

Jan Kattein, who brings flexibility, circularity and colour into regeneration



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Words: Isabella Priest



Social architecture is a driving force for Jan Kattein, whose schemes to revive and regenerate bring a burst of human colour to some lost and gloomy sites. His practice is commended in the MacEwen Awards 2024 for a lifetime of architecture for the common good

Jan Kattein had worn his red trainers to the photoshoot at Angel Yard for this profile. They provided the perfect match to the reclaimed London bus that's used as a meeting space at the entrepreneur hub. When we got to the site a man was busy spraying one of the walls – left white by Kattein's team to save costs – with a multi-coloured graphical artwork that matched his scarf too. It was an overcast day in early January, but the photographic opportunities with Kattein, poker-faced with his grey coat and colourful shoes, veered on the surreal and fantastical – like scenes filmed in a studio for Wes Anderson. Except that Angel Yard is in prosaic Tottenham, with 1960s residential blocks looming over the low-rise redevelopment of former garages.

Kattein was one of my unit tutors at the Bartlett 15 years ago. Those were his early days of tutoring. The unit was based around an imagined place called Skoutown, which had burgeoned into a city called East. Already Kattein was leaving a trail of students with their own approaches, particularly to colour, light-heartedness and flexibility. Architecture then was only tentatively becoming less static, more temporal. Look inside the workplace units at Angel Yard and, like Kattein at the centre of the frame, it is the people who occupy the building – the bubble tea shop, gift card illustrator, lashes salon, hairdresser and another architectural practice – that make it zing. The same goes for Kattein's previous scheme, Blue House Yard in nearby Wood Green – only in Tottenham the creatives are mixed in with start-up solicitor and accounting firms, among others. Everyone is under the age of 30 when they sign up. Kattein describes this approach as 'leaving room to let stuff happen', whether that's in the design process or the final result. Under the timber and

multicoloured canvas around these spaces have started to nest and evolve

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