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The art of An Te Liu tells a wry tale about intimately linked childhoods: his own in Canada during the 1970s, and that of modernism earlier in the 20th century. In the installations, assemblages and graphic works he has shown in Canada, the United States and abroad since the outset of his career in the late 1990s, Liu has recalled these vexed, various passages of time with affection and dry humour, and with penetrating irony. Marcel Duchamp's deadpan readymades make Liu's philosophical objects possible. Liu is wise to the mixed blessings of the modernist moment, as Duchamp was long ago, yet free enough of Duchampian cynicism to cherish them anyway. He even allows himself some nostalgia, though his creative sensibility belongs firmly to our time—to the sceptical side, that is, of the ambiguous temporal divide that separates us from the fabulous accomplishments and dizzying delusions of the youthful modern moment.

This abyss had not yet fully opened in 1971, when Liu (then four years old) and his parents decamped from a house in Taiwan crowded with antiques to a modern apartment in Toronto. The artist remembers his fascination with the new world into which he had been parachuted, one of brightly lit supermarkets, vast stores crammed with gleaming white and silver home appliances, and (a little later) showrooms of flat-pack home furnishings. Canada still basked in the optimistic afterglow of Expo 67, and still enjoyed its self-advertised reputation as a liberal, unwarlike America, full of opportunity—hence its wonderful allure in those years to the elder Lius, and to myriad other immigrants from Asia, the United States and elsewhere.

But then came the oil crisis and the economic dislocations of the mid-1970s, and the onset of the decline (which continues to this day) of modernity's promises and prestige. It was in this newer time of disillusionment—the dawn of the “contemporary,” the seemingly timeless zone of consumerism and spectacle we now inhabit—that Liu grew up, and went to the University

Modern Man

AN TE LIU and the space between idea and object

BY JOHN BENTLEY MAYS

PREVIOUS PAGES: Installation view of *No Molestar* (2006) at Witte de With Center for Contemporary Art, Rotterdam

of Toronto to study art history, film and the Renaissance. In the 1990s, he concluded his education at the cutting-edge Southern California Institute of Architecture (SCI-Arc) in Los Angeles.

Not that there was much public demand at the time for any architectural edge, cutting or otherwise. What was getting built was routine (the most distinctive work of Frank Gehry, Zaha Hadid, Daniel Libeskind and Rem Koolhaas lay in the future), and the economic recession of the early 1990s rolled on and on, making the prospects for daring real-world architectural practice look dim. It was probably just as well that Liu had not gone to SCI-Arc to train for a conventional career in an architectural office. He was attracted, instead, by the school's emphasis on theory and speculation, the things that had captivated him as an undergraduate. So it was in the spirit of the institution and of the times—many a bright North American designer was hard at work on highly speculative “paper architecture” projects—that, in 1994, Liu plunged into an intense review of cultural modernism's trajectory, from rise to downfall to aftermath.

He read Michel Foucault (especially *Order of Things*), Roland Barthes, the Situationist Guy Debord, Walter Benjamin, and the books on cultural theory being published by the Zone collective on the American east coast. He read Peter Eisenman, but also Susan Sontag, T. S. Eliot, Gertrude Stein and the science fiction of J. G. Ballard. He watched the films of Peter Greenaway and David Lynch's *Blue Velvet*, which plumbs the spiritual darkness behind the clipped lawns and white picket fences of small-town America. He listened to John Oswald's sound compositions, looted from sources high and low, and—perhaps most important of all—he looked at Gerhard Richter's vast archive of images and things, *Atlas*.

What Liu was learning from these inquiries had less to do with subject matter than with tactics for telling stories. The narrative ploys he discovered included cross-indexing and cross-referencing between discourses of knowledge; wrenching nouns and verbs out of conventional syntax and allowing them to play off one another promiscuously (as Stein did); and fooling around subversively with the agreed-upon meanings of everyday things (as Duchamp did). This wide-ranging intellectual adventure informed Liu's first important artwork, which travelled across several disciplinary boundaries (of visual art, design and even ethnography and library science) under the passport of a master's thesis in architecture.

House Parts (1995), his prize-winning SCI-Arc thesis, was what its author called a “rumination on elements of the domestic” in 40 collages, objects and accompanying narratives. The strategy here was bricolage, as elaborated by Claude Lévi-Strauss in *The Savage Mind* (an important source for Liu) and applied to all narratives by Jacques Derrida in *Writing and Difference*—a mindfully perverse, revelatory rearrangement of fragments rescued from a “heritage which is more or less coherent or ruined,” according to Derrida. In Liu's case, the “heritage” represented in the collection of objects and texts is that of modern dwelling, in its architectural, urban, historical and narrative dimensions.

The incandescent period of research and meditation in 1994 and 1995 proved seminal. Beginning with *House Parts* and continuing to the present, Liu has engaged in a semi-worshipful, semi-sceptical celebration of modern living. “what is there not to like about modernism?” Liu asked in an unpublished 2003 text fragment. “What about spaceshots, time-space relativity, heroic abstract painting, fast dreamy cars, kitchen appliances, clean edge buildings with calder sculptures in front of them, serial music,



strange screwy narrative structures, the Helsinki Olympics, uncertainty principles and so on?... modernism brought us interesting things. the ideas were interesting too, but of course they are now outmoded, or at least the implications of the space between idea and product have changed.”

In researching this changed, charged space between objects and their representations, Liu has maintained the stance of the bricoleur. He has rummaged in the attic of technological and cultural modernity, and in the attic of his own very modern boyhood, in search of talismanic artifacts that can tell us what it meant to exist then, in circumstances both different from and weirdly similar to now. (If indeed moribund, modernity appears to be dying a very slow, elusive death.)

At the start of his public artistic career (which followed a brief, post-SCI-Arc turn as a designer in Los Angeles), for example, Liu sensed in popular air-purifying home appliances—ionizers, cleaners, humidifiers and the like—a potential to function metonymically in an expanded field of modernist mythology. Distributed like buildings in a model of a futuristic city (*Airborne*, 2000), stacked in skyscraper-esque, totemic columns (*Exchange*, 2001), or suspended in clusters from the ceiling (the brilliant

ABOVE: *Title Deed* (process sequence) 2009 latex block filler, paint and house COURTESY MKG127 PHOTO SALOME NIKURADZE

RIGHT: Installation view of *YA* (2003) at the Seoul Museum of Art





LEFT: *Exchange* 2001 56 HEPA air purification units running continuously COLLECTION SAN FRANCISCO MUSEUM OF MODERN ART PHOTO HENRY URBACH GALLERY, NEW YORK

OPPOSITE: An Te Liu in his Toronto studio, March, 2011 PHOTO GEORGE WHITESIDE

utilitarian goal of achieving “the greatest happiness for the greatest number” (see: Jeremy Bentham), as the motto was recycled and popularized by practical Victorian materialism. Liu satirizes this modernist dogma in more than one piece—most memorably in the ongoing *Pattern Language* series of “suburban wallpapers” he began fashioning in 1999. The imagery is based on aerial photographs of Levittown, a post-war cookie-cutter bedroom community on Long Island that was consciously designed to embody the modernist Benthamite principle as it applied to mass-produced housing.

Unlike the layout of tract houses in the black-and-white photographs, which is banal, efficient and tiresomely uniform, the pattern in the wallpaper is hectic and exuberant, and the colours are relentlessly cheerful. *Pattern Language*, then, makes a modern icon of

Cloud, 2008), these fully operational, buzzing electro-mechanical elements evoke memories of architectural modernism’s utopian promises to remake crowded, smoky 19th-century European cities into marvels of cleanliness and health.

We are invited by these works to reflect, in turn, on the early 20th-century cultural matrix of this architectural preoccupation: a morally mixed back-to-nature phenomenon that included the Boy Scouts and the Wandervogel movement, fresh-air treatment for tuberculosis sufferers, and an upsurge of public concern for urban slum-dwellers, but also an enthusiasm for the pseudo-science of eugenics and for city-destroying programmes of “urban renewal.” The viewer is prompted by Liu’s art to remember all of it, both the noble and the suspect, as the childhood of what we are now—still obsessed with health and wellness and fresh air (hence our ever-expanding no-smoking areas). And there is a warning here: like the early moderns in the grip of the passionate vogue for revolutionary genetic and urban engineering, we may be oblivious to the deleterious side effects of our high-minded, well-meaning hygiene initiatives.

The anti-dirt moves of early modernism were also inspired by the

“the greatest happiness for the greatest number” into an over-the-top home-decorating product for the contemporary consumer, for whom the objective is, apparently, the greatest *pleasure*—excitement, titillation, gratification—for the greatest number. (In other words, the work is a double send-up: of both the old modernist piety based on notions of efficiency and economy, and the more recent cultural hedonism that descends from it.)

Liu’s interests in domestic realities and bricolage, which began with *House Parts*, found especially interesting expression in 2009 with *Title Deed*, a work featured in a group interrogation of Torontonion suburbia called “The Leona Drive Project.” Liu was given an abandoned house slated for demolition and redevelopment—a full-sized, mass-produced modernist bungalow—to do with what he liked. He responded by stripping the very ordinary house of all its external functional excrescences (power wires, and the gas and hydro meters, for example), boarding up the windows and doors, and then painting the structure a vivid green. When Liu was through, it looked (as he intended) like a radically scaled-up Monopoly symbol for residential real estate.

This effective removal of the “found” building’s use-value transfigured it from a house into a “house”—a purely abstract sign for “houseness,”



immediately comprehensible in any culture with timber-framed construction. Moreover, Liu’s transformation of the house into a board-game item, in itself a smart, evocative play with scale and meaning à la bricolage, suggested the building’s true nature as a commodity within a very large game of its own: the complex web of rules, contracts, rituals and procedures that together compose economic modernity. This web includes mortgages, appraisals and other mechanisms of the real estate market; municipal and provincial building codes and zoning by-laws; and the regulated relationships between labour and capital, suppliers and builders, brokers and clients. Most importantly, perhaps, the network also comprehends the demands of consumers (no less exacting now than they were in the heyday of modernism), who expect that a suburban tract-house will look like the pitched-roof ideal promoted, then and now, by the real estate industry (and by storybooks and movies), and not like something else.

During the childhood of modernism, the primary, most highly focused site of such concern with dwelling was the Bauhaus, and Liu’s artistic career has thus far been a one-man version, reprise and brisk updating

of that venerable institution. Like the sum total of creative personalities gathered by Walter Gropius into the original Bauhaus at Weimar in 1919, Liu creates formally various things anchored in a concentrated consideration of domestic space and its intimacies (such as reading, relaxing under air conditioning and so on). These things include wallpaper; typographical experiments; those air-purifying sculptures; a video-installation reference to Andy Warhol’s anti-action movies of the 1960s, which documents the dust and other minute debris floating in the air of the gallery (*Matter*, 2008); and a whimsical video of his cat performing Michelangelo Antonioni’s *Blow-up* in an architectural model (*Pook X Pookie*, 2009).

Like the Bauhaus, the only thing Liu does not produce is architecture. But what he makes encircles architecture, inhabits the resonant field around it. With high imaginative vigour and a playful spirit, Liu peoples this complex territory with multivalent images that speak to us of times rich in both possibility and pathology—childhoods in light that the artist, and the rest of us, have only tentatively outgrown, if we have outgrown them at all. ■

To see additional work by An Te Liu, visit canadianart.ca/liu

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Air Apparent

An Te Liu: Man and Machine

That a collection of air-purifying units can bridge the gap between art, architecture and hygiene is just one reading of the hybrid-honed work of An Te Liu. Household appliances and objects are just one of his source materials, but it is the compositional provocations and ambiguity-laden forms and densities that keep the minds of the audience whirring.

text RODOLPHE EL-KHOURY

An Te Liu strikes a discordant note in the lecture room at the University of Toronto. In his skinny McQueen jeans, Comme des Garçons blazer and vintage riding boots he doesn't exactly blend with the other professors. They are here to introduce themselves to the graduate thesis class at the launch of the academic year. Beneath the blazer, his hooded sweatshirt boasts an integrated mask with gold lamé flames and is straight out of 'lucha libre', or Mexican wrestling. The look is slightly bizarre yet elegant, despite the Luchadores' kitsch. Indeed, Liu's sartorial flair (which not incidentally gained him a 'best dressed' accolade from the city's major newspaper), points to techniques at work in his art practice.

Transgressive Hoodie

In the early Soft no. 5, multicoloured 3M household sponges are packed into a rectangular field, and hung like a painting. The sponges are not processed or transformed. They are glued *tel quel*, with their lowly origin unapologetically laid bare. But the intention is not to provoke the high-low clash that motivates pop art. The work also diverges from postmodern pastiche in its treatment of the found object and the commitment to its formal and material qualities. Soft no. 5 is cheekily

frivolous, but with its meticulous compositional precision it also exudes the ponderous gravity of abstract art. It is also dead-serious in aligning hygiene, mass production and modernist aesthetics in tight, thought-provoking formations; the fact that it is at once flippant and serious accounts in great measure for its effectiveness. The same holds true for the clothes. Framed by the tailored elegance of the blazer, the transgressive hoodie is like the 3M sponge. It seems relevant and even compelling in its new position and redefined role. The outfit also works because it's beautiful.

Liu now takes the stage for his presentation. In elucidating his scholarly interests, he turns to naming the magazines he currently or has recently subscribed to: 032C, Vanity Fair, Monocle, Grey Room, The New Yorker, ArtForum, The Economist, Purple, Dazed & Confused, and the list goes on. It is an eclectic mix of journals, trendy zines and glossy fashion monthlies that belies any attempt to frame his core interests. The list instead maps a vast constellation of references that exceed the reach of academic disciplines. The act itself - listing the magazines in lieu of the expected formal introduction - is closer to performance than academic procedure. It is

An Te Liu
photo: William Hollingdale

Complex (Tower of Squash no.1),
2004 (background image)

Matter, 2008
Closed-circuit surveillance camera, light, airborne particulates; two projection installation over 18 day duration. Installation view, Künstlerhaus Bethanien, Berlin

Cloud, 2008
(facing page)
Air purifiers, ionizers, sterilisers, washers, humidifiers, ozone air cleaners; running continuously. Installation view, 11th Venice Biennial of Architecture
photo: Cameraphoto Arte / La Biennale di Venezia

humorous and somewhat jarring in this context. But it is effective in situating him at the intersection of different fields, underscoring the complex relationship he cultivates with his multiple interests and affiliations.

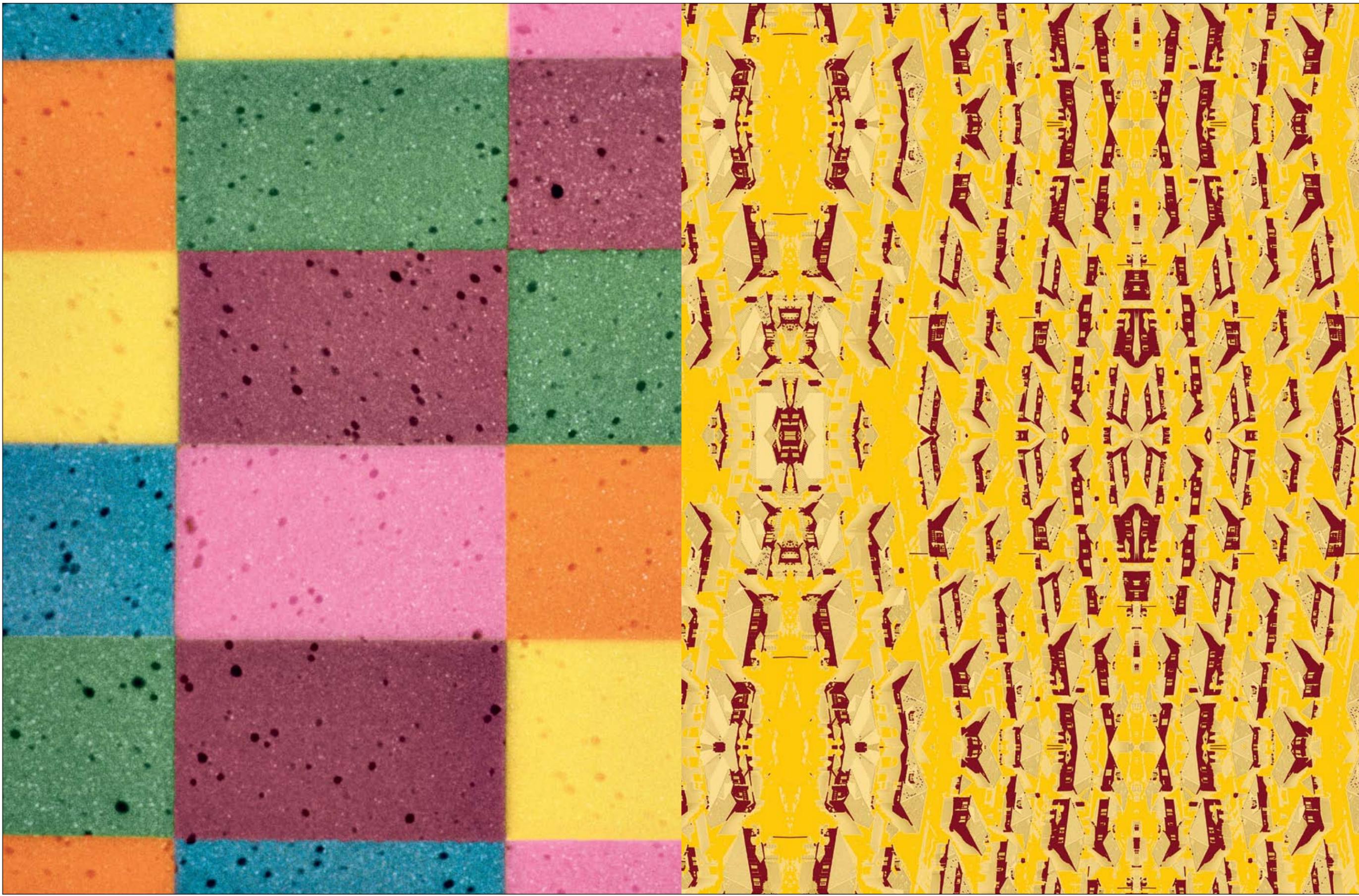
Theory and Practice

Liu trained as an architect at the Southern California Institute of Architecture (SCI-Arc) in Los Angeles at a time when the famed school's experimental orientation was most pronounced. He practiced architecture in firms in Paris, then in the office of Frank Gehry and afterwards as a founding member of the LA-based Hedge. The precocious group promptly generated acclaim for its innovative reshaping of professional practice as an alternative and collaborative enterprise. But Liu's professional career as designer was short lived. In a sudden departure to Vancouver, he inexorably moved toward architectural theory and art practice, reviving interests that hark back to his undergraduate degree in art history, Renaissance studies and film. In a short time he had solo exhibitions at the Contemporary Art Gallery in Vancouver and the Henry Urbach Gallery in New York. While his reputation was growing in the art world he was recruited and then tenured as a professor of architecture at the University

of Toronto. Although he had long forgone professional practice, he directed the graduate programme for several years until a Canada Council fellowship landed him in Berlin as an Artist in Residence.

Although his work had long since settled in galleries and museums, Liu never deserted his architectural base. Works such as *Airborne* and *Exchange* capitalise on his double expertise. Here, he exploits a fertile territory between installation art and architecture by playing with ambiguities of genre, medium and scale. Should we approach *Airborne* - a sprawling (and fully operational) assortment of air-treating appliances on a platform - as a symbolic representation or as an indexical process? Is it a scaled model of an imaginary utopian city? A Van Doesburg-inspired composition of solids in space? An homage to Hannes Meyer in a tableau of mass-produced consumer goods? A showroom display for Honeywell? A minimalist sculpture, or cluster of mechanical equipment for a new-age wellness centre in downtown Vancouver? All these readings are relevant - together they account for the ambiguity in form and the density in meaning that characterise Liu's work. *Exchange*, first exhibited at the Henry Urbach Gallery, develops similar





Untitled (Complex II), 2002
air ionizers, humidifiers, various
materials; running continuously

Exchange, 2001
(facing page)
HEPA air purification units, cords;
56 unit installation, running
continuously. Installation view,
Henry Urbach Gallery, New York

Soft Load, 1999
(previous spread, left page)
3M Rainbow Pack foam sponges

Pattern Language: Tantric (gold),
2005
(previous spread, right page)
Ultrachrome print on Tyvek

themes in the interstitial territory between architecture and art. Here, purifying HEPA appliances are assembled in columnar formation - a quasi-spiritual hypostyle hall, and a somewhat deranged one. Exchange pushes hygienic obsessions to the extreme, recycling and purifying all the air of the white cube gallery every 40 seconds.

Mechanical Swarm

Liu's most ambitious work to date was commissioned for the 2008 Venice Biennial of Architecture. Visitors to the main exhibition space at the Arsenale were greeted by the impressively looming sight - and sound - of the Cloud installation. A suspended mass of functioning domestic appliances dedicated to washing, filtering, ionising, ozonising, and sterilising air, commentators have likened it to a metabolist megastructure, an armada of starships from Battlestar Galactica, Moshe Safdie's Habitat, the amorphous designs of Luigi Colani, and El Lissitzky's Proun architecture. Some embrace its overt optimism. They appreciate it literally as environmental remediation at work, overlooking its quixotic nature - though one tree-hugging critic faults it for not using solar cells mounted on the roof as a power source. Others are fascinated and disturbed by its darker un-

dertones. In the buzzing cumulus of immaculate white plastic they see an ominous figure: a mechanical swarm at once terrifying and comforting in its stubborn and hopeless operation, descending in squadron formation upon the exhibition, with a mission to eradicate all pathogens from the air we breathe. All pick up on the provocative connections Liu draws between space, architecture, machines, hygiene, environment, and modernism: a complex map of relationships that Cloud artfully condenses into a humming icon.

Cloud and much of Liu's work is preoccupied with air, deploying machines that literally process it, incessantly sucking and pumping it back into the atmosphere. You can't see it but you can feel and smell air around Liu's installations - ionised air has a distinct odour. Air also figures conceptually in the work, beyond the palpable physical presence. It is implied in the modernist predilection for autonomous bodies in space and the corollary vision of the city as a field of atomised and hygienically isolated pavilions, a vision that stemmed largely from preoccupations with air and ventilation. Most eloquently perhaps, it is presented as a virtual absence, in the implied vacuum of outer-space where Cloud hovers.





Reconstruction (II), 2008
C-Print

Cosmic Dust

Liu's installations gain much of their potency from the invisibility of the very thing they process, and represent. Matter, exhibited recently in Berlin, takes a different approach and aims for the visibility of air. Two large-scale video projections occupy adjoining walls in the far end of the gallery space. Watching these, viewers are exposed to shining particles moving against a black background - what may seem to be stellar matter, or alternately, snow swirling in the winter sky. But one later realises that both images come from a single feed, a highly sensitive surveillance camera focused on a beam of light in the same darkened gallery, filming airborne particles that fluctuate and intensify as more visitors enter the space. One projection depicts events in real time, while the other is broadcast at half speed, creating a time lag that increases over the duration of the exhibition. The spectacle has a cosmic quality that mesmerises viewers, who don't tire of contemplat-

ing the ebbs and flows of micro dust storms that they might have created, or which traversed the space of the gallery many days earlier.

Meanwhile, back in the lecture hall, Liu picks up his bag and promptly leaves. It is a vintage '70s BOAC on-board flight bag and a staple accessory. A souvenir from the day when his family emigrated from Taiwan via Hong Kong to their new Canadian home. Style and nostalgic elegance mix with a direct reference to his immigrant family history. The memory of BOAC jumbo jets negotiating the perilous skies above Kowloon's Kai Tak airport completes the mental picture. They glide in curving and exact trajectories above the city, magically suspended in the thick humid air.

www.ante.liu.com

Jan Winkelmann

FRISCHE LUFT

Zur Arbeit von An Te Liu (CAN)

FRESH AIR

On the work of An Te Liu (CAN)

An Te Liu ist ausgebildeter Architekt und studierter Kunsthistoriker. Seine künstlerische Arbeit speist sich einerseits aus dem fundierten Wissen über diese Felder kultureller Produktion, ist andererseits aber auch von dem Unbehagen geprägt, das eine Fokussierung (im Sinne einer ausschließlichen Tätigkeit) auf nur einen dieser Tätigkeitsbereiche mit sich bringen würde.

Die Installationen und Skulpturen des Künstlers bestehen häufig aus industriell gefertigten Produkten und Geräten, die durch den Gebrauch und die Funktion in anderen als den ihnen angestammten Kontexten neue Bedeutungszuschreibungen erfahren.

Die Arbeiten mit Luftreinigungsgeräten bilden im Schaffen des Künstlers eine Art Kristallisationspunkt, an dem verschiedene inhaltliche Stränge zusammenfinden.

Die Skulptur *Airborne* (2000) kann hierbei in mehrfacher Hinsicht als exemplarisch für An Te Lius künstlerische Praxis gesehen werden. Auf einer lackierten Platte, die über dem Boden zu schweben scheint, gruppierte der Künstler unterschiedliche Modelle von Heim-Klimageräten, portablen Klimaanlage, Ionisatoren und Luftreinigern. Die Gehäuse sind allesamt in gebrochenen Weißtönen gehalten, wodurch sich auch nach außen das ihrer Funktion eingeschriebene Moment von (Luft-)Hygiene und Sauberkeit vermittelt.

