayed under the
poster asking: do women
have to be naked to get
into the Met. Museum?'
Jessica Kelly, p107

'No one at Rogers Stirk
Harbour can afford
to live in the flats they
design – yet it is these
forays into urban
think-tanking that
Rogers seems to want
to be remembered for'
Owen Hatherley, p114

Rural Somerset's bucolic idyll is the unexpected setting for a new gallery of contemporary art that perceptively unites buildings, works and landscape

LAND ART

Art gallery,
Bruton,
Somerset,
England,
Luis Laplace







REPORT

ISABEL ALLEN

Durslade Farm in Bruton, Somerset, was conceived as a romanticised vision of a rural way of life. The cluster of stables, piggeries, granaries and threshing barns sits artfully amid woodland and fields. The odd telltale flourishes – neo-Gothic windows; stone coats of arms – give the game away. This is not your typical working farm, but a model farm, built by the Berkeley family in 1768 as a Picturesque view from their family home.

A quarter of a century later Iwan and Manuela Wirth, founders of international art gallery Hauser & Wirth, were seduced first by the Somerset countryside and then by Durslade's exaggerated pastoral charms. So much so, that they moved to Somerset, and later bought the farm.

The Wirths commissioned the architect Luis Laplace to transform the cluster of derelict buildings into Hauser & Wirth Somerset, the latest outpost of an empire that includes galleries in Zurich, London and New York. Hauser & Wirth Los Angeles is due to open in 2016. Bruton, a tiny town nestled in Somerset's bucolic Brue Valley,

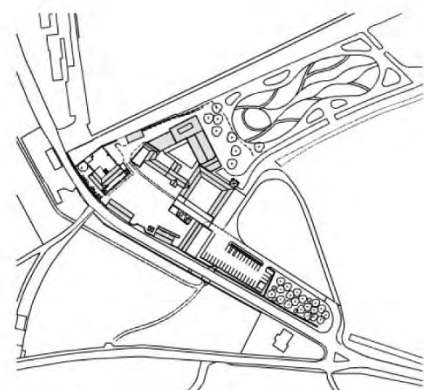
seems an incongruous choice. But for Laplace, who was born in Argentina, made his name in New York, and is currently based in France, the choice of location makes absolute sense. 'For me, France is all about Paris; England, it's about the countryside. To me every English person is a gardener. The English have such a passion for the land!

The brief for the project was admirably succinct: 'absolute freedom with no compromise'. Laplace's response was deft but low-key. Existing buildings have been patched up; two new galleries have been designed to complement the sense and scale of a traditional working farm. His big move was to cluster the collection of buildings around an intimate cloistered courtyard inspired by the walled forecourt of the 18th-century Spread Eagle Inn on the neighbouring Stourhead Estate and the medieval cloisters at Wells Cathedral some 13 miles away.

'I wanted to do something very connected with the place, with Somerset,' says Laplace. 'I was inspired by the extraordinary light and the very intense, dramatic skies. I didn't want to go from one gallery straight to another. Every time we move from one space to the

Art gallery,
Bruton,
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Luis Laplace

- 1. (Opening spread, left) brass sculpture by Hans Josephsohn, *Untitled*, 1970 / 1973, nonchalantly surveys the grounds
- 2. (Opening spread, right) the listed 18th-century threshing barn with its striking rafters was sympathetically restored