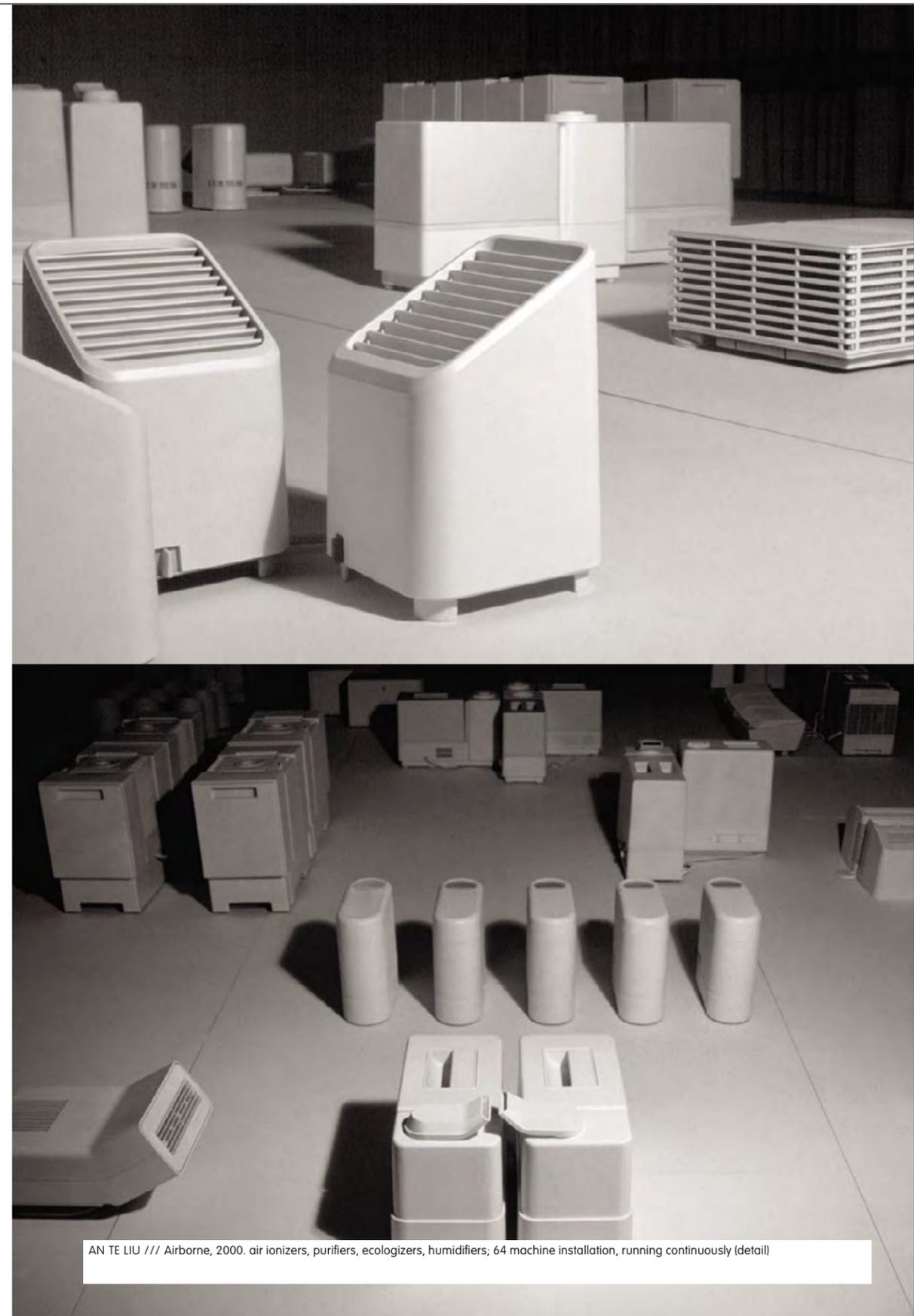
Die größtenteils längsrechteckigen, ab und zu runden und sehr oft gedrungenen Formen sowie die für diese Art von Geräten typischen Lüftungsschlitze beziehungsweise Lamellen erinnern an Häuserblocks mit entsprechenden architektonischen Bestandteilen wie Lüftungsanlagen auf Dächern oder Fensterfassaden mit Lichtschutzrollos. Demzufolge assoziiert man mit Gruppierungen von Geräten gleicher Bauart Reihen von Häuserblocks, und diese

An Te Liu is both a trained architect and an art historian. In his artistic work he draws upon his substantial knowledge of these two areas of cultural production, yet refrains from focusing exclusively on one or the other. Still, this interdisciplinary approach triggers a subtle dynamic, which runs as a leitmotif through the artist's varied body of work.

Liu's installations and sculptures often consist of industrial appliances and devices that acquire new attributions of meaning through uses and functions in contexts other than those normally ascribed to them. In the artist's oeuvre, the works with air purification units are a kind of crystallization point in which various thematic threads coalesce.

The sculpture *Airborne* (2000) can be seen as exemplary for Liu's practice. On an enamelled plate that appears to float above the floor, the artist groups various models of home climate-control units, portable air conditioners, ionizers, and air purifiers. All of the casings appear in various tones of white, which outwardly communicates their functional roles of generating (air-related) hygiene and cleanliness.

The primarily rectangular, sometimes round, and often squat forms – as well as the ventilation slits or lamellae typical of these appliances – are reminiscent of housing-project blocks with their corresponding architectural components, such as ventilation systems on roofs or window facades with exterior blinds. One thus associates groups of appliances of a similar style with rows of apartment blocks; and these, placed beside other groups, are in turn evocative of master plans for concepts of urban development. The ensemble appears to be a sterile miniature of a zone determined by mod-



AN TE LIU /// Airborne, 2000. air ionizers, purifiers, ecologizers, humidifiers; 64 machine installation, running continuously (detail)

im Nebeneinander mit anderen Gruppen lassen wiederum an Masterpläne für städtebauliche Konzepte denken. Das Ensemble mutet dabei an wie eine sterile Miniatur eines von modernistischen Bauten geprägten Areals. Neben diese mimetische Qualität tritt fühl- und hörbar die funktionelle. Alle Geräte sind in Betrieb und verändern die unmittelbare Umgebung, indem sie die Luft des Galeriebeziehungswise Ausstellungsraumes filtern, ionisieren, kühlen und reinigen.

Hiermit kommt eine weitere Referenzebene ins Spiel: Die enorme Präsenz dieser Art von Geräten in unserem Lebensumfeld ist ein Indiz wie auch ein Symptom für den in den Industrieländern immer weiter um sich greifenden Reinlichkeitswahn, der sich in einem gesteigerten Bedürfnis nach Sauberkeit und Hygiene – vor allem in urbanen Kontexten – niederschlägt. Dabei steht deren Zweck interessanterweise deutlich im Widerspruch zu der durch ihre Produktion und vor allem durch deren Betrieb verursachten Umweltverschmutzung.

Für An Te Liu greift dieser Aspekt jedoch viel weiter zurück: „Die Vertreter der Moderne hatten in Sachen frischer Luft, Hygiene und Begrünung eine überzeugende Rhetorik, die von gewaltigen utopischen Architekturfürwürfen begleitet war wie etwa dem von Le Corbusiers *Ville Radieuse*.“⁽¹⁾ In *La Ville Radieuse* publiziert Le Corbusier 1935 seine städtebauliche Vision einer utopischen Stadt, mit großen Apartmenthäusern umgeben von „Serviceeinheiten“ inmitten weitläufiger Parkflächen, in der sich die Individuen frei entfalten können.

Le Corbusier verlangte eine radikale Änderung der Architektur als logische Konsequenz auf die rasante technische Entwicklung und den damit einhergegangenen Wandel der Lebensgewohnheiten zur Wende vom 19. ins 20. Jahrhundert. Ähnlich wie bei den Ideen des Bauhauses wurde hier eine Gestaltung des gesamten Lebensumfelds propagiert. An Te Liu sieht hier den Ursprung für die im 20. Jahrhundert weiter fortschreitenden Bemühungen, das individuelle Lebensumfeld nicht nur selbst aktiv zu gestalten, sondern es dadurch auch zunehmend zu kontrollieren.

Im Jahr 2001 realisierte der Künstler mit der Installation *Exchange*, die im Rahmen seiner Einzelausstellung *Condition* in der Henry Urbach Architecture Gallery in New York zu sehen war, eine weitere Arbeit innerhalb dieser Werkreihe. Durch das Übereinanderstapeln von jeweils acht gleichen Geräten entstanden sieben Säulen, die vom Boden bis zur Decke reichend an reale Pfeiler erinnern. Die Apparate sind über von der Decke herabhängende Kabel ans Stromnetz angeschlossen und konstant in Betrieb. Durch die Kraft der Ventilatoren wird die Luft

ernist constructions. And in addition to this mimetic quality, a functional dimension palpably and audibly manifests itself: all of the appliances are operating, transforming their immediate environment by filtering, ionizing, cooling, and cleaning the air in the gallery or exhibition space.

Here, another layer of reference comes into play: the enormous presence of such appliances in our living environment is both an indicator and a symptom of the industrial world's pervasive obsession with cleanliness, which is reflected in an increasing need for sanitation and hygiene. Interestingly, their purpose stands in ironic contrast to the environmental pollution caused by their production and especially their operation.

For Liu, this aspect goes back even further: “The Modernists had a persuasive rhetoric of fresh air, hygiene and greenery, which accompanied huge utopian architectural schemes such as Le Corbusier’s *La Ville Radieuse* (The Radiant City).”⁽¹⁾ In his eponymous book from 1935, Le Corbusier published his urban vision of a utopian city with large apartment houses surrounded by “service units” in the midst of ample green spaces.

Le Corbusier demanded a radical change in architecture as a logical consequence of the rapid technological developments and corresponding lifestyle shifts at the turn from the 19th to the 20th century. Similar to ideas of the Bauhaus, a new design encompassing the entire living environment was propagated. In this, Liu sees the origin of efforts still continuing in the 20th century to not only actively shape one’s individual living environments, but also to increasingly control these.

In 2001, the artist realised another work within this series with the installation *Exchange*, which was on view in the exhibition *Condition* at Henry Urbach Gallery in New York. By stacking groups of eight identical appliances on top of one another, seven columns were constructed, which, extending from floor to ceiling, were reminiscent of pillars in real life. Connected to the power supply through cables hanging from above, the appliances were constantly in operation, completely circulating, filtering, and cleaning the air in the exhibition space every 21 seconds.

Here, in contrast to the more model-like presentation of *Airborne*, Liu creates a space on a scale of 1:1 with respect to the viewer. The pillars are perceived as an architectural intervention; the appliances’ effect is equally palpable through the movement and cooling of the air. Although the machines’ function is immediately perceptible to the viewer physically, their benefi-



AN TE LIU /// Exchange, 2001. 56 HEPA air purification units, cords, current

des Ausstellungsraums alle 21 Sekunden vollständig umgewälzt, gefiltert und gereinigt.

Im Vergleich zu der eher modellhaft anmutenden Präsentation von *Airborne* bespielt An Te Liu den Raum hier in einem 1:1-Maßstab gegenüber dem Betrachter. Die Säulen werden als architektonische Intervention wahrgenommen, und in gleichem Maße ist die Wirkung der Geräte durch die Bewegung und Kühlung der Luft fühlbar. Obgleich die Funktion der Maschinen für den Betrachter unmittelbar körperlich spürbar ist, bleibt deren nutzbringender Effekt – die Reinigung der Luft von mikroskopisch kleinen Schmutzpartikeln – nicht wirklich nachvollziehbar und somit lediglich der Vorstellungskraft überlassen.

Für seinen Beitrag zur Architektur-Biennale in Venedig 2008 schuf der Künstler nun eine Weiterführung innerhalb dieser Werkreihe. Hier wurden mehr als 120 Luftreiniger, Klimageräte und Ionisatoren zu einem großen Cluster verschraubt. Von der Decke hängend schwebt er über den Köpfen der Betrachter wie das Modell eines futuristischen Raumschiffs, umgeben von mehreren kleineren Clustern. Kinematografische Assoziationen an *Star Wars*, *Blade Runner* oder *2001: Odyssee im Weltraum* kommen dabei ebenso zum Tragen wie architektonische Verweise, beispielsweise an Moshe Safdie's modulares Fertighauskonzept *Habitat 67*, das im Rahmen der Weltausstellung in Montreal 1967 realisiert wurde.

Wenngleich der Künstler hier noch einmal an das Modellhafte der eingangs erwähnten Arbeit anknüpft, findet durch die Vielzahl der Geräte und qua Größe der Installation dennoch eine gefühlte Maßstabsverschiebung und gleichzeitig eine Art von Monumentalisierung statt. Wo in der zuvor beschriebenen Arbeit Subtexte von Modernismus, Architektur, Städtebau und Urbanismus anklingen, werden hier Referenzen zu Utopismus und Science Fiction deutlich. „Wir sind es gewohnt, uns die Zukunft als Fortschreibung der Gegenwart vorzustellen. Die Visionen von zukünftigen oder fantastischen Welten konstruieren wir im Wesentlichen gemäß dem Modell der Gegenwart.“⁽²⁾ In diesem Sinne stellen für den Künstler Projektionen in die Zukunft nicht zuletzt auch immer eine Auseinandersetzung mit der Gegenwart dar.

(1) Zit.n.: *Safe Haven*, Interview mit Aaron Betsky, *Surface* No. 25, Herbst 2000.

(2) An Te Liu im Gespräch mit dem Autor, April 2008.

cial effect – cleaning the air of microscopic dirt particles – is not really comprehensible and is left entirely to the power of the imagination.

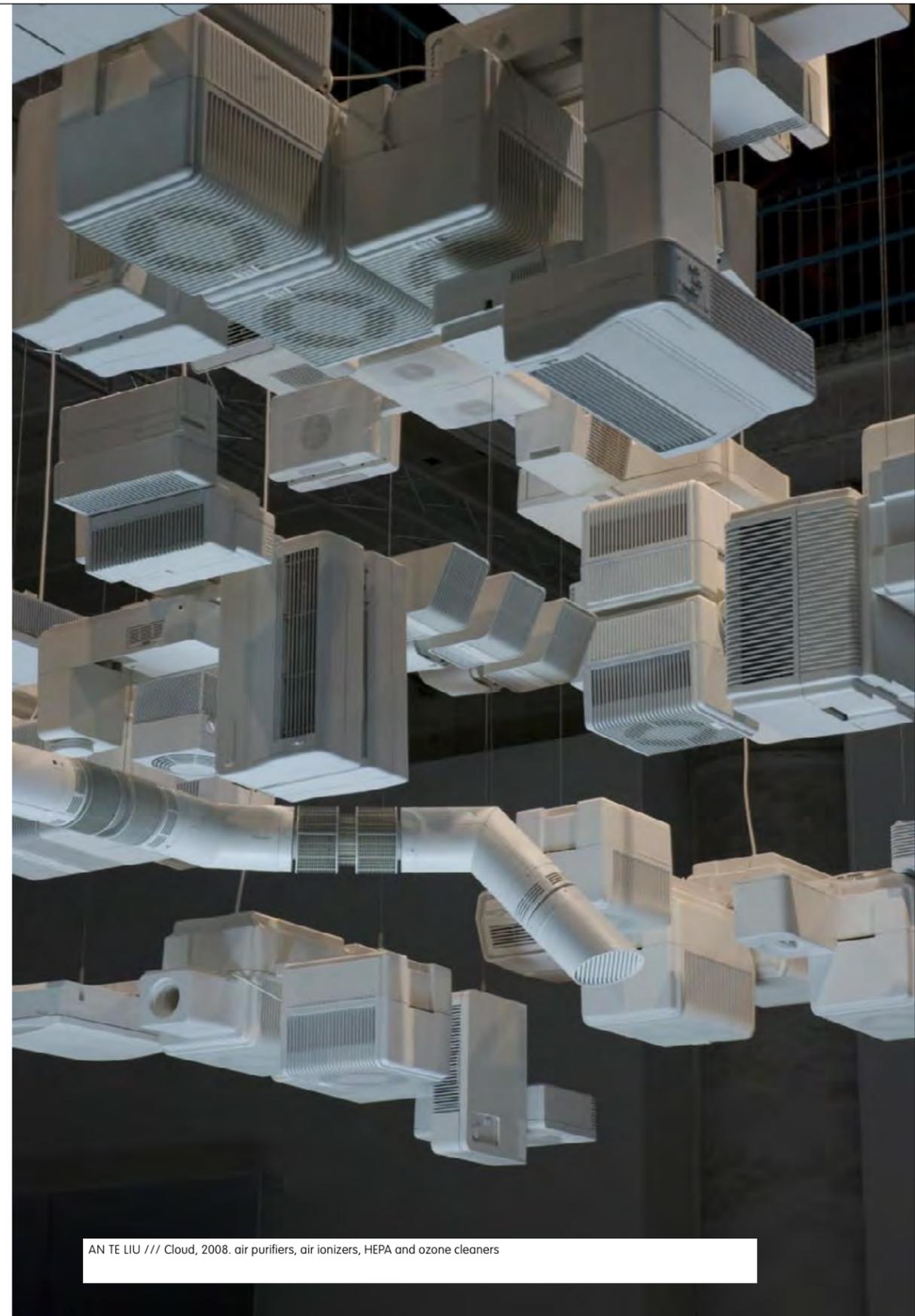
For his contribution to the 2008 Architecture Biennale in Venice, the artist has continued this series. In this project, more than 120 air purifiers, air handling units, and ionizers have been screwed together to form a large cluster, suspended from the ceiling like a space vessel or model of a futuristic city and surrounded by several smaller clusters. Cinematographic associations to *Star Wars*, *Blade Runner* or *2001: A Space Odyssey* are equally evoked here as are architectural references, for instance to Moshe Safdie's concept for prefabricated modular houses, *Habitat 67*, which was realised in the context of the World Expo in Montreal in 1967.

While this most recent work relates to the model-like character of the work mentioned at the beginning, the number of appliances and size of the installation create a perceptible shift in scale and a simultaneous monumentalisation. Where in the previously described works a subtext of modernism, architecture, urban planning, and urbanism is implicitly inherent, the new installation unmistakably refers to utopianism and science fiction. But, as the artist observes, we primarily construct visions of the future or fantastical worlds based on models of the present.⁽²⁾ And in this sense, projections into the future are not least an examination of the problems and fears which we are dealing with here and now.

(1) Quote from "Safe Haven", interview with Aaron Betsky, *Surface*, no. 25, Fall 2000.

(2) An Te Liu in conversation with the author, April 2008.

Translation: XXX



AN TE LIU /// Cloud, 2008. air purifiers, air ionizers, HEPA and ozone cleaners



AN TE LIU WHITE DWARF 2012

Museum for the End of the World

curated by Michael Prokopow and Janine Marchessault

Scotiabank Nuit Blanche 2012 | City Hall | September 29 7:03 PM - Sunrise

For Scotiabank Nuit Blanche 2012 An Te Liu presents *White Dwarf*, a floating orb composed of obsolete domestic artifacts. Its title comes from the term given to dying stars in our galaxy - those which have lost their energy and imploded into degenerate matter. In this work, Liu creates a moribund assemblage of that which was once 'new' but now dormant and fading. Once novel, desirable, and advanced, these remnants of our recent consumer past have outlived their use value, and their promises of convenience, comfort and pleasure. Here they have calcified into a spherical crust embedded with familiar objects, silently spinning, eventually to a stop.

An Te Liu's installations and sculptures explore issues of function, dysfunction and cultural coding in our built and hypothesized environments. His work has been exhibited internationally and is included in the permanent collections of SFMOMA, the Art Institute of Chicago and the Art Gallery of Ontario.

Museum for the End of the World

Douglas Coupland, Thomas Blanchard, Iris Häussler, Sarah Beck, Jean Michel Crettaz, Mark-David Hosale, Dana Claxton, Geoffrey Pugen, Joshua Bonnetta, An Te Liu, Tania Mouraud, Christine Davis, Marco Brambilla, The Nathaniel Dett Chorale

White Dwarf is located in the Toronto City Hall rear loading dock, accessible from Bay Street or Chestnut Street at Armoury Street. Wheelchair accessible via City Hall Front Security desk.



José Manuel Ballester,
An Te Liu, Lynne Marsh

Hyper Spaces

26 November 2011 to 4 March 2012

Oakville Galleries
at Centennial Square

Curated by Shannon Anderson

Hyper Spaces

José Manuel Ballester, An Te Liu, Lynne Marsh

by Shannon Anderson

One can't even know what it means to be lost in reality. For instance, it is easy to know whether you are lost or not in the Sahara desert, but to be lost in reality! This is much more complex! Since there are two realities, how can we say where we are? We are far away from simulation, we have reached substitution! I believe this is, all in the same time, a fantastic, a very scary and an extraordinary world.

— Paul Virilio¹

If we are to believe the theories of philosophers such as Paul Virilio, we have already entered the future. A fundamental shift in how we understand the “real world” has occurred in that the idea of the virtual is all encompassing. According to Virilio, we now live in two realities, one actual and one virtual. On the one hand, we have always held the “real” at a certain distance through the mediation of our thoughts and dreams, a distance acknowledged as early as the seventeenth century by René Descartes.² On the other hand, we can point to the prevalence of the screen in our daily lives, beginning with film and television, then to the computer screen’s increasing presence in our space of communication, especially as it becomes more mobile in the form of GPS readers, BlackBerry devices, and iPads. It should come as no surprise that our persistent need to shift between these two worlds—the virtual and the real—might provoke a third space, a space which lies in both of these worlds, and neither of them. We might call it hyperreality or hyperspace, an alternative realm normally attributed to science fiction, but that seems ever closer to the present moment. The sensation of being not-quite-in-this-world takes many forms: driving to a destination on autopilot, somehow navigating through the real world without really

seeing it; being confronted by endless rows of products in a big-box store; or walking along a too-quiet street in the dense fog. *Hyper Spaces* focuses on this sense that we are standing at the threshold between the everyday and the extraordinary, the bizarre, the impossible. It is this moment when we hover between the real and virtual, or the dream and the waking state that the works in this exhibition evoke. José Manuel Ballester, An Te Liu and Lynne Marsh conjure unsettled spaces, micro-worlds on the cusp of transition. In all instances, they are triggered by public architecture. Here, the body and building brush against one another, and the encounter is both strange and familiar, uncomfortable and exhilarating, and filled with tension and fascination.

José Manuel Ballester’s photographs document the built environment, consistently drawing us to the edge of spaces that seem to pour out toward infinity. *Hyper Spaces* includes images from Spain, Ballester’s home country, and also China and Brazil. In both *Interior Bienal 2* (2007), which documents Oscar Niemeyer’s winding concrete ribbons in the São Paulo Bienal building, and *Pasillo Blanco 2* (2004), which captures the hypnotic repetition of arches in the Madrid Airport’s newest terminal, Ballester’s use of symmetrical, tunnel-like spaces pulls viewers in while highlighting their solitary observation of these otherwise empty spaces. In each scene, we explore grand spaces designed to accommodate large crowds. The emptiness is rendered more extreme by the large volume of these rooms, leaving us without a sense of scale to ground our perspective or a sense of narrative to ground our imagination. Instead, anything is possible in these unoccupied buildings, and they are quickly filled with our growing unease.

Cover: An Te Liu, *Fantasia in 24 Gauge (Op. 1)*, 2011 (detail), sheet metal, brass, mirrored acrylic, glass.
Image courtesy of the artist.



is our avatar, exploring her surroundings in search of the opening to the next level. *Stadium* creates a sense of limbo between two worlds, where the protagonist has no means of escape.

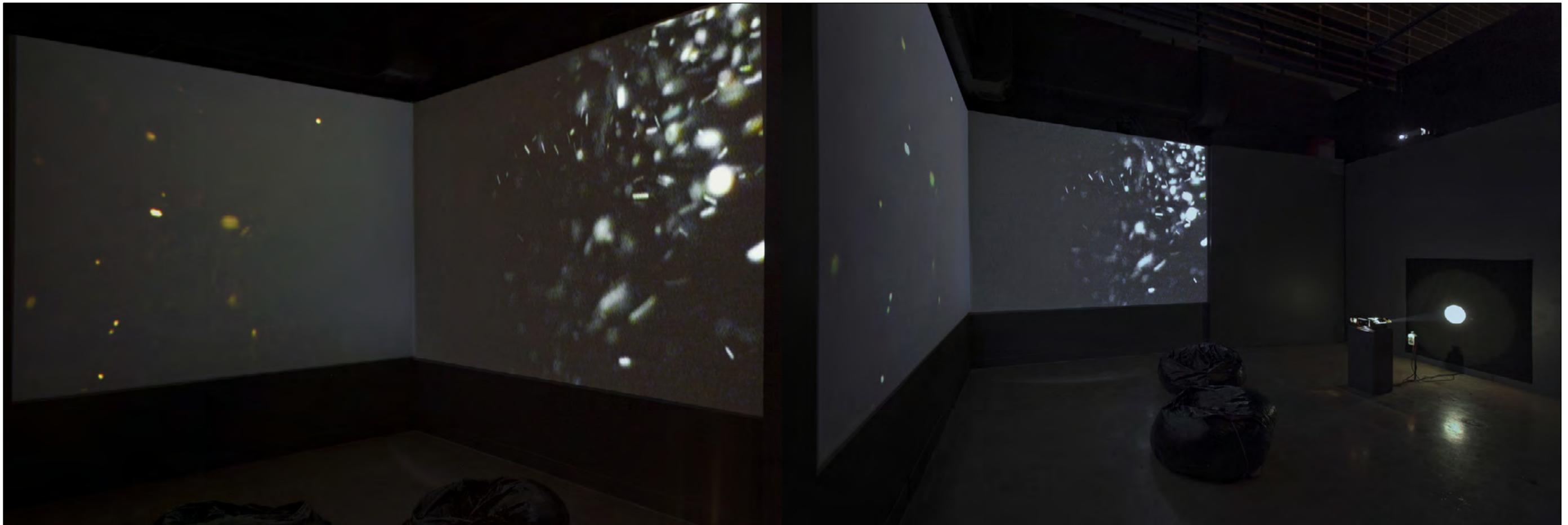
The woman's movements grow stronger toward the video's climax, when they reach a whirlwind that seems almost at war with the stadium. For a moment, everything appears to fall off-kilter, the camera swinging precariously until it rights itself and the video fades to black. The tension is left unresolved, and we learn nothing more about the world that extends beyond this intensely expansive yet suffocating environment.

At times, the futuristic worlds of science fiction films can feel a little overwrought, sharing a similar architectural language of grey, moribund, dense, windowless,

concrete structures, where the damp, cold night is omnipresent. An Te Liu picks up on the intensity and excess behind the genre in *Fantasia in 24 Gauge (Op. 1)* (2011). In the same fashion as the science fiction spoof *Brazil* (1985), Liu draws attention to the inner workings of the gallery in a spirit both playful and disorienting. Air ducts are the most prominent architectural element in *Brazil*, depicted as bulky, monstrous entities that in many ways operate as a central character in the film. They are visible in nearly every scene, weaving in and out of every building, ubiquitous but ignored.

Liu draws the same absurdist attention to the pipe and air duct system running through Oakville Galleries at Centennial Square, a system that is intended to operate fairly invisibly and, in the case of this gallery, is covered

Above and following page: An Te Liu, *Fantasia in 24 Gauge (Op. 1)*, 2011 (detail and installation view), sheet metal, brass, mirrored acrylic, glass, 2.13 x 2.13 x 2.13 m, Images courtesy Oakville Galleries © Toni Hafkenscheid.



by a baffle system that encircles the upper ceiling. Liu has built a hanging structure that, while suggestive of a monolithic sculpture from the outside, contains a complex parallel universe of sorts when viewed from underneath. Inside, a fully-mirrored chamber creates a kaleidoscopic environment where “one experiences the air conditioning infrastructure of the gallery as an infinite and dazzling network of ducts and pipes.”⁹ The intense optical illusion is an Alice-in-Wonderland-like world where we are neither here nor there as the reflections above are infinitely fractured and multiplied. In his discussion of heterotopias, Michel Foucault uses the metaphor of a mirror to describe a state that is simultaneously real and virtual:

From the standpoint of the mirror I discover my absence from the place where I am since I see myself over there.

*Starting from this gaze that is, as it were, directed toward me, from the ground of this virtual space that is on the other side of the glass, I come back toward myself; I begin again to direct my eyes toward myself and to reconstitute myself there where I am. The mirror functions as a heterotopia in this respect: it makes this place that I occupy at the moment when I look at myself in the glass at once absolutely real, connected with all the space that surrounds it, and absolutely unreal, since in order to be perceived it has to pass through this virtual point which is over there.*¹⁰

Liu’s psychedelic installation intensifies our relationship to the surrounding space, opening up an inner world that operates on an infinite scale. This is not a reflection of reality, but a new reality even more disjointed from the mirror that Foucault describes.

Above: An Te Liu, *Matter*, 2008 (installation view), closed-circuit surveillance camera, light, airborne particulates, two projection installation over 100 days. Image courtesy Oakville Galleries ©Toni Hafkenschied.

By drawing attention to the gallery’s infrastructure, Liu also challenges our notion of Oakville Galleries as a “modernist white cube.” Such a description is a bit of a misnomer as it implies a neutral ground or *tabula rasa* for the display of art. This might be said for all “white cube” galleries, but we can focus on the particular space of Centennial Square, which has its own distinct set of curious features. The gallery’s 30’ ceilings makes entering the space feel as though one is walking into a cavern-like room of unexpected expanse. The darkened, black ceiling makes the space above feel drastically open but oppressively present. The room’s psychological impact is easy enough to ignore, until someone like Liu draws our attention back to where we stand, giving us the opportunity to scratch our

heads at the strange grids of sound-baffles that line the upper half of the walls, or the heavy ducts that transfer air in and out of the room. These features operate on pure function, intended to be invisible parts of our built environment. But Liu reminds us of their strange presence. “This piece plays with the everyday infrastructure,” he says, “multiplying, reordering and aestheticizing it in an unnatural way.”¹¹

Liu’s *Matter* (2008) continues this hyper examination of our surroundings, but this time, by focusing on the very air we breathe. Two projections display small white objects skating across the screens in a curious dance, darting in and out of view. At this scale, the images look equally like a microscopic or macroscopic view of our world; they suggest the appearance of galaxies viewed

Above: An Te Liu, *Matter*, 2008 (installation view), closed-circuit surveillance camera, light, airborne particulates, two projection installation over 100 days. Image courtesy Oakville Galleries ©Toni Hafkenschied.

from a Hubble telescope just as readily as organisms viewed through an electron microscope. In reality, they are enlargements of the particulate matter circulating in the air inside the gallery, projected at a large scale. This is the unseen matter that we breathe in and out of our lungs as we wander through this room and experience these artworks. Liu focuses on "our evolving relationship to hygiene and comfort via environmental technologies and controls."¹² Being able to witness the bits of matter that permeate the air around us challenges our assumptions about these "pure" and healthy environments.

Scale becomes a strange and relative measuring device in this situation, and from the point at which we stand, we can move forward or backward in any direction. We are equally small specs when viewed on a massive scale and monstrous beings from a microscopic perspective. *Matter* produces a sense of vertigo as we find ourselves floating within these two extremes, without any absolute sense of where we can situate ourselves when infinity stretches out from either direction. We are floating in a world where there is nothing to anchor us: a hyperspace, so to speak.

Each of the three artists in *Hyper Spaces* fabricates a view of reality where nothing is certain, reminding us of the psychological impact of all public architecture, however muted the desired effect. They conjure the space where the ground is no longer quite stable at our feet, and our surroundings no longer feel quite right. As Virilio claims, and as we all no doubt regularly feel, we are living with stereoscopy: two realities between which we

are constantly switching back and forth. The barriers cannot remain distinct, and the two often overlap, creating moments where we start to view the "real" world through virtual-tinted glasses. At those moments, it feels as though "up" could just as easily be "down" and who are we to say if an alternate reality lies just to the side of where we stand? "I don't think we can even imagine what it may provoke in people's minds and in society to live constantly with this 'stereo-reality,'" Virilio says. "It is absolutely without precedent."¹³

¹ Paul Virilio, interview by Louise Wilson, "Cyberwar, God and Television: Interview with Paul Virilio," *CTheory*, October 21, 1994, <http://www.ctheory.net/articles.aspx?id=62>. ² René Descartes, *Mediations and other Metaphysical Writings*, trans. Desmond M. Clarke (London: Penguin, 2000). ³ Barbara Rose has made this same observation. See Barbara Rose, "In the Mind's Eye," *José Manuel Ballester* (Toronto and New York: Nicholas Metivier Gallery and Charles Cowles Gallery, 2007), n.p. ⁴ José Manuel Ballester, email to the author, January 11, 2011. ⁵ José Manuel Ballester, email to the author, January 11, 2011. ⁶ Paul Virilio, interview by Jérôme Sans, "Game of Love and Chance: A Discussion with Paul Virilio," *Watson Institute*, n.d., <http://www.watsoninstitute.org/infopeace/vy2k/sans.cfm>. ⁷ Jeremy Todd, "What are we now? On Stadium and Vox Pop," *Blackflash*, Fall 2009, 53. ⁸ Lesley Johnstone, "Figure, Architecture, Camera: The Strategic Modes of Lynne Marsh," *Lynne Marsh* (Montréal and Rimouski: Musée d'art contemporain de Montréal and Musée régional de Rimouski, 2008), 55. ⁹ An Te Liu, Toronto Arts Council grant application, 2010 Visual Arts Program. ¹⁰ Michel Foucault, "Of Other Spaces," *Diacritics* 16 (Spring 1986): 24. ¹¹ An Te Liu, telephone discussion with the author, January 4, 2011. ¹² Liu, Toronto Arts Council grant application. ¹³ Virilio, interview with Jérôme Sans.

akimbo

Exhibitions



ARTIST INTERVENTIONS AT ART TORONTO 2011



Image: New works for Art Toronto 2011 Jon Sasaki (left) and An Te Liu (right)

28 to 31 October 2011

Metro Toronto Convention Centre
255 Front Street West, North Building, Exhibit Hall A & B

PLACE

This curatorial initiative explores notions of navigation and mapping – as both a movement through space and a purely conceptual exercise. Curated by William Huffman, *Place* will introduce two unique artist interventions by Jon Sasaki and An Te Liu along with four self-serve walking tours of Art Toronto, created by Huffman. This presentation is in partnership with Toronto Arts Foundation, Art Dealers Association of Canada and Art Toronto. Supported by David Angelo, Gillian Hewitt Smith, Kathleen Sharpe and Eb and Jane Zeidler

ID / EGO / SUPER – An Te Liu creates a figural intervention into the fair's arrangements for navigation and people-moving. As part of the artist's ongoing series of airport taxiway signs, *ID / EGO / SUPER* presents the eponymous words inscribed on three FAA regulation light-boxes, conflating disparate locating systems to create a new kind of signage, while repurposing everyday codes to divulge unexpected meanings. An Te Liu is represented by MKG127 (Toronto).

2011 ART TORONTO

July 6th 2011 to January 6th 2012

An Te Liu

Lost in Transaction: Title Deed & Pattern Language

Presented by No.9: Contemporary Art & the Environment

no. 9

Contemporary Art & the Environment

In *Lost in Transaction*, An Te Liu brings together elements from two projects that take the suburbs as their starting point. Rather than present-day suburbs, *Title Deed* and *Pattern Language* look at examples from North America's earliest post-war wave of suburban development. Although their modular, mass-produced designs resulted in the cheapest possible construction for the highest possible profit, they now seem quaint and somehow idyllic when compared to the monster homes and acres of treeless streets that now extend the limits of our cities. But beginning in the immediate post-war period, this model of development literally paved the way for our current highway-based infrastructure, severing housing from the social and economic benefits of mixed-use communities, and ensuring continued reliance on the automobile.

Title Deed (West Wall)

Shown here are artifacts from Liu's contribution to *The Leona Drive Project*, a temporary, public exhibition where artists transformed six bungalows slated for demolition in Willowdale, one of the Toronto area's oldest planned communities. By stripping down the house and painting it a particular shade of green, Liu transformed 19 Leona Drive into a giant Monopoly piece, instantly imbuing it with economic implications and making it symbolic of the real estate market in general. By foregrounding the economic factors at work in the development and redevelopment of land, Liu references the recent housing market crash, which stemmed from corporate greed and individual desire for the Dream Home.

Pattern Language (East Wall)

As the United States' first mass-produced suburb, Long Island, New York's now-iconic Levittown functions in parallel with Willowdale and Leona Drive. Here, Liu has taken Levittown's aerial plan, shrinking and manipulating it into a dizzying wallpaper pattern, bringing the organizational logic of an entire town to a domestic, interior scale. The reflecting and repeating streets and houses emphasise Levittown's relentless sameness, countering the individuality sought by the houses' owners and, as in *Title Deed*, turning it into a symbol of a serial system. Once seen as utopian and ideal, this way of neighbourhood-building has evolved into new versions of the suburbs, which, in turn, may be ready to be replaced by a more sustainable way of planning where and how we live.

EAST WALL

1. *Pattern Language: Levittown (seafoam)*, 2007
silkscreen ink on paper

WEST WALL (left to right)

1. 19 Leona Drive in Willowdale, before demolition and redevelopment by Hyatt Homes

2. 19 Leona Drive (*caulk study no. 1*), 2009
Scale replica cast in household caulking

3. *Title Deed*, 2009

Latex block filler, paint, house
Site-specific installation, The Leona Drive Project

4. Post-demolition remains of 19 Leona Drive

No.9's programming is possible thanks to the generosity of our supporters:

Program Partner



BOMBARDIER

no9.ca

An Te Liu is represented in Toronto by MKG127



AN TE LIU / BLAST

BROOKFIELD PLACE APRIL 2- 20

arts>Brookfield

Brookfield Place presents *BLAST* (2011) by celebrated Canadian artist An Te Liu. *BLAST* was the journal of the early 20th century Vorticist movement in England. Edited by Wyndham Lewis, *BLAST* was known for the concrete poetry of its typographical style. In An Te Liu's hands, 'concrete poetry' takes on new meaning. The artist animates real things. In mid-air, a vortex-like sculptural arrangement suspends common household devices, from air purifiers and fans, to a George Foreman grill, a Moulinex, and an early Nintendo game console. Once coveted for their promises of domestic comfort, convenience, and leisure, these devices also now speak to the cycles of desire, use, and disuse which sustain consumer culture. With *BLAST*, Liu locates an axis in the whirlwind, creating a provocative artwork out of the tension between control and chaos, the 'new' and the redundant.

"STRIPPED OF FUNCTION AND CONTEXT HERE, THESE OBJECTS AND DOZENS LIKE THEM ARE PAINTED A PURE, ALMOST-SAINTLY WHITE. DESTINED TO BE SUSPENDED IN A TORNADO-LIKE SWIRL, THE EFFECT IS ELEVATION IN MORE WAYS THAN ONE. ONCE INNOVATIVE, HIS MENAGERIE OF THE OBSOLETE EVADES THE LANDFILL IN BECOMING A WORK OF ART"

Murray Whyte, *The Toronto Star*

ABOUT THE ARTIST: An Te Liu's installations and sculptures explore issues of function, dysfunction and cultural coding in our built and hypothesized environments. He was the Canada Council's Artist in Residence at the Künstlerhaus Bethanien, Berlin in 2008 and has recently exhibited at MOCCA, The Louisiana Museum of Modern Art in Denmark, the EV+A in Ireland, and SFMOMA. His work has been widely published and is included in the permanent collections of San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, the Art Institute of Chicago and the Art Gallery of Ontario. Liu is represented by MKG127, Toronto

Brookfield Place

PRESENTED IN CONJUNCTION WITH

arts>Brookfield

domus 948

June 2011



An Te Liu, *BLAST*, 2011

Air Borne

Ad An Te Liu piace l'aria. A quanto pare è il materiale principale del suo lavoro, o per lo meno lo è la percezione spaziale dell'aria. La sua mostra *Blast* (Scoppio), uno sciame di circa 80 elettrodomestici dismessi. È un insieme centrifugo di depuratori d'aria, ventilatori, ionizzatori e altre apparecchiature per il trattamento dell'aria, tutte attive. Ampliando lavori precedenti di Liu su questi apparecchi, come *Cloud* (Nuvola) per la Biennale di Venezia, *Blast* crea letteralmente le proprie condizioni meteorologiche interne. Qui non è tanto importante il messaggio quanto l'effetto intrusivo: la sua pressione vorticosa sul corpo e la sua competitiva aspirazione per il nostro elemento spaziale fondamentale sono palpabili.

• An Te Liu likes air. It is, arguably,

his primary working material, or at least the spatial perception of air. Liu's exhibition *Blast* features a swarm of 80 discarded domestic appliances in a centrifugal array comprising operational air purifiers, fans, ionizers and other air-handling units. Extending Liu's previous work with these devices, such as *Cloud* for the 2008 Venice Biennale, *Blast* quite literally produces its own interior weather. More than its message, the central aspect here is its intrusive effect: its vortex-like pulling at the body is palpable, together with its competitive gasping for our base spatial element. **Mason White**

23.04.2011–21.06.2011
MKG127
www.mkg127.com

VISUAL ARTS

The familiar transformed into the mysterious

R.M. VAUGHAN
THE EXHIBITIONISTAn Te Liu at MKG127
Until May 21, 127 Ossington Ave.,
Toronto; www.mkg127.com

The re-purposing of familiar, everyday objects into high-concept art commodities is at least a century-old practice. (Many would argue that crafters, who turn scraps of all sorts into decorative art, have been doing it forever — but that's another column.) Two new shows, one at Susan Hobbs Gallery and the other at MKG127, breathe gentle puffs (quite literally at MKG127) of new life into the practice by re-working objects so familiar, so tame and easily overlooked, they are almost abject.

Over at MKG127, An Te Liu's *Blast*, a room-sized sculpture made from dozens of partially gutted, whitewashed small appliances — everything from a Dustbuster, a soap dispenser, a toaster oven, an ice crusher and a clock radio to a collection of still-working fans — chugs, whirrs and hypnotizes the over-oxygenated viewer.

Starting with a small tail of tangled appliances near the gallery floor, the sculpture spirals upward, an inverted whirlpool. As it grows wider, the array encircles a long, downward-pointed black pendant spotlight, recreating the effect of dropping a lit flashlight down a tiled well.

When fully activated, with the light bouncing upward off the floor and onto the bellies of Liu's disemboweled machines, and with all fans spinning, *Blast* is a white-noise dervish that effectively neutralizes the entire gallery; making conversation, even ex- and inhalation, difficult, or at least more than involuntary. You feel that you are being both drawn into a vortex and shoved away, pushed to the wall.

Deliciously disorienting but, counterintuitively, given the scrapyards materials, made with abundant, tidy care, *Blast* is both meditative and bombastic, bluster and still.

Liu, who recently sold a similar huge sculpture (one that was on view last summer at Toronto's Museum of Contemporary Canadian Art) to the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, is the new crown prince of the gleaners.

ENTERTAINMENT

VISUAL ARTS

A blast at our disposable culture



MURRAY WHYTE

An Te Liu steps gingerly around a homely array of mechanical conveniences and distractions — humidifiers, dust-busters, an archaic PlayStation, an Easy-Bake Oven, at least one facial vaporizer — arranged in careful groupings on the gallery floor.

"There are 51 hanging points that need to be precisely located," he says, turning his gaze to the reinforced plywood ceiling he's installed at MKG127, where "*Blast*," his new installation, opens tonight. A critical squint, then a shrug. "I tend to look up a lot."

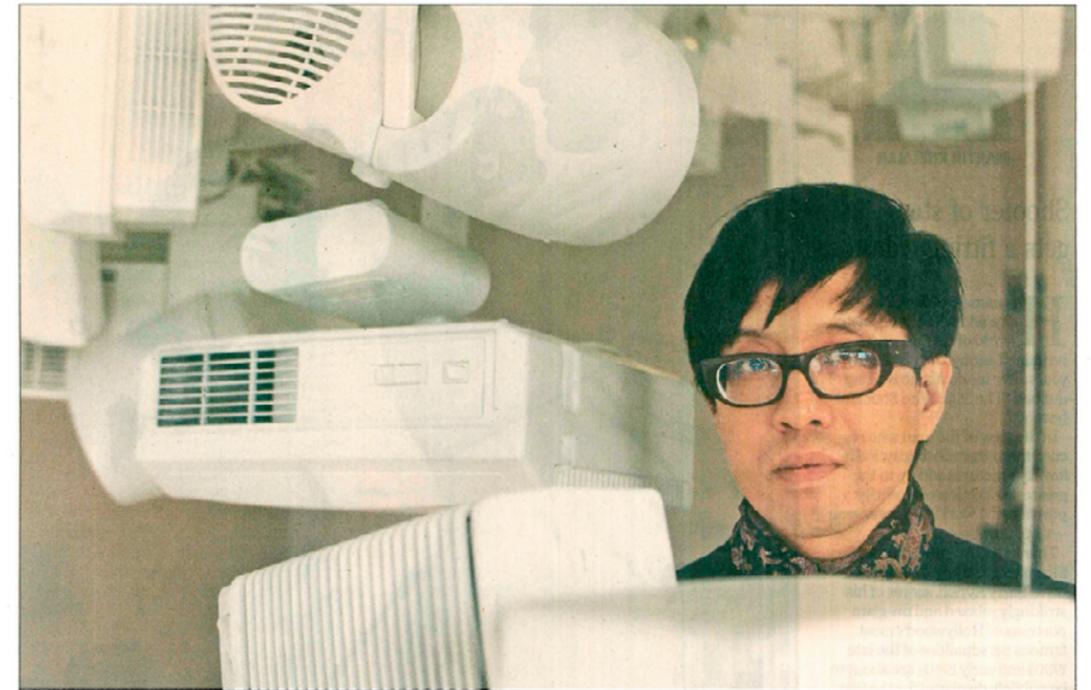
Last summer, Liu's 2008 piece "*Cloud*" — a dangling cluster of air purifiers arranged to evoke a blocky, cubist version of its namesake — showed at the Museum of Contemporary Canadian Art on Queen Street. "*Cloud*" has covered some distance since then. Acquired by the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, it's on display there as part of a group show called *Paradesign*.

In no uncertain terms, "*Cloud*" embodied a clever critique about our cheap-and-easy, mechanically aided reality. A stand-in for a natural world, its constituent parts were built to protect us from the damage we've done to it.

Installed, "*Cloud*" was both eerily gorgeous — lit from below, it glowed with almost unearthly purity — and unnervingly active: Suspended above, the purifiers were switched on, breathing their grim duty to the last.

It is precisely the kind of complex puzzle in a simple, tightly-wrapped package for which Liu has since become well known. In 2009, "*Title Deed*," a simple postwar bungalow in North York that Liu painted top to bottom in Monopoly-game green, became an international meme.

Part of the Leona Drive Project, in



JAYME POISSON/TORONTO STAR

Toronto artist An Te Liu poses Thursday in the middle of assembling his installation "*Blast*," which opens tonight at MKG127 on Ossington Ave.

which a gang of artists staged interventions in a cluster of soon-to-be-demolished bungalows, "*Title Deed*" was alarmingly simple yet potentially symbolic. Reduced from home to economic unit in the ongoing game of urban policy and commercial development in the ever-gentrifying urban landscape, Liu's green house, with the slightest of gestures, spoke volumes.

The building blocks of "*Blast*" may be more eclectic, but it shares a root concern.

"Everybody has a stuff fascination, and a stuff problem," says Liu, pausing from the tedium of screwing his plastic menagerie to sturdy wooden frames. "What to keep, what to get rid of, what to store in boxes and put away. And the whole time, we're just accumulating more and more."

The accumulation of "*Blast*" was,

of course, fully intentional. Liu spent four solid days on the road — "from Burlington to Markham," he smiles — culling Salvation Armies and Value Villages for his collection. What's striking about the mix is the prevalence of objects once deemed to be on the proverbial cutting edge: The original Nintendo gaming system, a PlayStation of similar vintage, an iconic Braun food processor, a George Foreman grill.

Stripped of function and context here, these objects and dozens like them are spray-painted a pure, almost-saintly white. Destined to be suspended in a clunky tornado-like swirl, the effect is elevation in more ways than one. Once innovative, now obsolete, his menagerie of the obsolete evades the landfill in becoming a work of art.

It's a cheeky transformation,

trading one form of uselessness for another, but it's just a minor part of the greater whole. "*Blast*," Liu explains, was the name of the journal of the early 20th-century Vorticist movement. Edited by Wyndham Lewis, it revolved around a group of artists whose associates included such literary heavyweights as T.S. Eliot and Ezra Pound.

Running alongside such Modernist revolutions as Futurism and Cubism, the Vorticists took a decidedly less sunny view of the gross upheavals of modernity's dawn. Eliot was particularly gloomy about the prospects of a nascent world of faster, cheaper, mechanically better, as evidenced by the title of his most famous poem, *The Wasteland*.

If Liu's "*Blast*" has any such revolutionary propositions, they're

kept close to the chest. One thing is certain: His entropic swirl of obsolescence conjures all sorts of complex reactions, from the warmly nostalgic — I remember coveting that Nintendo as a teen — to mild disgust at the volume of waste it suggests.

Is it a eulogy, then, a canonizing of our once-coveted objects, now shuffled off to the dustbin of consumer history? Liu demurs.

"There's a critique built in," he says.

"Sure, waste is bad, obsolescence is bad; it's so much a part of our makeup to want new things, to acquire new things and move on to the next.

"But I have a loving relationship with these things. To be honest, I'll kind of miss them."

An Te Liu: *Blast* opens at MKG127, 127 Ossington Ave., Saturday at 6 p.m.