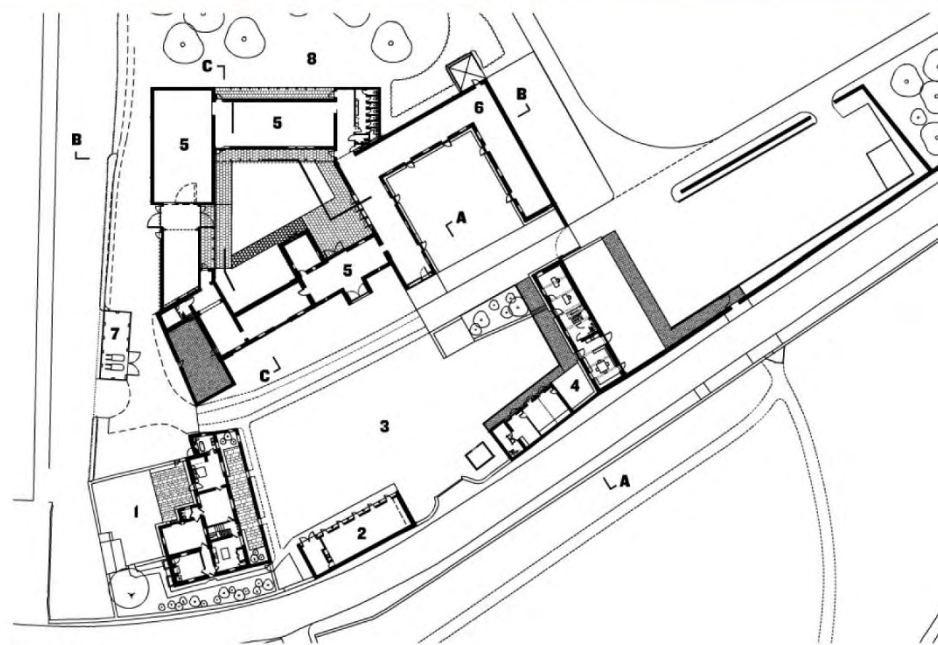
site plan



3. Nestled in the bucolic Somerset landscape, Durslade Farm represents a historic pastoral idyll
4. Sculptures stand larger than life in the courtyard of the 18th-century threshing barn. From left to right: Thomas Houseago, *Large Lamp I*, 2011; Subodh Gupta, *Untitled*, 2008; Paul McCarthy, *Ship Adrift*, *Ship of Fools*, 2010-11



- 1 farmhouse (artists' accommodation)
- 2 educational space
- 3 farmyard
- 4 offices
- 5 gallery
- 6 restaurant
- 7 workshop
- 8 meadow garden



ground floor plan







next there is what I call a hinge space that connects you to the outdoors; that reminds us we are in Somerset.'

Oversized glazed doors – built to the scale of the original barn doors – offer views inwards to the sculpture courtyard and outwards to working farmland and rolling hills. To the north the galleries overlook a perennial meadow; a threshold space between the galleries and the agricultural landscape, designed by Dutch landscape designer Piet Oudolf. Cut through with pathways, the meadow gives a nod to classical garden design, but is tempered, subverted and softened by the crazy collage of colour and the easy exuberance of the plants.

Two somewhat surreal guardians keep watch over this kaleidoscope dreamscape: a pair of black granite benches shaped like giant eyes by the French-American artist and sculptor Louise Bourgeois, and an enormous, slightly tipsy-looking distorted clock face perched atop a steel pillar by Albanian artist Anri Sala. The sculptures look slightly surprised – as though they themselves can't quite work out how they came to land in this sleepy corner of Somerset. The overall effect is that the landscape feels alive; like the animated pleasure grounds of early children's television. As though Zebedee will bounce into view and announce it's 'Time for Bed'.

The gallery spaces themselves are neutral, a deliberate foil both for the richness of the landscape and for the ever-changing exhibitions that are their raison d'être. Laplace set out 'to be honest, to be truthful to form. To think "What would the farmer

'Durslade is not so much about putting art on a pedestal, but rather about relationships and connections'

have done?'" Existing buildings were patched up; the new galleries are crafted from a no-nonsense palette of precast concrete lintels and jambs, brick walls and profiled aluminium roofs.

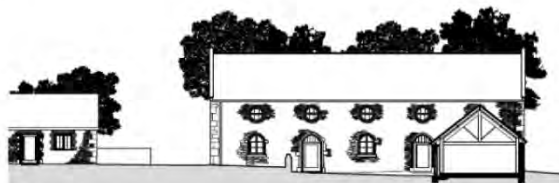
'Some architects want to put their own stamp on the space,' says Laplace. 'In my head it is very clear. I want to allow the artists space to respond.' And so they have. He is thrilled, if a little taken aback, by the way the inaugural exhibition – a series of anarchic, exuberant site-specific installations by British artist Phyllida Barlow – invades, colonises and overwhelms the space. 'My little brain thought "Ah yes, little drawings will be nice in here"'. But this artist, she challenges all that. I like the way she challenges architecture. She works against architecture.'

There are moments where the boundaries between art and architecture are less distinct. Artists Björn and Oddur Roth, the son and grandson of the late Swiss artist Dieter Roth, have transformed the former milking shed into a radical exercise in salvage-yard chic. Pickings from local reclamation yards have been crammed into a super-dense three-dimensional collage that is simultaneously a 30-metre long abstract sculpture and a working bar. It raises issues about the relationship between high and low



Art gallery, Bruton, Somerset, England, Luis Laplace

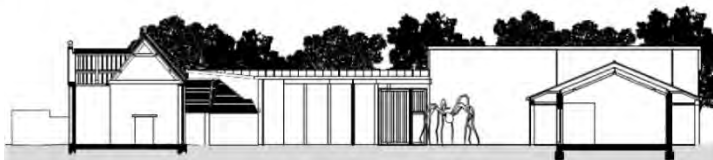
- 5. Landscape designer Piet Oudolf – known for Manhattan's High Line – integrated planting with the sober architecture**
- 6. The original barn doors were given over to full-height glazing. They open onto the courtyard and the surrounding meadows**
- 7. The gallery's reception and shop are housed in the former cowshed**



section AA



section BB



section CC