THE LEONA DRIVE PROJECT

An Te Liu

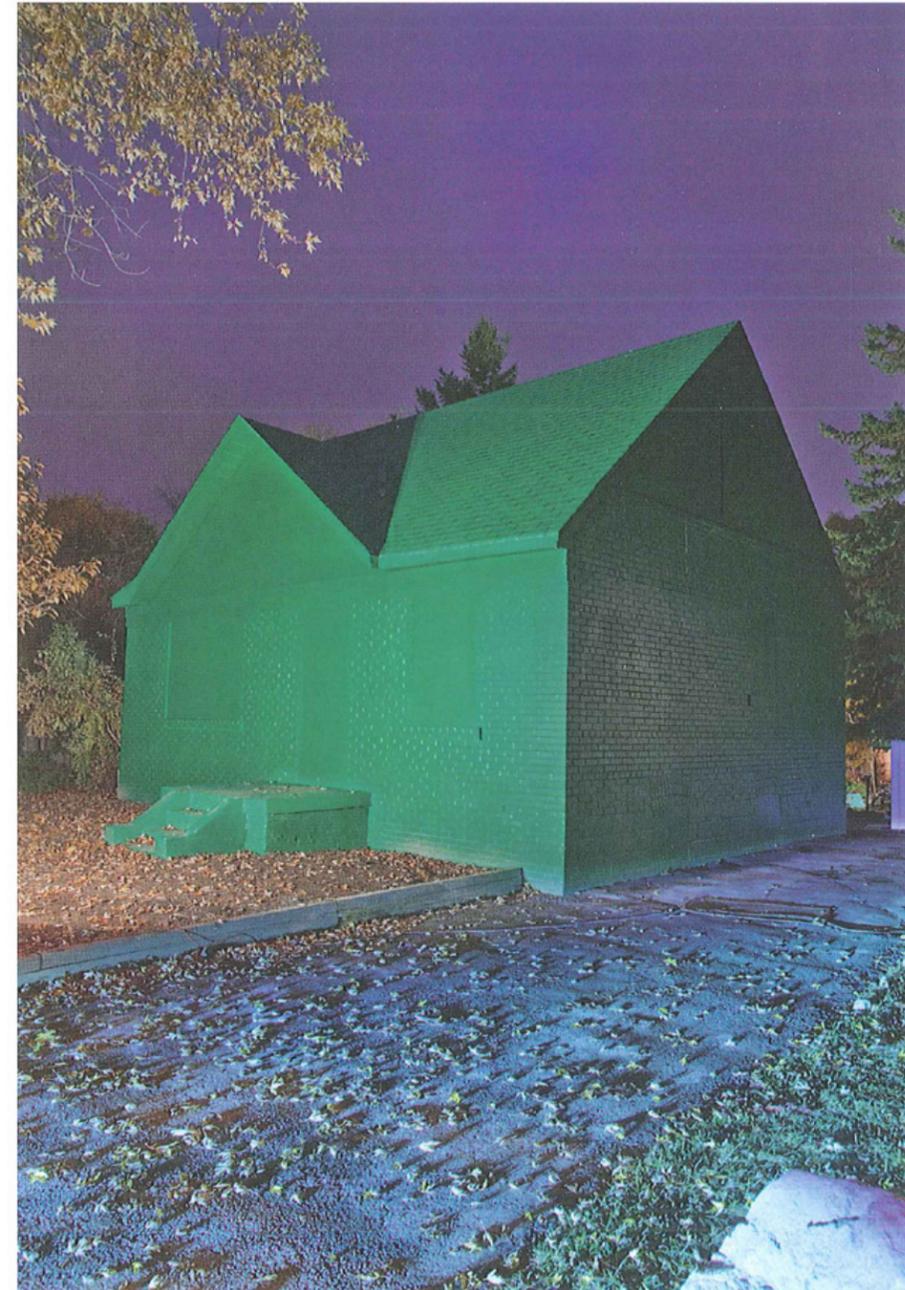
Title Deed

real estate

a legal term pertaining to land, along with anything permanently affixed to it, such as buildings; specifically that which is fixed in location; often considered synonymous with *real property* (also sometimes called *realty*), in contrast with *personal property* (also sometimes called *chattel* or *personalty*)

mortgage

the charging of real (or personal) property by a debtor to a creditor as security for a debt (esp. one incurred by the purchase of the property), on the condition that it shall be returned on payment of the debt within a certain period; a deed effecting such a transaction; a loan obtained through the conveyance of property as security





Audio Interview

An Te Liu: Board Games

LEONA DRIVE, TORONTO OCT 22 TO 31 2009



An Te Liu *Title Deed* 2009 / photo A. Sulikowska

One of the highlights of Toronto's fall art season so far involved an invitation to the north end of the city where the [Public Access Collective](#), in collaboration with [LOT: Experiments in Urban Research](#), opened the "Leona Drive Project". The project featured 18 artist interventions in a series of bungalows waiting to be demolished for a new townhouse development. Built in the late 1940s as affordable suburban housing for returning war vets, the houses are of a type to be found across Canada and represent one of the first forays into suburban development. The most commanding project of the group was done by Toronto artist [An Te Liu](#), who took one of the rundown houses, cleaned it up and painted it a pristine Monopoly-house green. In one fell swoop, Liu's *Title Deed* spoke beyond the immediate locale to make a wide-ranging statement about housing as a funnel for broader financial concerns and lessons learned in last year's subprime mortgage meltdown. In this audio interview, Liu speaks to *Canadian Art* editor Richard Rhodes about the development of his project. (Running time 6 minutes 16 seconds)

[Download MP3](#)



Aerial view of Leona Drive, Toronto / photo A. Sulikowska



AARON LYNETT / NATIONAL POST

Artist An Te Liu has turned the vacant bungalow at 19 Leona Dr. in North York into a giant Monopoly house.

COMMENT

It's not Park Place, but close: Art project livens up North York

Mr. Moneybags has nothing on these vacant sites



PETER KUITENBROUWER

Yesterday after breakfast, Scott Rogers, an artist, hauled off and slammed a pickaxe into the bedroom wall on the second floor of a brick bungalow in North York. "Heeeeere's Johnny!" shouted fellow artist Justin Patterson, and it was like the scene from the Jack Nicholson horror film *The Shining*, with one exception: the wall barely budged.

Messrs. Roger and Patterson, along with other members of a Calgary art collective called The Harbour Lake School, are breaking up 17

Leona Dr. and using the wood and bricks to build a shantytown in its backyard. "We've actually developed a name for ourselves doing stupid stuff like this," says John Frosst, another collective member.

Welcome to Leona Drive, two blocks east of Yonge Street at Sheppard Avenue. In 1948, the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corp. built a neighbourhood of brick bungalows here for returning Second World War soldiers and their families. Hyatt Homes, a developer, will demolish six homes here in November. Meanwhile, this is The Leona Drive Project, "one extended art space."

Deena Pantalone from Hyatt Homes said in a statement: "We plan to build eight detached homes on the site, backing onto the ravine. With the houses sitting vacant and unused, we loved the idea of putting the land to good use and helping to support the local arts community at the same time."

Two artists, Janine Marchessault of York University and Michael Prokopow of the Ontario College of Art and Design, are curating the show, which runs Oct. 23-31.

The artist Christine Davis is colouring every surface in the bathroom at 9 Leona Dr. using 75 tubes of red lipstick donated by MAC. She arrived on the job yesterday wearing corduroys in a fuchsia that matched the lipstick, drinking a Vitamin Water of the same alarming hue.

"During the Second World War cosmetics companies marketed lipstick colours like Victory Red, Banner Red and Furlough Red," she says. "Women wore these to go work in the factories. Then in the 1950s women still wore lipstick and became perfect housewives."

David Hann, another artist, has parked an Oldsmobile Cutlass Cruiser station wagon, complete with a fake-wood panelling paint job, in a driveway, and plans to project 1970s TV sitcoms through its windows from the inside.

No. 19 is my favourite. An Te Liu, who runs the graduate landscape and architecture program at the University of Toronto, stripped off its back veranda and railings and painted it entirely — roof, walls, window panes, sills — in emerald green, transforming it into a giant Monopoly

house, whose dimensions it perfectly copies. "Leona Drive with One House, rent \$250."

It is tempting to see all this as a satire and a send-up of the suburbs, but Prof. Marchessault insists this is an homage to a lovely part of town.

"We want to think about the 1940s and 1950s suburbs, which had an ideology. There's this imagination of a better life that these houses will offer you. There isn't that utopianism in the new suburbs."

Houses were smaller back then; outdoor space was more prized than it is today. It's hard to watch these jewels disappear, especially after I learned of Ruth Gillespie, who lived here at No. 9 for 40 years, before dying suddenly on the dance floor in 2003. The periwinkle and hydrangea she tended in her back garden are healthier than ever.

Next door a group of art students from Earl Haig high school began transforming a house, arranging its contents so that they appear to be bursting from the windows. Still, they seemed a little hesitant, as though wary of defiling an icon of their neighbourhood. And I can respect that.

Elsewhere on Leona Drive, there remain dozens more houses like those that are vanishing — all sturdy, well-tended and fronted by stately trees. I wish them long life; I like them better as dwellings than as art.

National Post

pkuitenbrouwer@nationalpost.com

Project brings new meaning to art house

LISA ROCHON
CITYSPACE

lrochon@globeandmail.com

That children in the burbs of Miami are being offered a trip in a Hummer to McDonald's as a reward for being top fundraisers at their school is enough to make us gag on our lattes while exploding in laughter. Tell the story to your Canadian kids and watch them crinkle their faces into expressions of sadness, or, simply emit a sustained:

"Euwwww."

Overbloomed and overscaled, the suburbs in the United States are doomed, and not even the trim, fit mind of President Barack Obama can make it right. But, on this front, Canadians should resist feeling overly smug and self-righteous. The suburbs in Canada are a piece of madness, too, and only draconian measures can help inject some humanity and grace into these zones of wounded streets and crush of ugly condominium towers. Face it: The suburbs have colonized our minds, and our bodies.

Artists and architects treat the suburbs as a no-man's land – a dreaded place of formula they'd rather avoid. Admittedly, there's no art in the burbs. I know this when aiming my camera at the patched, potholed sidewalks, photographing the narrow, mean space allowed for people to manoeuvre, heads down, against the harsh wind created by the tunnel of towers at Yonge Street and Sheppard Avenue in one of Toronto's suburbs. Other than Wimpy's and beleaguered-looking sushi joints, I'm unable to find fresh food. Dark chocolate at the gas station doesn't actually count. They may not be exactly alike but Canadian and American suburbs definitely share the Jenny Craig factor. Live there and resist no more: Your life will be confined to a car so as to access work, groceries and trips to the fat-reducing farms located in the suburban malls.



So it was with considerable glee that I happened upon the Leona Drive Project, a wacky and often poignant unearthing of suburban life that takes place in five vacant postwar bungalows located just east of Yonge Street, directly south of Sheppard Avenue in northern Toronto. The art intervention opened last night and is part of the Toronto International Art Fair. One of the most compelling interventions is by artist An Te Liu, an associate professor in the University of Toronto's faculty of architecture, landscape and design. He sealed the windows and doors of the bungalow at 19 Leona Dr. and then painted the entire structure in bright green, the colour, in fact, of one of those little plastic houses you can purchase with a roll of the dice and some paper money from the Monopoly board game.

In this case, a roll of the dice has meant these bungalows

have been bought by a development company that's planning on ripping them down and replacing them with a series of 21st-century townhouses that will likely look as if they belong to the Victorian era. Architecture follows a continuum of time, but it's rarely of its time. Buildings, even houses, shift dramatically from one decade to the next, depending on available materials, the will of developers, marketers and what's considered good taste. The prim little bungalows were built in the mud flats of a new subdivision in what before 1967 was called the Township of North York. That version of affordable housing is currently undergoing a massive overhaul, meaning owners are replacing the brick structures with larger faux castles clad in prefabricated stone. It may be curious to look at but it's considered part of the march of progress.

Not long ago, during the 1950s, artist Ryan Livingstone recalls how his grandmother engaged in the "dizzying, mind-boggling ritual of changing into a dress for dinner." And, he remembered his mother's recommendation that "a penny saved is a penny earned." In response, Livingstone transformed a small dining room at 9 Leona Dr. into a "dizzying, mind-boggling" array of 14,000 nails banged into all four walls, every one of them topped with a penny painted white. It's the ultimate polka-dot dress, and it's just one of the many works that should be taken out dancing rather than being demolished along with the house.

In the kitchen, Shana MacDonald and Angela Joosse, Toronto filmmakers and doctoral candidates at York University, have mined the books of Ruth Gillespie, a long-time resident of 9 Leona Dr. Gillespie lived

Artist creates Monopoly house as monument to credit crunch (three more and he can buy a hotel)

By DAILY MAIL REPORTER

Standing as a monument to the credit crunch, this life-sized Monopoly house was created as an ironic statement on the global financial crisis.

Created by Canadian artist An Te Liu, 44, the 36ft by 44ft work called 'Title Deed' was built in Willowdale, in the Canadian province of Ontario.

Built around a condemned home in one of the town's original suburbs, the giant green house is almost identical to the famous board game pieces.



© An Te Liu/Barcroft USA

Rent! Canadian artist An Te Liu has built a life-size Monopoly house as a monument to the credit crunch

Mr Liu spent two months building the house last year and employed friends and volunteers to strip the home of gutting, satellite dishes and windows before covering it in latex block filler paint.

He said: 'I received the commission from a curator in Willowdale to produce my vision for the Monopoly house in February 2009.'

'The house was being prepared to be knocked down by a local developer so we took advantage in a delay in proceedings to plan to alter the house into the recognisable feature from the board game.'

'I had already seen a similarity beforehand but once we began the process of changing the house using wooden boards for the windows and removing all the exterior extremities then the green painting could begin.'



© An Te Liu/Barcroft USA



© An Te Liu/Barcroft USA

Cashing in: The artist, pictured right, used wooden planks to shape the house, before it was covered in latex filling paint

Seeing property as a home, a loan, a debt, an investment and something that is more monetized than we realise, the artist wanted to use the iconic board game as a metaphor.

'Just as the sub prime mortgage crisis hit America and was caused by traders and bankers playing their games in Wall Street, so the common man was squeezed because of that,' he said.

'Our homes are not necessarily what we think they are. They are property just like in Monopoly to be remortgaged and used as collateral'



on TODAY

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29 A giant, green monument to the credit crunch

Oct 2010

According to Canadian artist An Te Liu, his life-sized **Monopoly house** is all three. Liu believes the mortgage mess "was caused by traders and bankers playing their games on Wall Street, so the common man was squeezed because of that."

So Liu constructed a monument called "Title Deed" to call attention to the crisis. The giant green house, built around a condemned home in Willowdale, Ont., looks nearly identical to the the board pieces of the iconic board game.

"Our homes are not necessarily what we think they are," Liu told the Britain's Daily Mail. "They are property just like in Monopoly to be remortgaged and used as collateral."

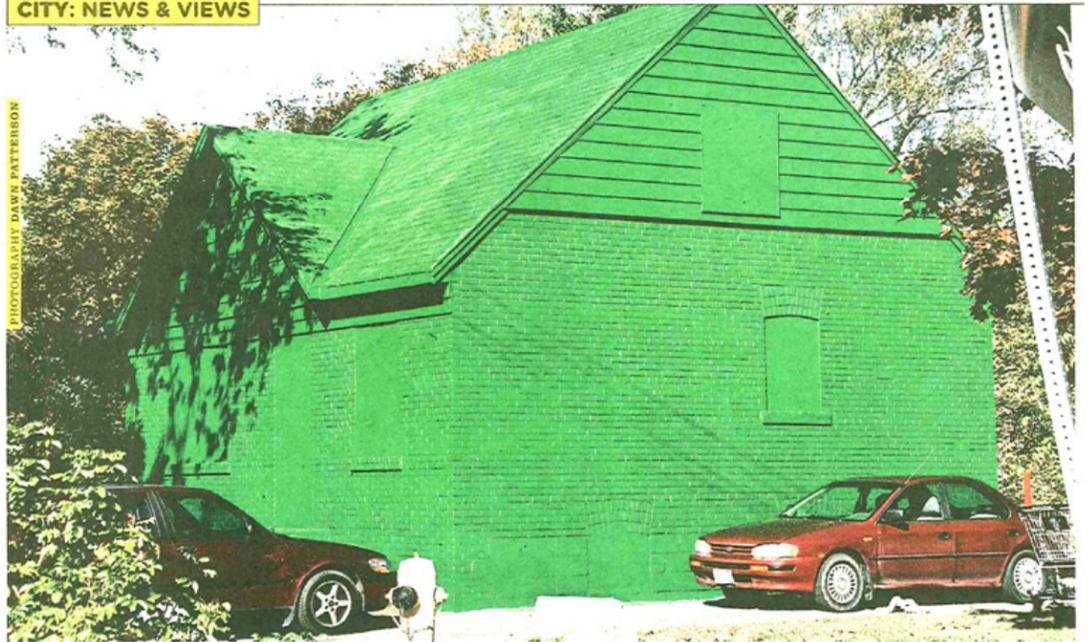


Photo courtesy An Te Liu

Artist An Te Liu's monument to the mortgage mess is 36-feet by 44-feet.

CITY: NEWS & VIEWS

PHOTOGRAPH BY DAWN PATTERSON



STROLL

Bungalow's Last Stand

There are a million stories in the naked suburbs — Willowdale's is just one of them

THE CITY CREATES, devours and recreates itself constantly and the velocity of this cycle is quickest in Toronto's inner suburbs. If you stand at Yonge and Sheppard in Willowdale you can see it happening in one 360-degree glance, as the new and big give way quickly to tiny bungalows. If urban planning were a game of chess, these are the pawns that only a few generations ago were the first line of Toronto's expansion into Ontario farmland.

Yet urban growth is more like Monopoly, ruled by a market that decides what has value and what can be discarded. Some of those bungalows, now sitting uncomfortably close to streets that have grown fat and eaten up their front lawns, have become offices for dentists and lawyers or offer shiatsu and psychic readings rather than containing nuclear families as intended.

Two blocks east of Yonge is Leona Drive, where a bungalow painted green stands out like a real-life Monopoly house, part of the Leona Drive Project, a temporary large-scale art installation taking over six 1950s bungalows that will soon be demolished to make way for newer, shinier housing. The vacant houses, interpreted and transformed by over a dozen artists, explore the deep territory of this suburban landscape, the one we're led to believe (at least by popular mythology) has no worthwhile stories and isn't interesting.

It's a remarkable project by the collectives Public Access Collective and L.O.T.: Experiments in Urban Research. The green house is by artist An Te Liu, and though made of solid brick, wood and plaster, a simple paint job renders the house plastic-seeming, as if it really is as disposable as we are treating it. Next door, Daniel Borins and Jennifer Marman have impregnated a living room window with a white Honda Civic, evoking a common late-night news story where an errant car drives up over a lawn and crashes into a house, a David Lynch-*Blue Velvet* view of the tranquil suburbs, where the very instrument that gave rise to this kind of development later destroys it.

Janine Marchessault, one of the project curators and a profes-

sof at York University, says the municipal strike over the summer actually made this project possible, as it delayed the destruction of the homes. Cobbling together various small arts grants (to a total of around \$50,000) and many in-kind donations, Marchessault and her colleagues' greatest work of art may have been getting a developer to agree to the project. "The risk for him was if this project caused people to take too much of an interest in these houses," explains Marchessault. It's also a massive coordinating effort as the houses aren't traditional art spaces. While we chatted, one of her workers interrupted and described a "non-lethal" gas leak that needed to be attended to.

Like many of Toronto's suburbs, Willowdale is not simply an extension of the downtown core but an amalgamation of little villages that had their own development trajectories but were eventually swallowed up by North York and, later, Toronto. The kernel Willowdale was a rural crossroads known as Lansing. You can see the Willowdale name live on around the area on street signs but another ghost of that rural heritage is still visible in the green belt behind the Leona Drive homes. Once the open headwaters of Wilket Creek, the watercourse has been long buried and entombed in concrete tunnels. A slight depression in the land can be followed south, meandering through parks and in between bungalows to the giant 401 sound barrier, where a metal grate blocks access to a culvert under the highway after which this nearly lost vale continues to meander through middle-class neighbourhoods to York Mills and Bayview, beyond which the stream finally sees light.

All along the way there are oversized drains that, coupled with the vast size of the 401 culvert, give a spooky sense that this infrastructure is waiting for the flood, a kind of semiotics of potential disaster. Many of the bungalows along this route have been replaced by "Monster Homes." Thirty-year Willowdale resident and artist Robin Collyer, whose work has often explored the suburban form, has installed ostentatious trim on one of the Leona



PSYCHOGEOGRAPHY by Shawn Micallef



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NEW YORK OBSERVER

Do Not Pass Go: Canadian Artist Turns a Profit on Foreclosure Joke

By Laura Kusisto 11/02/10 8:30pm



Sensible people flee when someone pulls out a Monopoly board. Then there are the kids who snap up properties, send their friends and loved ones to jail, and end up with a pile of cash at the end.

We can only assume they grow up to be real estate developers.

Earlier this year, a bright green, life-sized Monopoly house popped up in Willowdale, a

suburb of Toronto, Canada. Given that there were a record number of foreclosures in September, needless to say the art exhibit by Canadian artist An Te Liu is stirring up controversy.

"A house is a home," Mr. Liu told *The Observer*. "It's got its own stability as a place of shelter and a place to live and a place to grow up and a place to mow your lawn." But, he continued, "A house is also a piece of collateral and its got a monetary reality as well."

Consumers spend their hard-earned cash like it's Monopoly money and banks play with people's houses like they're toys. Now that's some smart art.

Mr. Liu's piece is part of a larger exhibition by Canadian artists on the site of a housing complex that was built for returning World War II vets. The houses had been sold to a developer who wants to turn them into "monster houses," as Mr. Liu deems them. The curator gave Mr. Liu one of them, which he stripped down and painted green, until it became "a life-sized miniature," as the artist elegantly puts it.

The iconic Monopoly house has undergone a few renos over the year, but Mr. Liu matched the style and paint color to the board game from the 80s—incidentally, the last time real estate went from boom to bust. "The project is about real estate and development and the history of this house and its present fate to be demolished and rebuilt into townhouses," Mr. Liu said. "A house is not only a home that we live in, but it's a piece of legal jurisdiction and tradeable asset as well."

In the best twist of all, thanks to the publicity generated by the exhibit, the developer flipped the property and made a profit.

VISUAL ARTS

Requiem for a suburban lifestyle

MURRAY WHYTE
VISUAL ARTS REPORTER

The bright green house — lacquered thick and shiny, from foundation block to roof peak, windows, doors, shingles and all — would be your first clue that all is not as it seems in the suburban idyll of Leona Drive. Need some more help? Try next door, where a mid-'90s Honda Civic teeters in the picture window, half-in, half-out.

The suburbs have changed mightily since they first sprouted all over post-war North America as tidily quiet, idealized communities for legions of returning soldiers and their families-to-be. But it can take some deliberate creative intervention to really gauge how much. That's what's happening here on Leona Drive, where curators Jantine Marchessault and Michael Prokopow have enlisted 23 artists to help parse what the suburbs have meant to so many of us — and what will become of them.

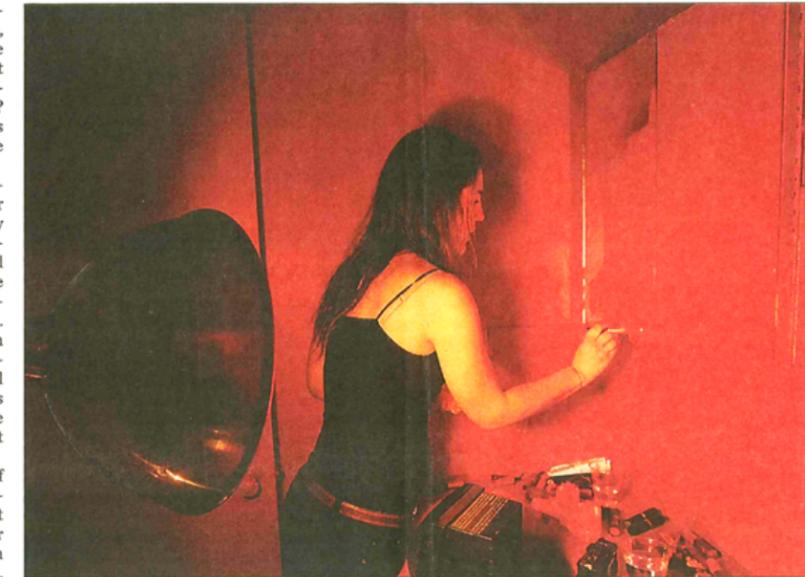
It's no mistake — and a good bit of luck — that the four houses on Leona Drive sacrificed for the project are soon slated for demolition. For one, it gave the curators free reign for alteration (one group of artists, Calgary's Arbour Lake School, took it as licence to cross-section a house, gutting an exterior wall from basement to eaves, revealing the house's graffiti-festooned innards).

For another, it's exactly what they hoped to address. "We were interested in the idea of the suburb then and now — what they were, and what they were going to be," said Marchessault on the cold, drizzly afternoon before the project's opening Friday.

On Leona Drive, the simple answer is suburbia's second phase, as modest homes are levelled to make way for decidedly more upmarket living. "It's a space in transition," Marchessault says. "You can really feel the old suburb here, and the new one growing around it."

But Leona is a microcosm of a con-

Artists taking over Leona Drive houses pay respects to a vanishing vision



TARA WALTON/TORONTO STAR

Using lipstick, Alex Busgang paints the bathroom mirror at 9 Leona Dr., where artists used found materials to pay tribute to Ruth Gillespie, the final resident of the house slated for demolition.

tinient-wide ideal that now seems almost painfully outdated. Boxy brick houses squat in the shadow of condo towers and climbing cranes of North York's nearby North York Yonge-Sheppard nexus. The neighbourhood around it is houses just like Leona Drive's. They're in varying states of repair, from crumbling to boarded up, but most remain tidily well-kept, keeping the promise made decades before.

It's easy to imagine that promise as one of the defining features of the 20th century. Emerging from World War II, suburbs were, to the nascent middle class, a modest kind of utopia — air to breathe, room to

move, safety, cleanliness and quiet.

That's changed dramatically, as cities swell and civic governments embrace the necessary rhetoric of density. Space, it seems, is now a luxury few of us can still afford. And on Leona Drive, there's an undercurrent of quiet dread.

The green house, a piece by An Te Liu, an artist and University of To-

Space, it seems, is now a luxury few can still afford. On Leona Drive, there's an undercurrent of dread

ronto architecture professor, is a cleverly readable bit of iconography writ large. Called "Title Deed," it bears an almost shocking resemblance to the tiny plastic *Monopoly* houses that come in fistfuls, and Liu intends as much.

But the inevitable reading is of the gamesmanship in the uneasy dance between planners, developers and residents when neighbourhoods densify, and communities are levelled to make way for new ones.

After six decades, extracting the roots of Leona Drive isn't without pain. In Richard Fung's installation inside 9 Leona Drive, Bettie Burnett, one of the neighbourhood's

"originals" — residents who moved in when Leona Drive was shiny-new, in 1948 — a quiet reminiscence reveals the tensions of change.

"The only thing I can mention that was negative about living there is when the developers moved in," she says quietly. You're meant to watch the interview from a plastic-sealed chintz loveseat, which, as a heavy signifier of middle-class thrift, puts a fine point on the class conflict of Bettie describes.

Outside, Arbour Lake has taken the detritus of its house-gutting and built shelters the artists will use as squats during the project's one-week life. They call it Paean, and the intention is as plain as it is bleak: As the old suburban ideal of affordable, decent family living is demolished, what happens to those who still need it?

Mostly, though, the work is a quiet elegy for a way of life being lost.

There's a gently human sense to the installation as whole, and the most poignant iteration of that is in the kitchen at 9 Leona, where Angela Joose and Shana MacDonald re-imagine the life of Ruth Gillespie, the last owner to live there before her heart attack. The artists found some of her belongings — pictures, cookbooks — in the basement, and use them to lovingly conjure a tribute in her kitchen, complete with a virtual tuna casserole.

The curators also brought in a psychic to channel Ruth, and recorded it on video, which they show in the shed out back. Taken together it's a tender paean for the modest lives lived not only here, but in suburbs continent-wide. It's a fitting reminder that circumstances need not be extraordinary to be significant. As Frannie, the psychic, says: "When I walked down this street, I felt nothing but love."

Which, really, should be significance enough.

The Leona Drive Project runs to Oct. 31, open daily, 1-4 p.m. and 6-9 p.m. with artist talks each day at 1 and 6 p.m.

01/01/2010

Happy New Year: Best of the year that was

5. The Leona Drive Project



A joint curatorial project between York University's Janine Marchessault and Ryerson's Michael Prokopow, the cynic might assume that their take on their subject, the liminal zone occupied by inner-ring suburbs as cities re-urbanize and wipe them away, might be numbingly academic. That's 90% wrong. By that, I mean about a tenth of the Leona Drive Project, in which 5 modest post-war suburban houses in North York were taken over by about a dozen artists or collectives, were too obliquely intellectual to truly engage, but as far as I'm concerned, that's a pretty great ratio. Simply put, The Leona Drive Project was, on the whole, one of the most readable, playful, provocative, elegiac and profound exhibitions on the suburbs I've seen, and believe me, I've seen a lot.

An Te Liu's outsize Monopoly house, above, became the exhibition's recognizable icon for this reason, encapsulating a lot with a little – the reductive dynamic of urban policy and commercial development, and its rendering of the architectural life cycle of house to home to economic unit in gentrifying urban landscapes. Liu laid out a readable, inviting welcome mat to all comers; once you were through the door, it was hard to leave.

AN TE LIU

19 September - 05 October 2008

AN TE LIU
"Matter"

19th September - 5th October 2008, Studio 3
OPENING: Thursday, 18th September 2008, from 7 pm

AN TE LIU's space-consuming sculptures and installations often consist of standard commercial electrical devices to filter and moisten the air. Piled up beside and on top of each other in the exhibition space, with their straightforward design, air vents and slats, and the cool white and grey colours of their cases, they resemble the model constructions of architectonic Modernism – functional housing blocks and building complexes that could originate from urbanist planners following the theories of "Neues Bauen". In his spectacular, exemplary design for the "Ville Radieuse", this movement's prominent representative Le Corbusier realised the notion of better-quality housing by means of functional forms, open to more light and air, and so better atmospheric hygiene.

When - in his work Airborne (2000) - An Te Liu actually completely exchanged and filtered the air of the gallery space in the shortest possible time using a number of functioning air filters and ionisers, and actually caused air pollution as a consequence of this massive use of electricity, his sculpture developed into a critical comment on those increased efforts for atmospheric hygiene that have become almost manic in many places.

Liu makes use of the formal repertoire of historical Modernism, and references to this in his works merge into fictive scenarios of the future when a collection of air filters and ionisers in Cloud (2008), for example, are mounted on a panel floating in space so that they suggest a futuristic space city or an armada of space-ships that has been launched to defend the galaxy against an attack of killer microbes.

Liu's new Berlin work Matter (2008) also investigates the conceptual worlds of cleanliness and dirt. This time, the particles of dirt or dust in the air around us become the focal point of a filmic installation that resembles a scientific experimental set-up: a small part of the darkened exhibition space is brightly illuminated and filmed by a camera, which then transmits images of the particles floating in the air onto two large projection surfaces. But the recordings, split into individual images, are projected with different timing – one simultaneous, the other at half speed – so that a growing discrepancy develops between the projections during the course of the exhibition, but also between what is filmed and one transmission. The fact that the camera is a model used for surveillance suggests that an invisible "danger" lies in wait in the corners of the room – by this means, An Te Liu's work enters the complex field of tense relations between belief and insight.

AN TE LIU *1967 in Taiwan, lives and works in Toronto. He studied art history at Victoria College, University of Toronto, and architecture at the Southern California Institute of Architecture in Los Angeles. Exhibitions include: Style and Epoch, MKG 127, Toronto (2008); 11th Biennial of Architecture Venice (2008); 136 and Counting, SFMOMA, San Francisco (2008); Figuration in Contemporary Design, The Art Institute of Chicago (2008); Pattern Theory, MKG 127, Toronto (2007); Modelle für Morgen: Köln, European Kunsthalle, Cologne (2007); S t r e e t, Witte de With, Rotterdam (2006).

www.bethanien.de



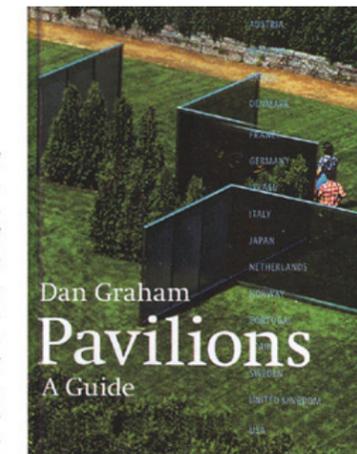
TEXTE ZUR KUNST

READINGS

Recent art books and catalogues

DAN GRAHAM, PAVILIONS: A GUIDE, Josh Thorpe, Art Metropole, 76 pp, \$20.00.

This tiny, perfect book fits in the palm of your hand and gives you all the information you need to set off on a round-the-world trip to visit the pavilion sculptures of the American artist Dan Graham. Since the late 1970s, Graham has taken on commissions for his steel-and-glass enclosures in Europe and Asia as well as North and South America. Like bus stops for looking, they provide shelter and viewing perspectives. Thorpe has tracked them all down and provided directions, illustrations and a revealing interview with the artist himself.



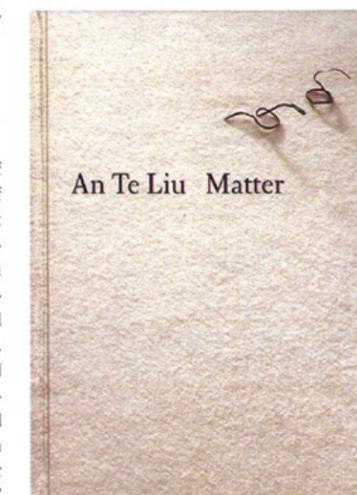
RUNNING THE NUMBERS: AN AMERICAN SELF-PORTRAIT, Chris Jordan, Prestel, 112 pp, \$49.95.

The digitally fabricated photos that comprise Chris Jordan's *Running the Numbers* series take dry statistics about the wounding effects of modern consumerism and bring them, Jordan explains, "into a more universal visual language that might allow for more feeling." Simultaneously art photography, political critique and environmentalist statement, the Seattle-based artist's unsettling yet alluring photographic landscapes, which depict apocalyptic wastelands made of defunct cellphones, used plastic bottles and other detritus, force us to bear witness to our own slow but unmerciful undoing of the planet.



AN TE LIU: MATTER, Nicolaus Schafhausen et al., Künstlerhaus Bethanien, 104 pp, \$13.00.

Minimalist restraint and wry reversals of modernist logic characterize the work of the Taiwanese-Canadian artist and architect An Te Liu. This catalogue to his solo exhibition in Berlin last fall features installation photos of works such as *Cloud*, an arrangement of suspended air purifiers presented at the 2008 Venice Architecture Biennale. Complementary essays and interviews shed light on Liu's fascination with the confluence of social-improvement theory and modern design as well as the artist's own maxim that "all functions taken to their extreme can become a bit dysfunctional."



Look Way Up

Two artists and two readings of the massive rooftop mechanics that power urban life
By John Bentley Mays

To the minds of city folk, the flat rooftops of downtown are as mysterious and remote as the expanses of the Gobi Desert. We never go up into the windswept wastelands above our heads, hot and dry in summer, bone-numbingly cold in winter. And even if someone got a yen to visit these forsaken spaces, he would find the way barred by security guards and locked doors.

But the roof of the city is not wholly empty. Though devoid of animal or plant life—the odd pigeon excepted—it is nevertheless populated by machines that pump air through massive systems of ductwork, cooling and cleaning units, fans and filters. This emplacement hovers like an electric cloud over the city, creating livable interior environments almost invisibly.

Obscure as it surely is, this very mundane metropolitan phenomenon has found eloquent witnesses in Toronto artists Howard Podeswa and An Te Liu. Along with the Impressionists of the 19th century, and avant-gardists ever since, Podeswa and Liu have identified sources of inspiration in the most unlikely, neglected places and things, and they have registered their

discoveries in memorable works of art.

Podeswa's series of numerous small and beautiful canvases called *Duncan* records the rooftop cityscape below the high window of a studio the painter once rented on Toronto's Duncan Street. This work captures the monumental presence of simple mechanical forms, their unintended sculptural minimalism. Brushed out broad and flat in oil, the images of air exchangers and other devices are also heavy with the loneliness of their position, certainly in the thick of the urban fabric, but largely out of sight to walkers on the pavement.

Viewed at a deeper level, the objects depicted in Podeswa's paintings can be usefully read as symbolic instances of everything that is appar-

ently marginal to the hectic pulse of mainstream city life. One thinks especially of the vast, quiet grid of energy and machinery, switches and wires, conduits and transformers, that operates underground and everywhere around us, mostly unnoticed, but undergirding all the comings and goings of citizens.

And there is also a human dimension in Howard Podeswa's symbolism. Almost everyone, to some degree or another, shares with the machines the experience of being background, mere backdrop. Like the ventilation systems high atop downtown buildings, we pass our lives largely unknown to the public at large, recognized only by the occasional artist such as Podeswa (a systems analyst who trained in

Cloud, 2008
by An Te Liu
Installation view, 11th Venice
Biennale of Architecture

ALONG WITH THE IMPRESSIONISTS OF THE 19TH CENTURY, AND AVANT-GARDISTS SINCE, THE ARTISTS HAVE IDENTIFIED SOURCES OF INSPIRATION IN UNLIKELY, NEGLECTED PLACES.

OPPOSITE: LA BIENNALE DI VENEZIA AND MKG127; CAMERAPHOTO ARTE DI CODATO





Duncan Series 2, 2010
by Howard Podeswa
Oil on panel, 30.5 x 30.5 cm

chemical engineering), who can see in ordinariness the underlying order of the city.

In contrast to Podeswa's paintings, with their moody, brooding atmospheres, the sculptures of An Te Liu forthrightly celebrate the suave technological cool of air-processing machines. His brilliant *Cloud* (2008) is a composition of air purifiers, ionizers, sterilizers, washers, humidifiers, and ozone air cleaners, all suspended above the visitor's head, plugged in, and whirring and buzzing continuously. These stand-ins for the big rooftop installations come together in a work without humanistic pathos or heartbeat, and charged with a kind of post-human philosophical voltage.

Cloud, in other words, is a miniature image of the new mechanical layout that modern engineering and technology have brought forth to make possible life and work inside tall buildings. It effectively draws attention to the secret sources of the clean air breathed by the tower-dwellers. But the piece does more than that. Like Podeswa's *Duncan*, *Cloud* gives evidence of investigative imagination applied with intelligence and sensitivity to commonplace things. Both Podeswa and Liu restore to us a sense of the great impersonal schemes that rest and toil in the subconscious of the urban imaginary. ●



Top right: Duncan Series 1, 2010
by Howard Podeswa
Oil on panel, 25 x 25 cm

Bottom right: Duncan Series 4, 2010
by Howard Podeswa
Oil on panel, 40.5 x 51 cm

Bottom left: Duncan Series 3, 2010
by Howard Podeswa
Oil on panel, 25 x 25 cm



VISUAL ARTS » REVIEW

The future is dystopian, but the buildings have modern feelings



R.M. VAUGHAN
THE EXHIBITIONIST
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EMPIRE OF DREAMS AT MOCCA
Until Aug. 15, 952 Queen St. W., Toronto; www.mocca.ca

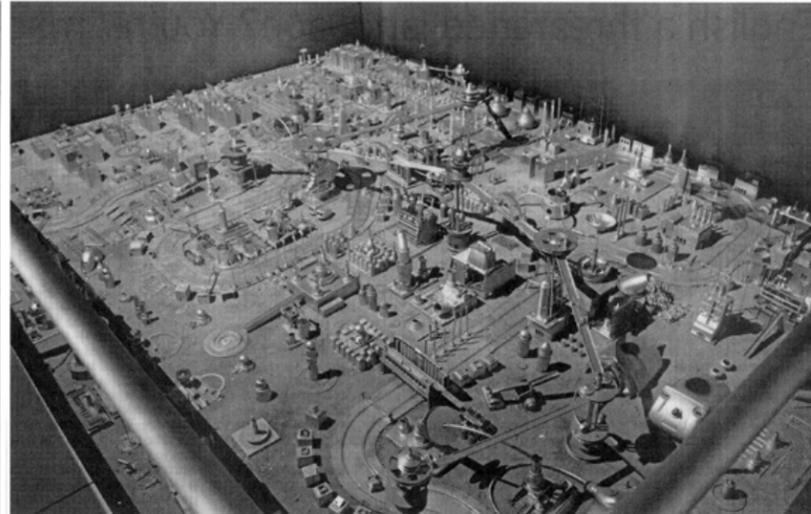
In keeping with all the Hollywood sequels on offer this summer, I'll dub this column Summer Blockbusters 2.

While the Power Plant's blow-out show, *Adaptation: Between Species* (covered last week), explores the e/devolving relationship between humans and animals, the Museum of Contemporary Canadian Art's *Empire of Dreams* ponders the equally brain straining topic of, as the show's subtitle puts it, the "Phenomenology of the built environment" — which is art-speak for "Do buildings have feelings too?"

Curated by MOCCA artistic director David Liss (whose penchant for rock 'n' roll pyrotechnics is well known) *Empire of Dreams*, a show that sounds about as exciting as a midterm paper on joists and load bearing, explodes with the signature Liss flair.

As per last week's big summer roundup, there is way too much art in *Empire of Dreams* for this humble column. But *Empire of Dreams* never feels repetitive or cluttered. Rather, it is the tightest exhibition I've seen at MOCCA in two years. In the interests of transparency, my own work was featured in a much-despised MOCCA summer show in 2007 — so I know what I'm talking about.

Entering the MOCCA, the first thing you encounter is a gentle whirring sound, the purr of motorized fans. Overhead, An Te Liu's gorgeous



Samina Mansuri's enormous, sparkling model city is made from film reels, food tins and discarded building materials.

sculpture *Cloud*, comprised of dozens of interlocked air purifiers, putters and puffs, continually spewing out fresh, dust-free breezes. Limiting his collection of gizmos only to those fabricated in gleaming industrial white, An Te Liu neatly melds innocence and health with trepidation and post-industrial panic. What, after all, is his cloud doing? It's removing all the little bits and mites that take our breath away. Don't be fooled by the hospital-clean shine.

Continuing with the sci-fi theme, Samina Mansuri revisits the optimistic futurism of the 1950s with an enormous, sparkling model city made from film reels, food tins, and discarded building materials. Like Liu, Mansuri sticks to one colour — in her case, a matte silver grey that is occasionally illuminated by a flickering video projected directly on top of the toy town. And while some may view Mansuri's lead-toned Jetsons-themed playground as more funereal than celebratory (the matte silver

does remind one of headstones), I found the sculpture joyful. The future does not wait in new materials and gadgets, Mansuri argues, but in the reinvention of existing materials.

For outright anti-utopianism, turn around and gaze at Alex McLeod's chaotic, wall-sized digital collages.

Blending hard, sharp architectural forms with luridly coloured blobs and dripping masses that resemble chewed gum, McLeod's cities are alarming Babels, places where human manipulations of the organic and the inorganic have sped along at an equal pace, uninterrupted by environmental or ethical concerns.

The result: cities turned nightmarish by their own sprawl and a host of bio-mechanical entities that have festered to monstrous proportions. The *Matrix* meets The Blob, and neither new reality appears to be winning.

After all that hubbub, calm yourself with Sara Graham's mustard-yellow blueprint fan-

tasias and Janet Jones's pulsing paintings of particles in slow motion.

Graham's madcap diagrams look like Frank Lloyd Wright sketches on crystal meth. Yet, her impossible proposals are weirdly comforting, in the same way that preposterously large churches and Baroque decor are comforting — because there is too much to consider, you decide instead to absorb, not decode, the drawings.

Jones, meanwhile, combines dusk black striated spaces with neon dots and dashes, replicating the calming sensation of watching distant traffic at night.

In an exhibition full of noisy inquiries into how we will inhabit the coming century, Graham and Jones present meditative pools.

Empire of Dreams is certainly full of firecrackers and fog machines, a KISS concert for eggheads. But if you overlook the subtler works, the buzz won't last as long.

VISUAL ARTS

A vision of the city, warts and all

The theme is dreams, but many works border on the nightmarish

MURRAY WHYTE
VISUAL ART CRITIC

If Toronto is remarkable for one thing, it's the uncanny ability to be everywhere and nowhere at once. There's a reason Hollywood has flocked here over the years; physically, we've managed to function almost perfectly as an urban backlot, the perfect, pan-urban nowhere. What, you thought it was the weather?

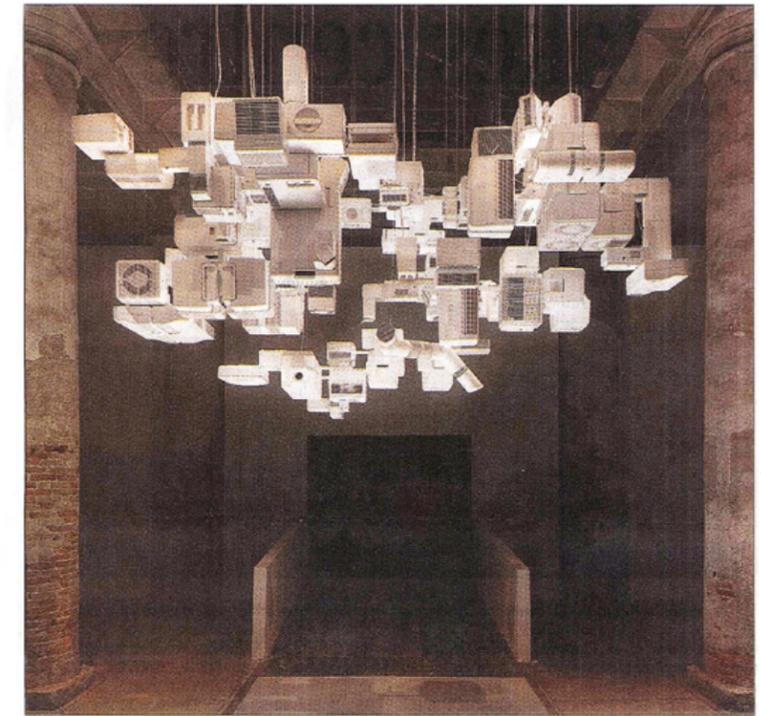
Meanwhile, we're a city of people who, in any other circumstance, would likely never cross paths, let alone share subway cars. With our wildly divergent backgrounds, experiences, languages, we all end up lumped together and simmered in a wildly eclectic brew that, one way or another, always seems to come out perfectly palatable and, once in a while, even something to truly savour.

At the Museum of Contemporary Canadian Art, it's the more-than-slightly-against-the-odds spirit that director David Liss is trying to capture with his summer show, "Empire of Dreams: Phenomenology of the Built Environment," and the mix indicates as much — young, old, established, newbie, longtime Toronto-ites, fresh arrivals.

There's something refreshing about not trying to be definitive about an art scene so much as the place in which it — and everyone else — operates, and that's also part of the goal here. The title is a mouthful, so let's just say it's a group of artists working out a set of urban realities, along with some distant-but-imaginable dreams.

Yet mostly they look an awful lot more like nightmares. Samina Mansuri's piece seems to be the place where all of this city's evergreening dreams of diversity and sustainability go to die; a scale-model urbanscape, it has all the hope of a *Mad Max* movie. It reminded me of a bleak, cartoonish version of Fritz Lang's dystopian masterpiece, *Metropolis*. Pallid, oblique projections — of clouds, lightning barely readable aerial city views — intensify the desolation.

Across the room, Alex McLeod's computer-generated cityscapes give us a candy-coated urban apocalypse in bright orange, black and grey. McLeod's technique has the remarkable ability to render exceedingly gruesome vision-enticing and friendly, but that's the spoonful of sugar for a still-grim



Artful air purifiers in An Te Liu's *Cloud* (2008): when the weather comes with Energy Star ratings.

dose of pessimism. Ditto David Trautrimas, whose digitally rendered images of fantastical brutalist military architecture contain an implied threat of authoritarian aggression.

That's one way to build an empire. But as empires go, Toronto's polyglot version, if you can call it that, is built on input, not output, colonized, not colonizer. David Han offers an endearing take with "Margaret Learns to Drive from There to Here," a piece he made for The Leona Drive Project last fall. Here, a mid-'80s Oldsmobile wagon sits parked in the gallery, its windshield obscured with a projection of a car moving through various Toronto neighbourhoods — squat bungalows and condo towers, light industrial space, vacant lots. Along one side, a separate video shows the same cityscape in passing, but with noticeable inflections of difference — ethnic strip malls, those same bungalows in the process of demolition.

It starts with the audio recording of Jim Anderson, the patriarch of the '50s radio and TV series *Father Knows Best*, trying to teach wife Margaret to drive. As a send-up of

suburbia's outdated ideals, it is hilariously chauvinistic (if that's possible). But Han translates the script to various foreign languages — Korean, Cantonese, Arabic — that make it ring with new meaning.

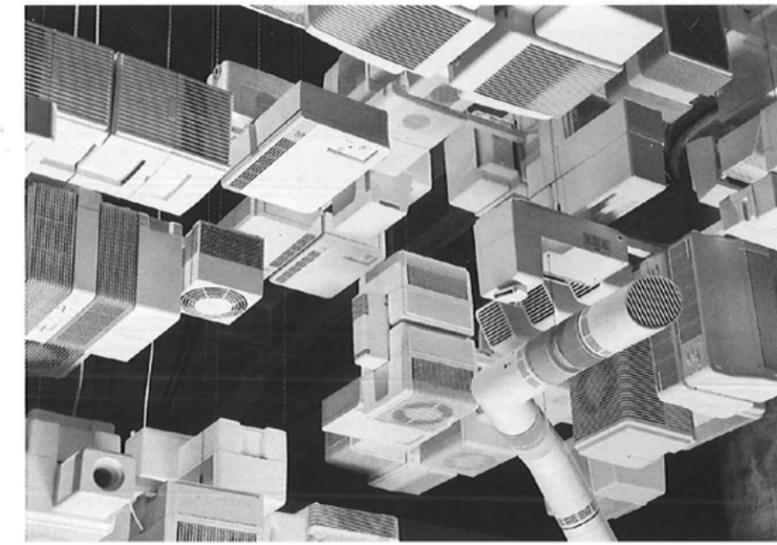
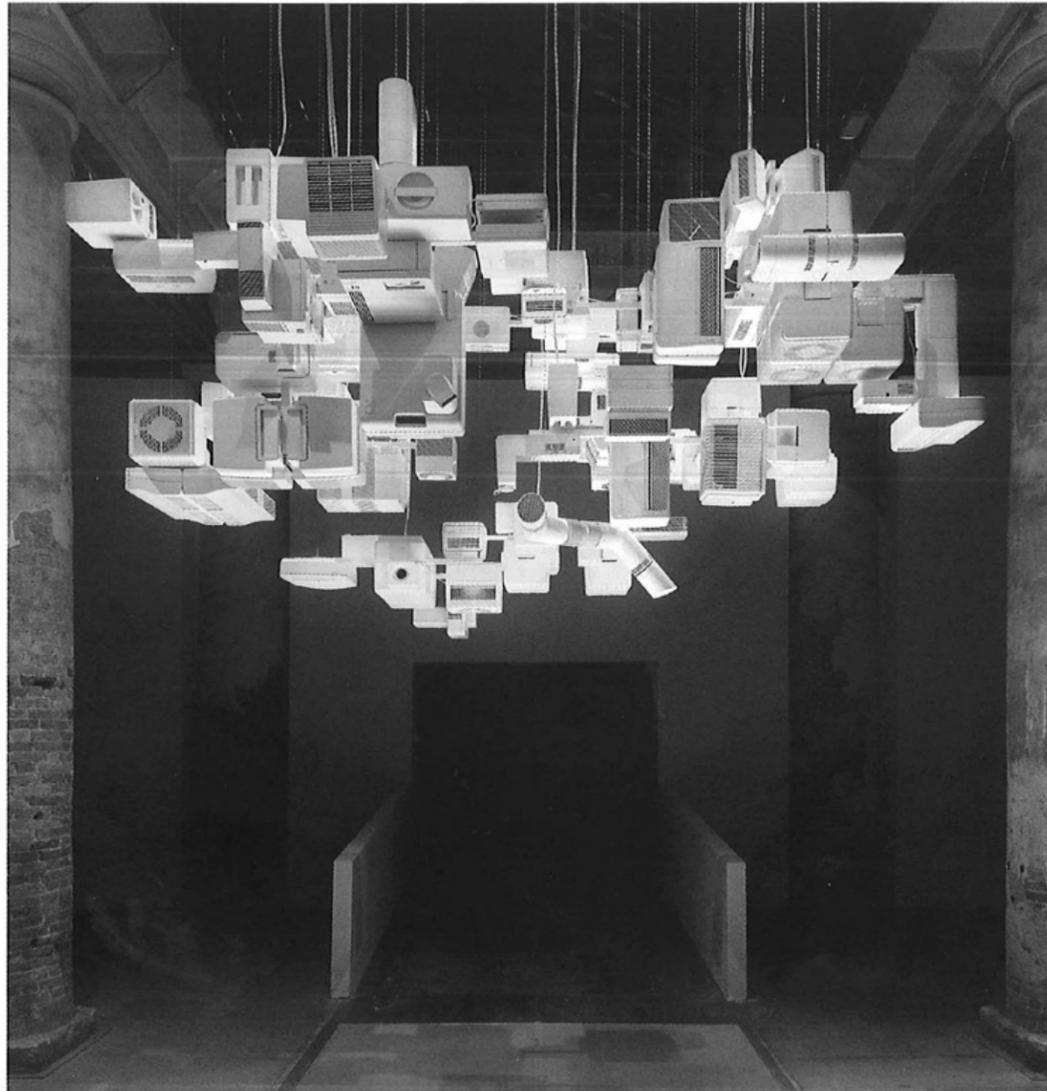
There's so much work here — 20 artists — and such a breadth, I couldn't possibly mention it all. Some we've seen before, like Dan Bergeron's recreations of defunct Toronto storefronts, from his "A City Renewal Project" of last year. Some we've been deprived of, like An Te Liu's "Cloud," showing in Toronto for the first time. A suspended cluster of artfully arranged air purifiers, it's a clear comment on our mechanically mediated urban lives — when clouds come with Energy Star ratings, it's gone too far — while its rectilinear shapes and ordered composition formally evokes Modernist sculpture and architecture.

But if there's one piece here that best fits the exhibition's premise, it's a video work by senior Toronto artists Kim Tomczak and Lisa Steele. It's called "Becoming," and there are three distinct videos — B for Berlin, V for Vancouver and, of course, T for — well, you get the idea. Each is a quietly observational

recording of cities in progress. After watching Berlin a while, a curiously compelling, entirely emotional sense forced me in front of the Toronto screen. A creature of the west, Alberta and BC, I'm not from here and, like many of us, I grew up with a cultivated resentment of the Big Smoke that, over time, I ground down to ambivalence and, in recent years, a touch of actual appreciation.

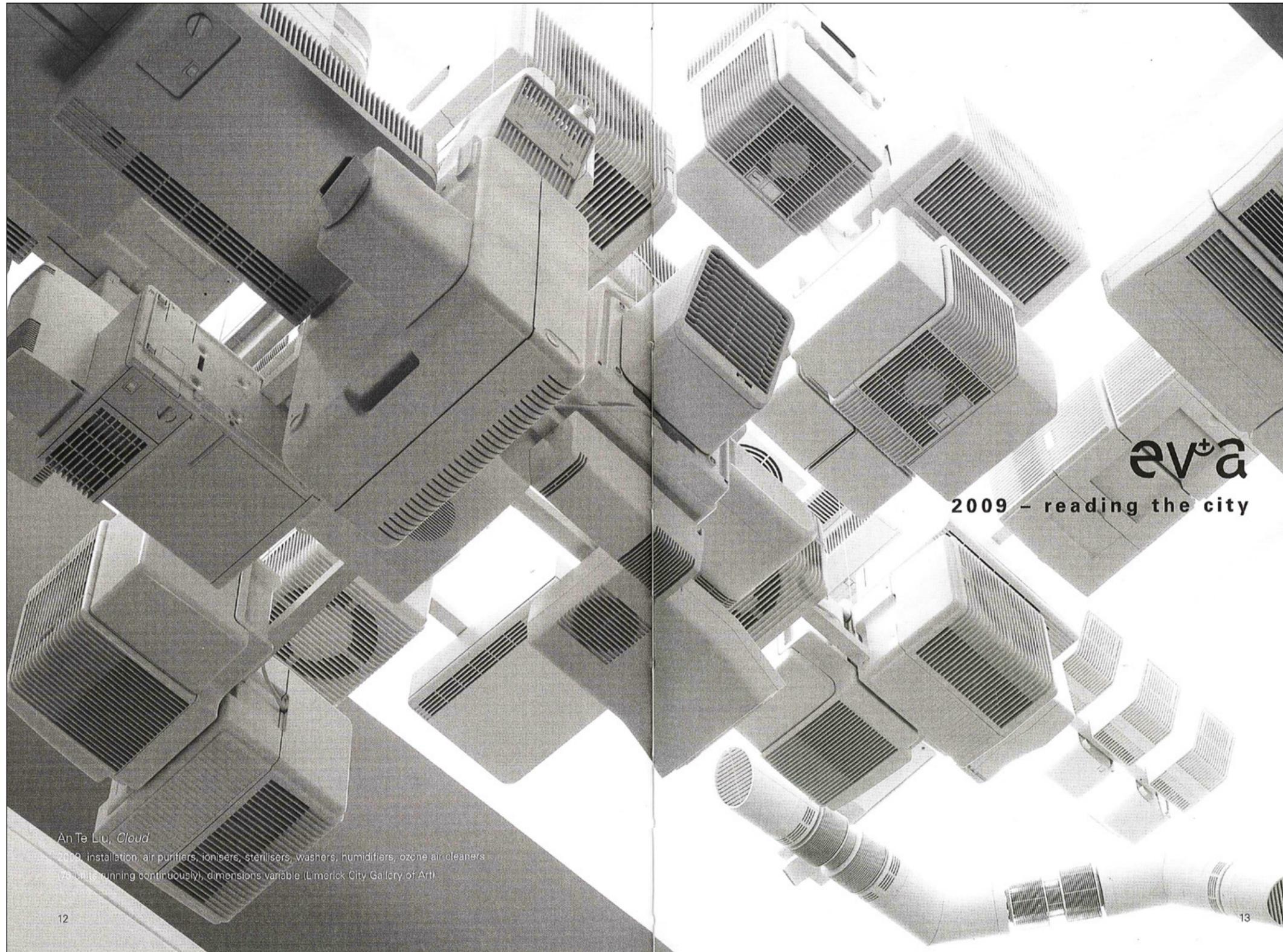
But sitting there staring at uniquely Toronto built forms — squat, postwar bungalows, condo towers rising over weary-looking Victorian row houses — I felt something I hadn't before: a sense of place.

Given the choices, I wanted to be with Toronto, warts and all. It's pretty simple, really. Tomczak and Steele give us a vision of the city that is neither bleak nightmare nor idealized utopia, but simply what it is. The title says it all: all cities, not just ours, are in the constant process of becoming, without end. Our empire, that dream of permanence and place, lives only in endless potential: We are not what we will be, forever. A pair of longtime Toronto artists delivering the piece that defines it? Funny, that.



Figs. 5.7 + 5.8
(opposite and right)
Engaging with fears of dust
in *Cloud*, by An Te Liu, Venice
Biennale, 2008

missing in these images of dust, smoke, and debris "are the missing." This almost geological image of Manhattan enables us to distance ourselves from the full effects of the tragedy. In considering another recent examination of dust, we might recall that immediately after the attacks, households in Lower Manhattan were provided with air cleaners to both filter the atmosphere and to provide some sense of solace within an urban environment having unknown atmospheric content and potentially harmful effects. Such an environment is the context for the project *Cloud* by An Te Liu. This is certainly a different type of exploration of dust than Kurgan's, but it nonetheless relates to Kurgan's project through its focus on the monitoring and surveillance of space. In *Cloud*, Liu assembled numerous air cleaners into an apparatus hovering above an entryway to one of the gallery spaces in the Venice Arsenal. He wrote how this assemblage of cleaning apparati "wash, filter, ionize, ozonize, and sterilize our airspace, separating us from bacteria, allergens, germs, spores, dust and other bad things." [Figs. 5.7 + 5.8] He claimed that the project was not only a literal cleansing device but an urban representation: "a floating polis, perhaps of the future, but also recalling visions of futures past."⁸ But the irony of this project is that the dust is simply moved, not removed. The idea is literally born out of the inner operations of each machine's dust-storage chamber. Our desire to clean results in the transference and relocation of dust. But returning to our original concept of dust as marker of history, we might consider one last project that represents a type of rapprochement with this substance—an experimental preservation project by Jorge Otero-Pailos, titled *The Ethics of Dust*.



eva

2009 - reading the city

An Te Liu, *Cloud*

2009, installation, air purifiers, ionisers, sterilisers, washers, humidifiers, ozone air cleaners
(76 units running continuously), dimensions variable (Limerick City Gallery of Art)

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An Te Liu

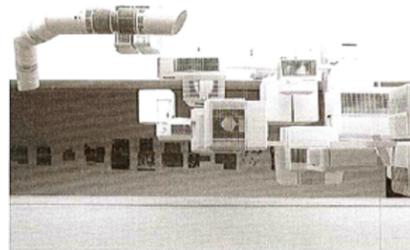
Born in Tainan, Taiwan, in 1967). Holds an honours BA in art history and renaissance studies from the University of Toronto, and an MArch from the Southern California Institute of Architecture, Los Angeles. His installations explore issues of function, malfunction and cultural coding in our built and hypothesised environments. Recent exhibitions include *Style and Epoch*, MKG127, Toronto; *Hier ist Amerika oder Nirgends*, Galerie Ben Kaufmann, Berlin; Art Berlin; 11th Venice Biennale of Architecture; *246 and Counting*, SFMoMA; *Matter*, Künstlerhaus Bethanien, Berlin. Lives and works in Toronto and Berlin.

Good hygiene is important.

Cloud is comprised of domestic air-purification appliances produced and consumed around the world over the last decade. They wash, filter, ionise, ozone-ise and sterilise our air space, separating us from bacteria, allergens, germs, spores, dust and other bad things. Armada-like clusters converge to create a floating polis, perhaps of the future, but also recall visions of futures past.

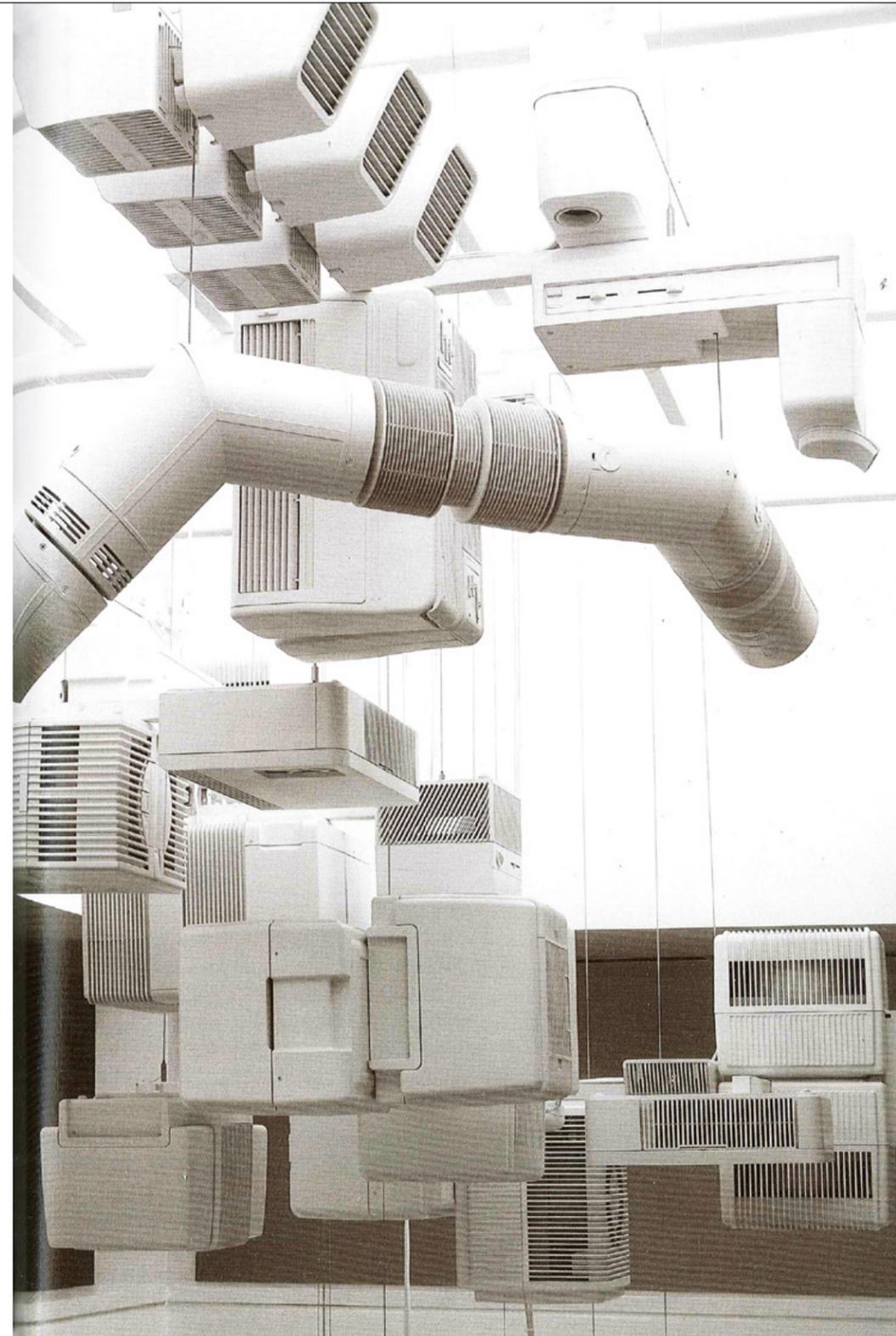
In the early twentieth century, ideas about cleanliness and healthy living were influential in the development of modern architecture and urbanism. They were connected to the call for sunlight, greenery, fresh air and spacious expanses free of congestion. Rhetoric about hygiene would resonate psychologically and translate visually in the creation of new, pure forms. Some time later, Reyner Banham made a provocative suggestion. Why have buildings at all? The increasing sophistication of our environmental technologies will allow us to survive fine without traditional forms of shelter. We could live in completely controlled environment-bubbles, with all our needs met by an array of systems and devices. These days, we still live in our houses, finding ways to feel at home.

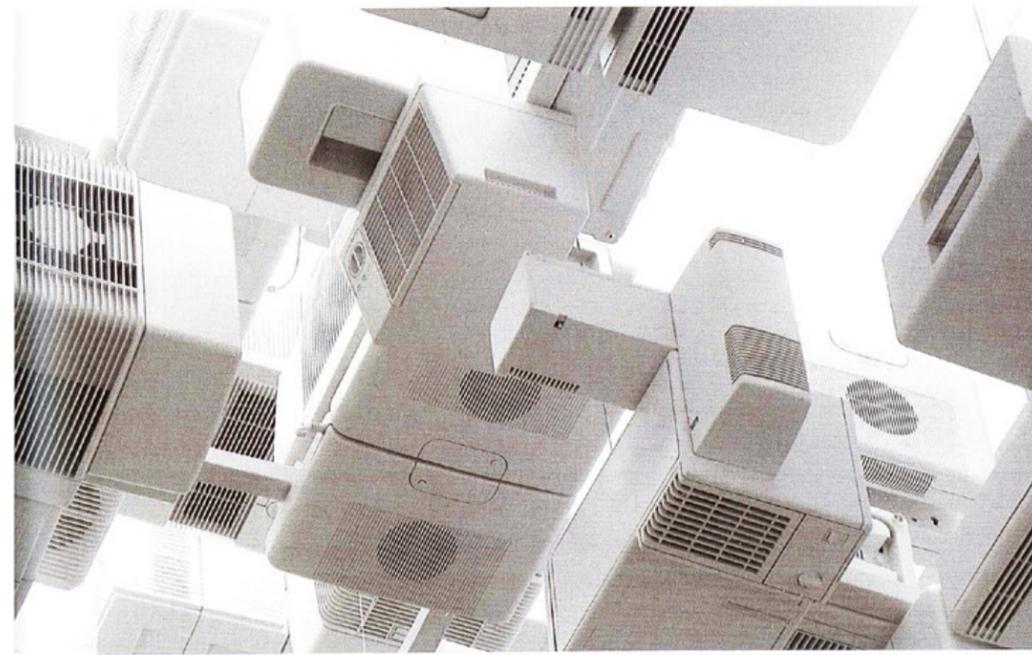
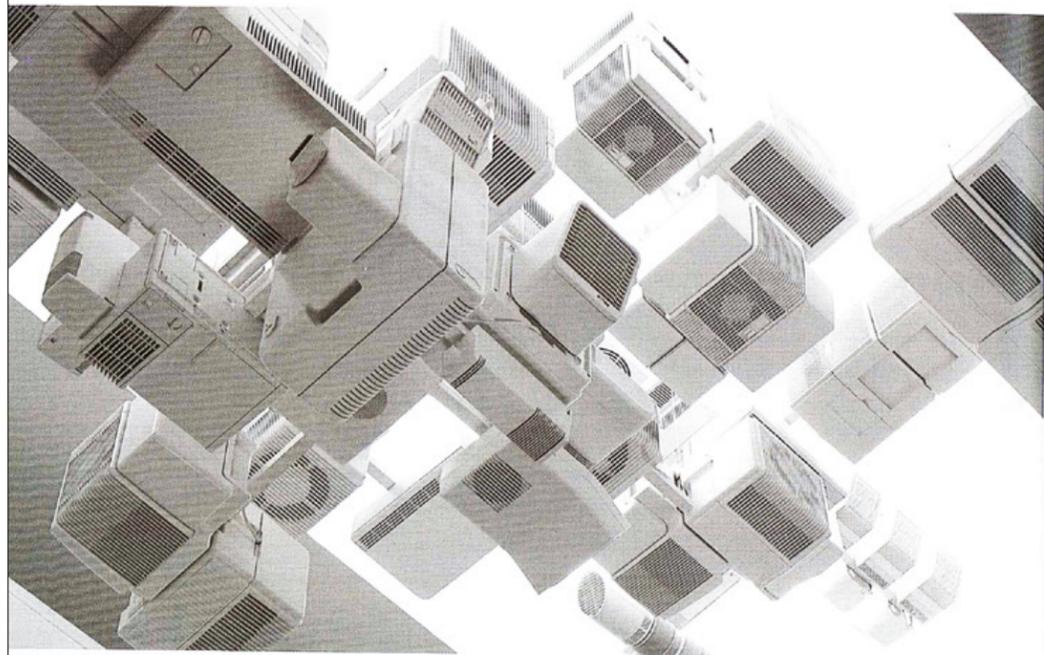
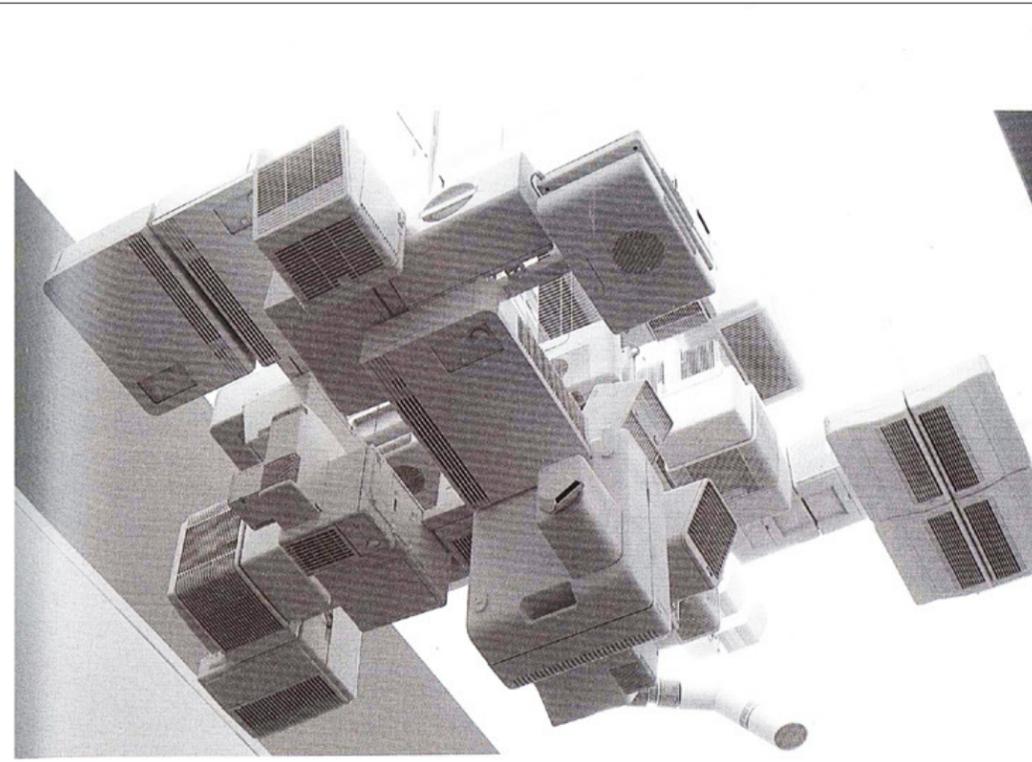
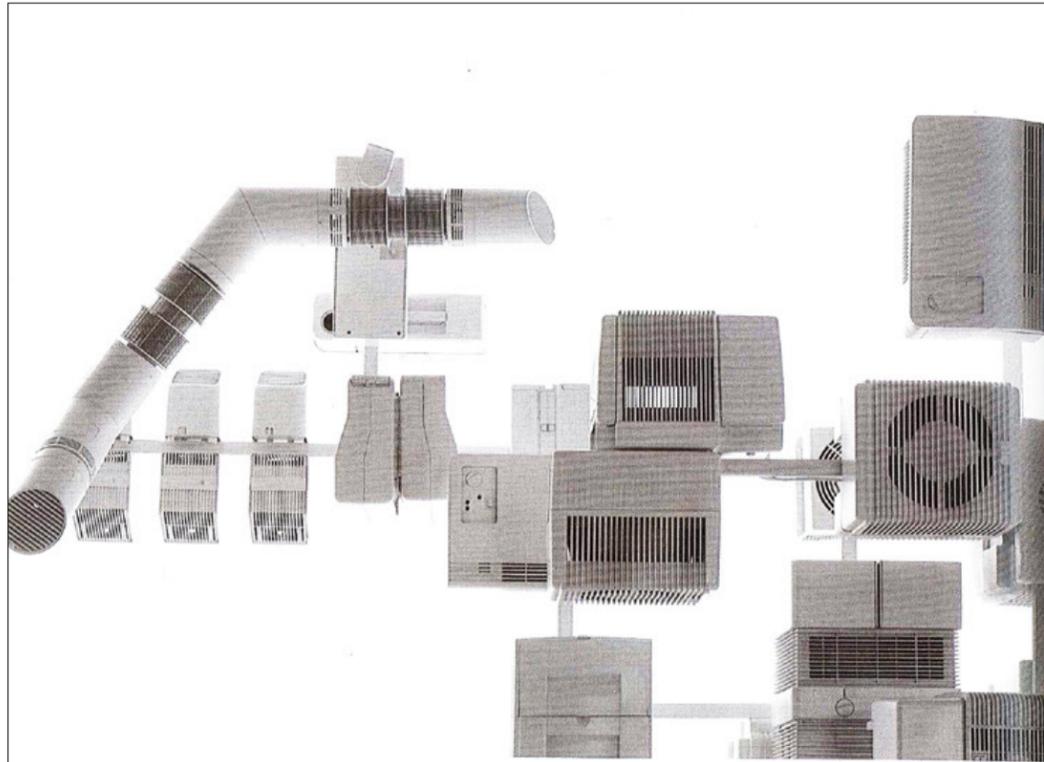
What will our new brave world be like? Clean, at least.



Cloud

2009, installation, air purifiers, ionisers, sterilisers, washers, humidifiers, ozone air cleaners (76 units running continuously), dimensions variable
Limerick City Gallery of Art







Clouds An Te Liu

Cloud, 2008
An Te Liu

Site-specific installation for the 11th International Architecture Exhibition of the Venice Biennale.

Cloud consists of domestic air purification appliances produced and consumed around the world over the last decade. They wash, filter, ionize, ozonize and sterilize the air around us,

shielding us from bacteria, allergens, germs, spores, dust and other harmful things. Armada-like clusters converge to create a floating polis, perhaps a city of the future, but they also recall past visions of the future.

With Cloud An Te Liu has taken modernism's rhetoric of purity and hygiene to a point where the idea of the traditional shelter has dissolved into completely controlled environment-bubbles, where all the needs of humanity are met by technological systems and devices – everything is absolutely clean.

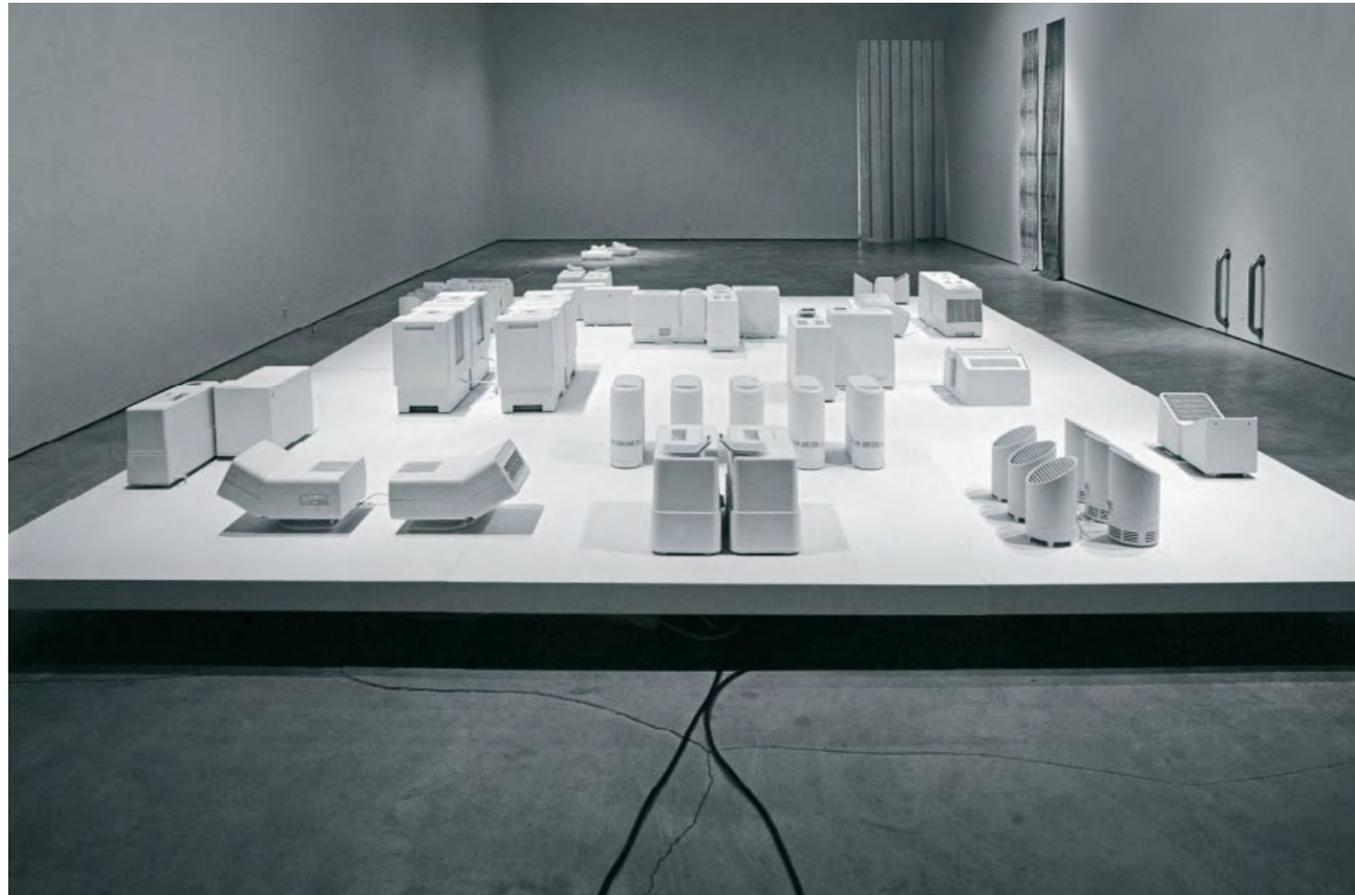
Photo Stefano Graziani © La Biennale di Venezia

99.7 Per Cent Pure

The HEPA air filter is only capable of processing 99.7 per cent of airborne particles, leaving 0.3 per cent unaccounted for. **Mason White** describes the work of Canadian installation artist An Te Liu who made air-filtration appliances his main subject.



An Te Liu, *Cloud*, Venice Biennale, 2008
Air purifiers, ionisers, sterilisers, washers,
humidifiers and ozone air cleaners
running continuously.



An Te Liu, *Airborne*, 2000
Air ionisers, purifiers, ecologisers, humidifiers;
64 units running continuously. Installation
view, Contemporary Art Gallery, Vancouver.

Taiwanese-Canadian artist An Te Liu's recent work operates within the complex airspace of classification, hygiene and weightlessness. Charged with conflicting and multiple readings of scales and eras, Liu employs modified devices and materials in swarms and assemblies with a tenacious attention to sequencing. Since 2000, he has used a broad range of continuously running air-filtration appliances – from HEPA (high efficiency particulate air) filters to ozone air cleaners – in his work. The intention of this series of installations, which began with *Airborne*, is to stimulate our awareness of and increasing reliance on (or the promise of) filtered and purified air. Of course, like any quest for technological perfection, the devices reach a Zeno's-paradox-like impossibility. The HEPA filter, the most effective common domestic filtration product on the market, for example, is only capable of processing 99.7 per cent of airborne particulates, leaving a lingering concern surrounding the unaccounted for 0.3 per cent matter. Liu's filtration appliance series capitalises on this problem and its urban and architectural ramifications.

Innovations in air filtration originated from a desire for increased respiratory safety for fire fighters (in the 1820s), coal miners (in the 1850s) and, later, for underwater divers (1910s). Augustus Siebe's patented diving helmet used tubes and filters to pump fresh air in and bad air out. Siebe adapted this same system into the gas mask during the First World War. The HEPA filter was a wartime innovation in the 1940s, which effectively processed the air of US government scientists working in radioactive conditions. What began as a classified item later became a well-marketed and domesticated product. Over time, filtration technology continued to extend into the workplace and public institutions, offering some level of perceived atmospheric purity. And in recent decades, air modification has extended beyond the elimination of foul odours, toxicity and noxious gases to the removal of odourless and invisible elements such as viruses and bacteria.

Air-purification systems also developed in response to the increasing toxicity of building materials, cleaning products and bio-aerosols containing pathogens, formaldehyde, VOCs (volatile organic compounds), asbestos and lead. In the 1960s, Klaus and Manfred Hammes introduced the first residential air purifier in Germany, increasing awareness of the effects of these domestic substances. The 1970s energy crisis created catalytic conditions for the success of

indoor air-filtration machinery, which sought to quarantine indoor from outdoor air. In 1984 the World Health Organization reported on a series of symptoms occurring at increasing frequencies in buildings with indoor climate issues. These symptoms, including irritation of the eyes, nose and throat, respiratory infections, dizziness and nausea later became known as Sick Building Syndrome (SBS). In Liu's air-filtration series, especially in *Airborne* (2000), *Exchange* (2001) and *Cloud* (2008), there is a seeming sickness in the excessive use of these appliances. Are the very machines designed to mitigate illness now in fact operating as facilitators of it? Air so pure, it hurts.

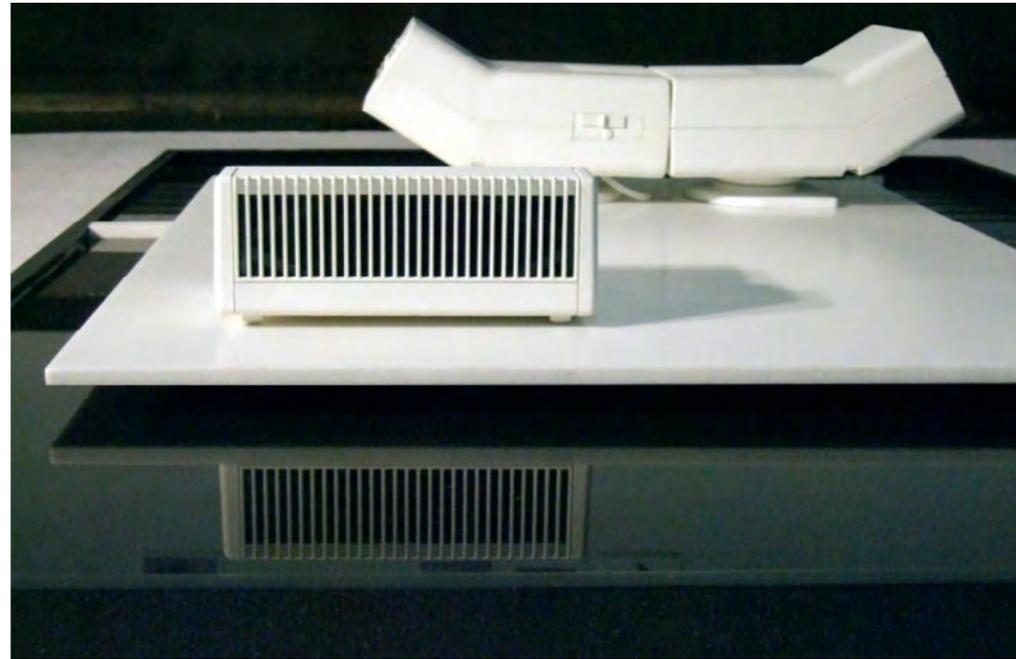
Inevitably wrapped up within their cultural status, Liu's appliance works also confront the complex evolution and development of their role within architecture and interiors. Early Modernism's faith in the technological agency in architecture predicted the significance to which it would influence building enterprises. Walter Gropius' 1956 *Scope of Total Architecture* posits a complete transformation of life 'brought about by technological

advancements' and, along with these changes, architecture that embodies a 'living urban organism' that he termed 'total architecture'.¹ In *Megastructures*, Reyner Banham offers the megastructure as a critique of Gropius' total architecture as being too homogeneous, culturally thin, and as dead 'as any other perfect machine'.² An Te Liu's work extends this critique from total architecture to megastructure. *Cloud* best exhibits this transition as it hovers effortlessly, teasing our airspace with its purity, a megastructure melding flocks of humming ionisers, purifiers and sterilisers, assembled in squadron formation, which aggregate into self-replicating and expanding clusters.

Liu's use of the appliance has shifted from the readymade to a modified unitised material. In *Cloud*, the appliances are merged, creating mutant assemblies and further confusing the scale at which the work is to be read. It is configurable, expandable and networked, and as a one-to-one reading it is intrusive – even excessive – highlighting the fear of unmediated interior environments. At an intermediate scale, the work is less Modernist urbanism than Futurist space-junk, since most of the material is intercepted by Liu, no doubt through online bartering portals, en route to dumps as the global e-waste burden grows. At its largest scale, *Cloud* is read as a machined



An Te Liu, *Exchange*, 2001
above: HEPA air purifiers and cords; 56 units running continuously.
Installation view, Henry Urbach Gallery, New York.



An Te Liu, *Untitled (Complex IV)*, 2007
above: Carpeting, Corian, distilled water, male and female pheromones, vibrators and air sterilisers running continuously.



An Te Liu, *Cloud*, Venice Biennale, 2008
opposite bottom and right: Air purifiers, ionisers, sterilisers, washers, humidifiers and ozone air cleaners running continuously.



equivalent of an actual cloud abstracted into its components of moisture processing, air exchanges and atmospheric densities, and imagines the potential, as with snow-making machines, of generating entire weather conditions at will.

As with earlier works of the series, *Cloud* has had its overwhelming beige-ness traded for the cleanliness of white, and is fully operational. However, departing from static Brasilia-like assemblies, it hovers as if in mid-flight, embarking on a mission for space. Or perhaps it is a well-vented and exhaling space station – the ultimate megastructure. *Cloud* extends the ambition of levitation found in earlier works such as *Ether (or, Migratory Studies of the North American Chinatown)* (2004) in which rendered suburban fabric floats among cumulus-like cloud formations. In many ways its disposition is more akin to how we might conventionally think of mechanical systems: hung from the ceiling, tucked outside our more accessible visual field.

Installed at the 2008 Venice Biennale and acknowledging the inability to process or filter the entirety of the Arsenale, *Cloud* instead creates its own bubble of processed air dissipating into the larger space; an

invisible zone of purity shape-shifting with the interior microclimates. Unlike earlier works with similar materials, *Cloud* is without orientation or reference. It has left the ground and thus left behind any reading of the Modernist city in favour of science fiction. Replacing the orderly plinth of *Airborne* and the columnar organisational logic of *Exchange*, its catenary-like suspension carries a new range of references grounded within 1960s architecture and 1970s film – perhaps Lando Calrissian's heady Cloud City from *The Empire Strikes Back*, or Yona Friedman's Ville Spatiale, a continuous space-frame with occupiable volumes. Either way, Liu's recent work seems to occupy the destabilising 0.3 per cent airspace where, given a tendency towards excess, there exists the slim margin that we are still not fully serviced by technological utopias. The processing and conversion of air into pure air, and its associated packaging, is caught between a Modernist ideal and a contemporary fear. **D**

Notes

1. Walter Gropius, *Scope of Total Architecture*, Collier Books (New York), 1962.
2. Nigel Whiteley, *Reyner Banham: History of the Immediate Future*, MIT Press (Cambridge, MA), 2002, p 287.

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HEAD IN THE CLOUDS



DESPITE GUMMERS OF HOPE EMERGING FROM THE 11TH VENICE BIENNALE IN ARCHITECTURE, IT'S CLEAR THAT A NEW RETHINK IS REQUIRED TO RETURN THIS AUSPICIOUS GLOBAL ARCHITECTURE EXHIBITION TO ITS FORMER GLORY.

TEXT RODNEY LATOURELLE

In contrast to the previous edition, the 11th Venice Biennale in Architecture is marked by an incredibly diverse and yet inherently contradictory collection of architectural display. In 2006, curator Richard Burdett's theme of *Cities, Architecture and Society* became a productive locus around which to evolve a discussion that went beyond the object to include a range of social dynamics. This year, Aaron Betsky's *Out There: Architecture Beyond Building* concentrates an experimental agenda, presenting many of the most excep-

ABOVE TORONTO-BASED AN TE LIU SUBMITTED *CLOUD* TO THIS YEAR'S BIENNALE, WHICH IS COMPRISED OF AIR PURIFIERS, IONIZERS, STERILIZERS, WASHERS, HUMIDIFIERS AND OZONE AIR CLEANERS THAT RUN CONTINUOUSLY.

tional practitioners of today. Its lack of focus and predictable inclusion of overscaled celebrity-architect installations ultimately makes its "visionary" proposition difficult to maintain. That said, this year's exhibition certainly provides a lively framework for current architectural debates.

Produced by a range of offices from Asymptote to Zaha Hadid, many of the installations at the main venue, the Arsenale, not only seem dated from the '90s, but contribute little more than an inconsequential prowess. To



Betsky's credit however, there are thankfully a few exceptions in this extensive exhibition, such as Philippe Rahm, An Te Liu, and Diller Scofidio + Renfro, all of whose works are not only formally sophisticated but conceptually resonant. Using Venice as a case study in cultural tourism and to investigate questions of spatial representation, Diller Scofidio + Renfro present two large-screen videos depicting tours through Venice simulations built in Las Vegas and Macau. Filmed from the perspective of a quintessential gondola ride, the naturally illusory quality of the city lends itself readily to the strange feeling of displacement engendered by these double fantasies. Philippe Rahm's preoccupation with the relation between climate, atmosphere and architecture is continued in the form of two minimal platforms offset from one another, the upper one heated to 12 degrees, the lower one to 28 degrees, which creates a continuous air flow using convection currents. With a neo-hippie sensibility, various clothed and unclothed actors articulated this architecture without walls at the exhibition opening, concentrating the ambiguous environmental metaphor and phenomenal conditions.

While immersive installations like the above truly do provide alternative constructions "beyond building," many of the works fail to formulate critical questions. Hani Rashid and Lise-Anne Couture, the Canadian-born duo that head Asymptote, exhibit a version of their retro-futuristic, modular blob furniture that is in fact much more luxury fetish than innovative spatial probe. However, fellow Canadian—An Te Liu—with whom they share one of the very first rooms in the Arsenale exhibition, succeeds in combining formal ingenuity with conceptual clarity. His installation, *Cloud*, is made up of over 100 domestic air purification appliances hung in elegant cluster formations. Appearing as part Metabolist megastructure, part Battlestar Galactica spacecraft, *Cloud*'s humming topography of domestic devices might be seen as a simultaneous parody and homage to the hygienic aspirations of early Modernism. Liu locates these altruistic ambitions not at an architectural scale but in the range of contemporary household devices that reveal a

particular psychological dimension to the call for light, space, and air. The installation is not only tightly composed and formally pleasing, but provokes a range of associations and responses, able to suggest the hope and fear inherent in Modernism's continuing legacy. In fact, Liu began working with air-conditioning units around 1995, just after Todd Hayne's film *Safe* was released, which depicted the psychological consequences of environmental illness. I am also reminded of David Cronenberg's first feature film, *They Came From Within*, set in a sterile and isolated modern apartment complex, where parasites travel through the modern conveniences of plumbing, garbage disposal, and air-conditioning ducts to infect tenants with a zombie-like lust for sex. The floating air cleaners connect notions of cleanliness to the characteristic purity of form initiated by modern architecture and urbanism, and while *Cloud*'s sci-fi superstructure articulates a gravity-defying optimism, it also embodies a darker, contemporary consumerist obsession, fuelled by corporeal paranoia.

This duality of formal ingenuity and a response to social concerns is analogous to the Biennale's thematic exhibition, which takes place at two main sites. In collaboration with Emiliano Gandolfi, Betsky's curation at the Italian pavilion is a well-chosen relief to the overscaled ambitions that are typical of the Arsenale. While a bit exhausting to take in on one visit, this tightly woven series of predominantly smaller-scale installations, videos, and exhibits from a variety of practitioners, presents a wide range of compelling experiences that concern a plethora of experimental yet germane discourses, from raw formal studies, to social and media relationships, and an almost utopian environmentalism. Beside a recent video interview with Archigram's Dennis Crompton, Raumlabor presents *Stick On City*, a large drawing of iconic projects and existing visionary proposals composed among an imaginary landscape. The visitor is encouraged to sketch his or her own utopian contribution, and stick it right on the drawing, thus creating a participatory yet informal discussion about architecture's communal dreams. While many of the installations at the Arsenale seem to interpret



MKG127 is very pleased to present

Style and Epoch

an exhibition of new work by Toronto artist An Te Liu.

In *Style and Epoch*, An Te Liu presents a photographic series in which mass produced, ready-to-assemble furniture, are reinterpreted through processes of mis-assembly and chance construction. Here, functional expediency gives way to a kind of experimental technics, resulting in provisional constructions poised somewhere between the banal and the iconic. Void of their use value, these scraps from our domestic consumer culture conjure the memory of visionary utopian artistic and architectural experiments from the last century, inviting rumination on the fate of previous vanguards and their aspirations for shaping modern life.

An Te Liu is currently living and working in Berlin, where he is the recipient of the Canada Council for the Arts International Residency for Visual Artist at the Künstlerhaus Bethanien. Displacing familiar objects into altered contexts, his work explores issues of function, malfunction and cultural coding in our built and hypothesized environments. Divergent themes and issues become linked as the work oscillates between object and representation, past and present, and utility and uselessness.

Liu has exhibited in New York, Vancouver, San Francisco, Montreal, Seoul, Frankfurt, and Rotterdam, and more recently at the European Kunsthalle in Cologne and the Art Institute of Chicago. This summer his installation, *Exchange* will be featured in a group show at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art. SFMOMA and the Art Institute have both recently acquired works by Liu for inclusion in their permanent collections. In the fall he will present *Cloud*, a new large scale installation for the Venice Biennale of International Architecture, and a solo exhibition in Berlin at the Künstlerhaus Bethanien, accompanied by a full color catalog on his work.

Opening Thursday June 26 6-9 PM. The exhibition continues until July 26.

in keeping with the evolving nature of Queen West's rising affluence, out of an area with a significant immigrant population, whose stories are evident in the environs of MKG127, a gallery even younger than Thrush Holmes Empire. Curated by gallerist Michael Klein, An Te Liu's solo show *Style and Epoch* makes aspirational playthings of the Danish prefabricated furniture kits that defined the artist/architect's childhood relocation from Taiwan to Toronto.

The manipulation of IKEA sensibilities is not uncommon in contemporary art – a wander down to Diaz Contemporary will reveal how fellow Torontonians Christian Giroux and Daniel Young have reassembled these familiar furnishings into the brightly coloured structures of an optimistic modernism – but An Te Liu brings these forms to bear upon a more complex dialogue surrounding modernity's promises and shortcomings. His architectural manipulations of these raw materials convey a futurist's longing for the sort of detached, clean-edged splendour that recalls his sprawling panorama 'Ether', 2004, at last year's Toronto International Art Fair. Unlike that sci-fi spectacle, these images are rooted in a sad realm of outmoded carpet, in some cases supported by convenient books and plants. The dreams hover, but they refuse to fly in such a small world as this.

By contrast, Rosana Simonassi's *Afuerras* opens out the dark interior of Gallery TPW with her projected slides of the Uruguayan Pampas, depicted as ephemeral passages of heat-burned grasses and leafless trees in monochrome stained by the wash of the slide projector's light bulb. That incidental smoked-gold light, a colour like lager drunk on the decades-old back porches of a pre-electric age, evokes the sultry-slow boil of a changing climate in images framed for desolation, the occasional traces of civilisation serving as unsettling signifiers in this otherwise natural steppe.

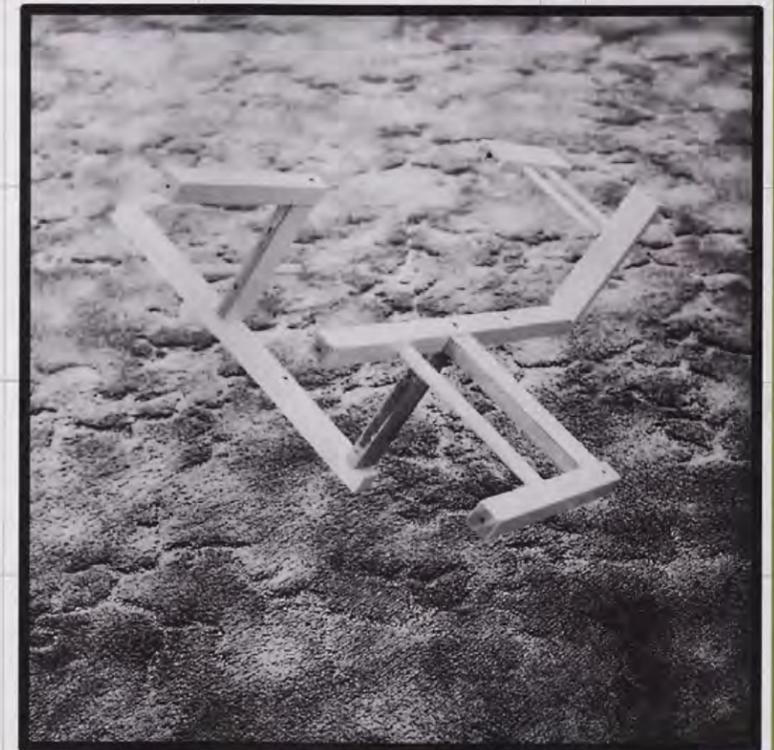
The sound of the projector's whirr, magnified times eight, heightens the physicality of this installation – viewers are acutely conscious of their place between the projectors as the steady beams are quick to capture visitor's shadows.

The rare awareness of where one literally stands in relation to this work is emblematic of the secure knowledge of these nations with histories enough to feed the ambivalence of Toronto in the lapse of Trudeau's open question, allowing for this fleeting specificity of all other things.

Stephanie Vegh is a Canadian artist
Grizzly Proof, Trinity Square Video, 20 June-12 July
Thrush Holmes Empire, ongoing
An Te Liu, Gallery MKG127, 26 June-26 July
Rosana Simonassi, Gallery TPW, 26 June-26 July



Left: Lisa Dillin, 'Bear Hug Sleeping Unit', 2007
 Far left: Thrush Holmes Empire, 'DIM-LIT GLEAMING UNIVERSE OF BUDDING LEAVES BLOWN BY OVERWHELMING NIGHT BREEZE', 2008 mixed media with neon lights on metal panel.
 Below: An Te Liu, 'GVR 1310', 2008, silver gelatin fibre-based print, framed





Figuration in
Contemporary Design
A+D Series
Art Institute of Chicago
Yale University Press

Through digital literacy and enhanced fabrication techniques, contemporary architects and designers have recently returned to the use of figurative characteristics in the design arts. Reintroducing hybrids of methods and ideologies that were once considered too ornamental

Joseph Rosa: Reimagining the Ornamental, *Figuration in Contemporary Design*. Chicago: The Art Institute of Chicago and Yale University Press, 2008.

instead a floral pattern as part of the regular assembly method. His *Lace Fence* transforms the mundane barrier of common chain-link into a visually inviting, intricate surface, and in doing so he showed how digital literacy can take two similar methodologies—in this case the mechanical acts of domestic knitting or weaving and industrial fabrication—and blur them together to create a dainty figurative hybrid that is antithetical to any conventional notion of what a fence should look like.

The employment of digital methods and fabrication techniques has made the aesthetic characteristics of decorative and ornamental embellishments an integral part of the contemporary design vocabulary. Tord Boontje's highly figurative avant-garde works reflect these current techniques, especially in his 2006 laser-cut *Eternal Summer* fabric for Maharam. The fabric's design comprises a variety of floral motifs that are each produced with the same laser-cut pattern of perforations. These perforations render the floral characteristics as voids on the surface, and depending on the amount of light illuminating the fabric from behind, the overall motif or portions of it become visible.

An inversion of this concept of figuration as void can be seen in the inventive extruded forms of Ronan and Erwan Bouroullec's 2004 *Algue* screen system for Vitra. While their die-cast, branchlike form is available in only one shape—though it is sold in a variety of colors and in quantities of six—each piece can be connected to others in multiple ways to yield an infinite variety of configurations that can serve either as transparent screen-walls or as very dense surfaces if one desires a more complete visual barrier. The Bouroullec brothers' designs allow the individual user to take this simple figurative module and produce his or her own screen—and to reconfigure its design at any time. While the *Algue* branch form is a very figurative interpretation of nature, the array of colors and assemblies and their repetitive qualities heighten the ersatz character of the product.

Petra Blaisse's 2003 *Fur* wallpaper from her *Touch* line for Wolf Gordon employs a repeated rectangular image of natural fur, but it is manufactured in colors that render the fur distinctly unnatural, while preserving the integrity of the image. When applied to a wall, the paper reads visually as a tattooed surface that has been repeatedly covered with the image of an animal's coat. Blaisse's *Fur* is a humorous play on the artificial and the real—from the figurative notion of wallpaper cladding a surface to the conceit of skin enveloping a body.

Wallpaper in fact has become a new medium in the art world: witness the limited-edition custom wallpaper in An Te Liu's 1999 mesmerizing

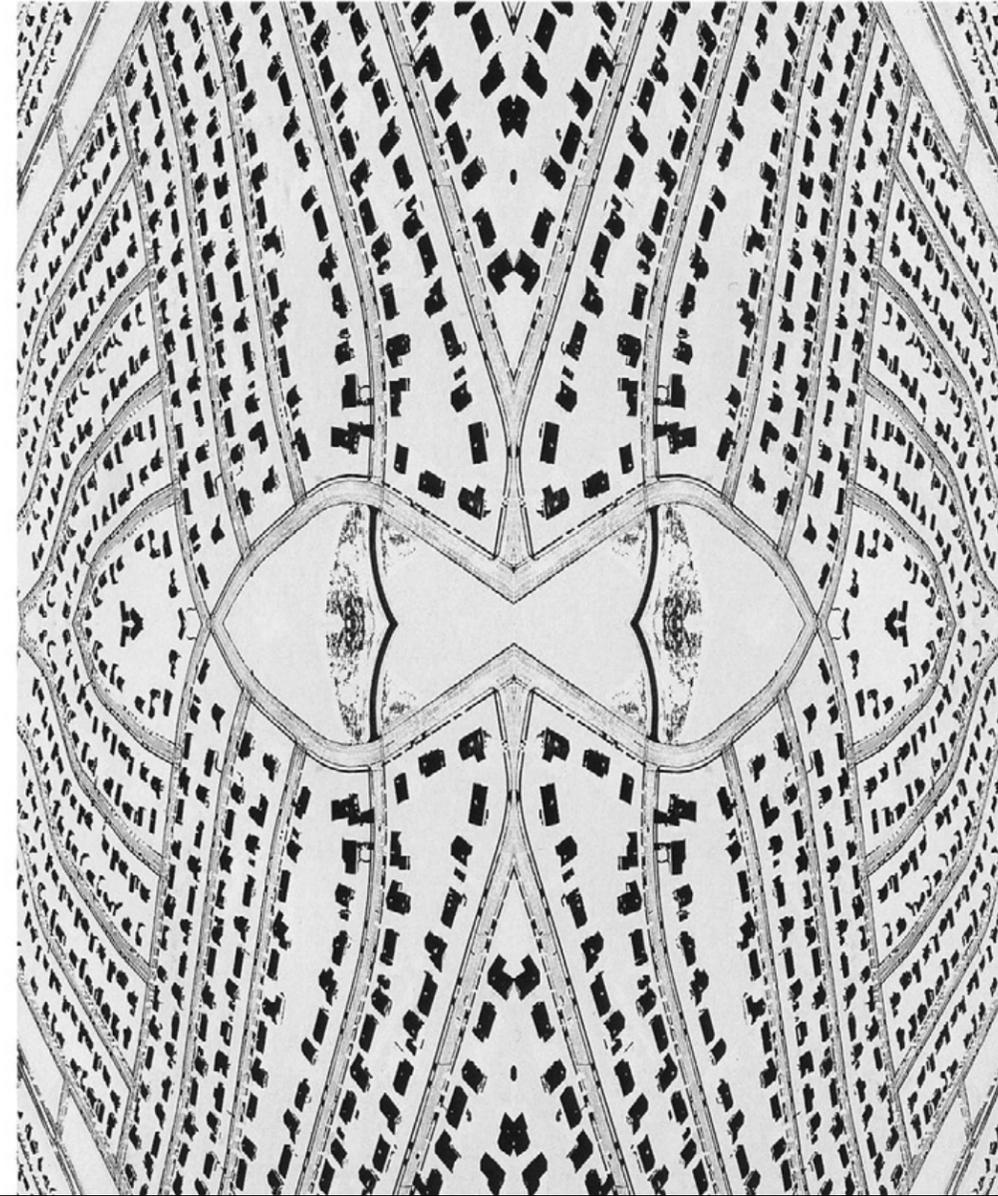
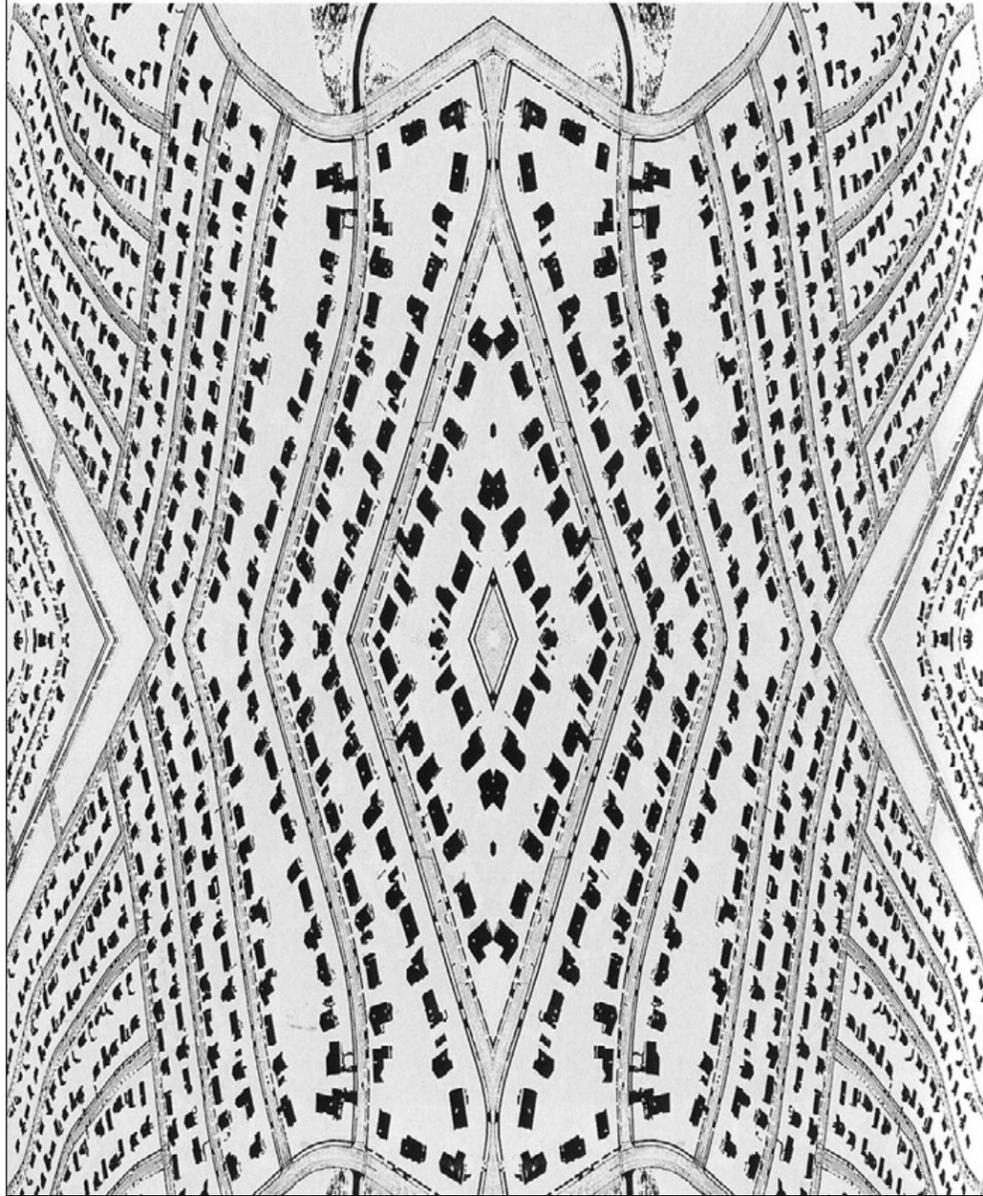
design entitled *Pattern Language I: Levittown*. Liu used an aerial-view photograph of the late 1940s Levittown housing development in Nassau County, Long Island, New York, to produce two versions of his wallpaper: red and white. The image is relentlessly repeated all over the surface of the wallpaper in a bilaterally symmetrical diamond pattern that looks similar to a multifracted view through the lens of a kaleidoscope. The classic representation of Levittown becomes the basis for an abstract pattern created by the contrast between figure and ground: the houses—which are black—and their context—which is either red or white. Only on close examination does the wallpaper reveal its subject matter. On another level, Liu's *Pattern Language I* is a critique of the post-World War II notion of housing and becomes a metanarrative of the inherently generic quality of Levittown and the countless suburban developments that followed it across the country, as well as the birth of sprawl mentality.

The employment of figurative characteristics repetitively to produce abstractions has led to a new genre and, indeed, a new market for contemporary wallpaper. Abbott Miller's *Merge* graphic wallpaper from his 2006 *Grammar Collection* for Knoll Textiles is a perfect example of a design in which abstraction is achieved by multiplying essential elements of the given subject matter. A partner in the Pentagram studio in New York, Miller is known for his early writings on typography with Ellen Lupton. *Merge* employs overlapping typographic forms that produce a density and opacity between the letters that barely reveal their shapes. From a distance, depending on the color of the typographic composition—always against a white background—the wallpapers read as either a monochromatic surface or a lacy tracery.

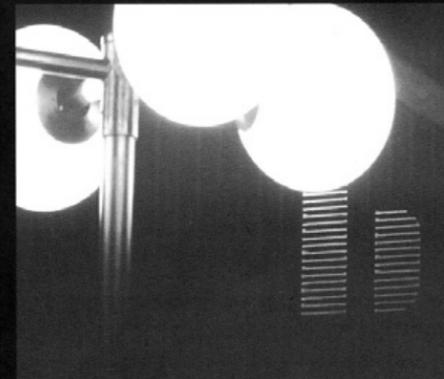
The use of multiple figurative forms can also collectively coalesce into a larger gesture, such as the environmental identity system that 2x4 produced for Rem Koolhaas's 2003 McCormick Tribune Campus Center at the Illinois Institute of Technology (IIT) in Chicago. Susan Sellers, Georgie Stout, and Michael Rock—principals of the 2x4 studio—created "pictograms," small circular forms containing stick-figure diagrams that illustrate everything a student might do in the center. These pictograms are dispersed throughout the building as part of the way-finding system. They are also used collectively—devoid of the function they fulfill in their circular form—to create enlarged photographic images fritted onto glass so that they read as a pixilated, tattooed surface. This technique was employed on the facade of the main entrance to the Campus Center

An Te Liu

Pattern Language I: Levittown, 1999



PARADOX and PRACTICE



Architecture in the Wake of Conceptualism

A Space In Between - Here and Elsewhere

Paradox and Practice: Architecture in the Wake of Conceptualism features seven projects that revive key intellectual concerns and methodological strategies of Conceptualism after the psychoanalytic lessons on identity and identification that characterized a post-modern branch of 80s and 90s art production. "Architecture," in this context, delineates an intellectual *subject* of interrogation rather than a classical *methodology* of production. While interrogating classic conventions of site-specificity, functionality and material presence (in both architecture and art), the exhibited artworks alternately address complex issues of historicity, public space and sexuality. But in so doing, a certain *between-ness* – a no man's land – persists in the artworks. Their site – be it formal, historical, filmic – is an uncanny one between a "here" and an "elsewhere." But this site isn't located between two defined things (inside and outside or art and architecture – the most obvious dialectics). Rather the "between-ness" is at that point when an outside is located *within* the inside or the discursive is located *within* functionality. In Bataille's terms, these artworks conceptually engage in a strategic *putrification* of good form on route to engaging a *critical aesthetic*.

An Te Liu

An Te Liu's sculpture *Untitled (Complex IV)* is a "monument" to architectural and sexual virtuality. The work consists of a shallow 6' x 4' "reflecting pool," in which a "plaza" floats. Upon the plaza two electric air ionizer/sterilizers quietly operate. The reflecting pool, filled with liquid containing dissolved male and female pheromones, is divided so that the pheromone types are segregated. Over time, traces of the pheromones evaporate, ostensibly into the air above the pool and into the gallery. The purifiers then suck the pheromone-impregnated air in, sterilizing and recirculating it across the plaza. Through this operation, the plaza is kept "pure." The notion of purity is visually reiterated by the immaculate white plastic nature of the purifiers themselves, ones that evoke the ceremonial modernist heroic structures that typically adorned the plazas of modernist urban planning paradigms like Brasilia. All of this sits on an 11' x 11' white carpet, a layer that strongly evokes the domestic sphere. What do all these elements put into play? As Liu put it:

The piece as a whole is a 'system' or circuit, which operationally exchanges and modifies substance (air, pollution, sexual signals, moisture). But it does so in an invisible or covert way. Complex IV is a system (which works on itself and on the space around it) as much as it represents a system (to the extent in which it is also diagrammatic). The system is both closed (it is self-referential, self-purifying, self-repressing) and open (there is a chance that the pheromones may have an effect on people who come close to the piece - will they be excited?).

Pheromones are best known through animal studies; the choice of sexual partner is highly influenced by sex-specific pheromone signals processed by male and female mating centers in the anterior hypothalamus. In the case of animals, pheromones are transferred to the hypothalamus from the vomeronasal organ via the accessory olfactory nerve. Human vomeronasal pits, however, don't have neuronal connections to the brain. Hence the controversy over the very notion of human pheromones, a controversy that some scientists are trying to resolve through brain-mapping technology. It's fitting, then, that pheromone technology be juxtaposed to the key elements of modernist urban planning – as both historically operate on certain "truth claims" that have waned in so-called post-modern times.

It seems that the issue of credulity is a central stake here; credulity in terms of Modernism's relation to the spiritual, science's relation to the sexual, Conceptualism's relation to the immaterial, and architecture's relation to the physical. For each of these discourses have conventionally held an idealist position to their discrete fields of research. For instance, the modernists as a whole had a highly ambivalent relation to the spiritual. Indeed, the constructivists wanted to merge art, industry and technology, according to their primary advocate, Alexander Rodchenko, who wanted art *to be akin to science*. *Complex IV* returns to this logic with its utilitarian component and its recourse to the neurological science of sexuality. Moreover, the work, with its layers of black and white squares and rectangles, equally evokes the monochrome paintings of Kasimir Malevich, whose manifesto on Suprematism declares: "The system [of Suprematist art] is constructed in time and space, independently of any aesthetic considerations of beauty, experience or mood, but rather as a philosophical colour system – as a matter of knowledge."²⁵ Ironically, Rodchenko and Malevich's "scientific" model of art would later be revived in Yves Klein's spiritual take on the monochrome as a pursuit of pure immateriality, most generally in the color blue. On this note, Klein famously cited Bachelard: "First there is nothing, next there is a depth of nothingness, then a profundity of blue."²⁶ Together, Malevich and Klein defined the modernist dialectic between science (as industry) and art (as feeling), while Liu's *Complex IV* evokes both poles simultaneously. This simultaneity belies the discrete credulity of either position (is one dialectical position, in fact, always the unconscious of the other?). Liu's recourse to the pseudo-science of pheromone technology in the guise of a "conceptual" artwork conceived along the lines of Robert Barry's 60s work – ones that similarly mobilized the (presumed) presence of invisible substances like gas or electricity within a given architectural context – is thus aptly done with a *wink*. For here the dialectical lessons of the avant-garde are neither legitimized nor discarded. Like all of the works in *Paradox and Practice*, *Complex IV* makes its deconstructive gesture in the avant-garde's *wake*.

The border between Art and Architecture is not fixed. Much of the cross-border traffic between the two disciplines, however, has been historically one-sided. While architectural history is littered with examples of practitioners slipping into the world of art, architecture has proved less readily accessible. The mid-1990s showed otherwise. At that time an ever-increasing number of artists began incorporating architectural elements into their art practices, marking architecture as a prime subject matter for contemporary art practice. Whether engaged in the construction of functional objects, operational frameworks, or spaces of occupation, these artists have produced everything from fully functional houses to furniture and lighting; from reconfigured gallery spaces and systems of building and inhabitation to appropriated iconic modernist architecture; from operational air filtering machines to re-imagined and re-presented urban public spaces.

Laying the ground for these practices was a wave of 1960s and 70s conceptual artists who rethought and reconfigured the historical relationship between art and architecture. Emphasizing content and process while de-emphasizing medium distinctions and technical proficiency, these conceptualists reworked existing disciplinary relations in order to resist both simple categorization and singular ownership. In the place of these distinctions – i.e. the distinct boundaries encircling the spheres of architecture and art – conceptual artists posited a compendium of not-quite-apprehendable constructs, including ideas of between-ness, indeterminacy and paradox. From these first- and second-wave conceptual practices a prime paradox emerges: *Conceptualism succeeded in exposing the inter-relatedness of art and architecture not by focusing on the centrality of their categorical distinctions, but by flirting with their erasure*.

Many of the contemporary artists who incorporate architecture into their practices do so by resituating and transforming traditional architectural constructs such as material presence, function and site around newly

and the public space produced by the project – in the video, on-site and in the installation – all reiterate the original question posed by the project concerning the locating and demarcation of the space of the public sphere and of our place within that space.

The collective N55 and individuals such as An Te Liu and Inigo Manglano-Ovalle represent a fourth group of artists who incorporate architectural concerns into their art practices. These artists have a shared interest in examining architecture's role as coordinator of various interdependent systems ranging from models of construction, building and inhabitation to networks linking ecological, biological, social and political structures.

The Copenhagen-based collective N55 employs forms and modes of production and distribution in order to shift the focus of their practice from individual artworks to an exploration of complex social structures. Engaging in broad terms with issues of inhabitation and occupation, N55 has for the last ten years collaborated with engineers, technicians, architects and philosophers on a series of projects that explore how physical, social, political and economic conditions interact with and impact upon structures of inhabitation and distribution. At the heart of N55's projects and procedures are repetitive building systems such as the functional components of alternate living systems they call "spaceframes." Examples include their *Hygiene System*, *Clean Air Machine*, *Floating Platform*, *Modular Hydroponic Unit* and *Public Things*, a modular-based structure containing a kitchen, wash basin, shower, toilet, bed, table and chair, all made from durable weatherproof polyethylene tanks. These projects inhabit or occupy various pre-existing systems, domains and disciplines. For example, N55 uses the internet to publish "how-to" manuals describing the construction and implementation of their objects/systems in order to allow for the widest and most open form of distribution possible. These virtual information systems are as much a site of production, inquiry and life support as are the various physical units that form the modules of actual inhabitation. This strategy allows the literalness of the work – its dwelling systems, products, objects and enclosures – to be translated into a wider understanding of inhabitation as a product of interdependent social systems through which architecture's social-structuring role is activated.

Trained as an architect yet specifically choosing to practice as an artist, An Te Liu employs architectural systems in the invention and manufacture of his "machines for living," and to mark the simultaneous expansion and dissolution of the city itself. Architecture provides the model for much of the formal aspects and aspirations of his work, such as *Exchange*, where the artist claims to recycle the gallery's air every 21 seconds using 56 HEPA air filters arranged in seven column-like stacks. The filters generate a relatively high level of white noise and emit a distinctly plastic odor. These and other projects enact what has been described as a parody of hygienic and domestic practices that recalls the utopian hygienic aspirations of historical modernism. Other projects include his *Soft Load* series, where household sponges are arranged in architectural configurations resembling columns that bring to mind overhead views of ideal modernist cities; and *Levittown*, a sample wall paper swatch whose pattern is derived from actual aerial surveillance photographs of the planned residential community in Bucks County, Pennsylvania.

Confronting the complex social relations central to urban growth, another work titled *Ether* involves the creation of a 65-foot-long wall scroll that runs through sections of the gallery and depicts an other-worldly panorama spliced together from the structural outlines of actual "satellite" Chinese malls in suburban Toronto. Liu's works oscillate between different scales of production and representation, from household cleaning items and air filtering machines to the urban landscape itself, presenting all of them as a series of operating systems or machines which are at once within our purview while simultaneously engulfing us.

Inigo Manglano-Ovalle is known for his multi-disciplinary collaborations with architects, geneticists, biotech researchers, medical ethicists, historians and others, as well as for employing a wide range of media including photography, video and sculpture of various sorts. The work has several main currents, beginning with an early focus on "cultural" processes such as the social forces influencing architecture and Modernism, the negotiation of borders, social injustice and the construction of collective spaces. While Manglano-Ovalle has incorporated work of the modernist architect Mies van der Rohe into three video projects and has collaborated frequently with other architects, his recent work marks a new and different association with architecture. Increasingly, Manglano-Ovalle's projects are based on natural processes of growth as found on the one hand in biological processes manifested in human DNA or sperm and on the other hand in climatological ones such as clouds and icebergs or ecological formations. These projects echo that strain of contemporary architectural research and practice that looks to various models and processes of natural growth. Manglano-Ovalle's work considers the conflicting biological and social bases that arise in determinations involving human identity and familial relationships – processes of immigration, violence and genetic research. Examples of this work include an enormous "cloud" made of titanium-covered black fiberglass and meant to capture a force of nature, and his two-story-high model of an iceberg formation. Manglano-Ovalle's concern with these natural processes makes his work indiscernible at times from a number of contemporary architecture practices, including the work of Greg Lynn, known for his use of biological models, and other emerging digitally-based architecture practices, such as O.C.E.A.N. North, Servo and dECOi. In developing various digital and material systems that attempt to model physical and scientific processes, these practitioners adopt dynamic models of growth into their practices, thereby making implicit associations between architecture and other seemingly unrelated systems.

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The number and diversity of art practices incorporating architecture testifies as much to architecture's range as to its adaptability. These last developments bring full 'round the series of incorporations following in and after Conceptualism, yet in no way do they foreclose the process. Instead, in reaching a state or site in which art and architecture both produce internal models through shared development of outside material, they

"Pattern Theory"

Gary Michael Dault

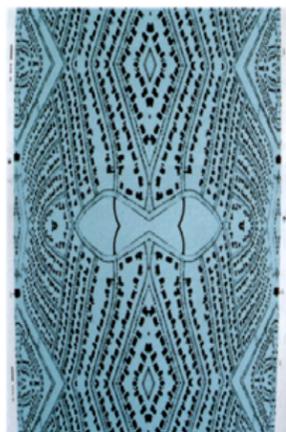
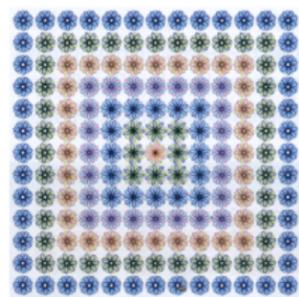
Pattern theory, which seems to have been engendered by Brown University mathematician Ulf Grenander in 1972, is as complex as it is absorbing, and if you don't think so, go on Google and check it out. The simplest discussion of it—on Wikipedia—locates it as a "mathematical formalism to describe knowledge of the world as patterns"—which means it differs interestingly and profoundly from structuralism, with which most



Installation view, MKG127, Toronto, 2007. Images courtesy MKG127, Toronto.

of us are more familiar. Pattern theory, intones Wikipedia, proceeds by prescribing a precise vocabulary with which to "articulate and recast the pattern concepts in precise language." How appealing all that precision is!

An exhibition titled "Pattern Theory" opened last November at Toronto's new MKG127 Gallery (MK for director Michael Klein, G for Gallery and 127 for the gallery's address on Toronto's Ossington Avenue). It was made up



top: Kristina Lahde, *Dark Corners*, 2007, ink on paper, 23 x 30"

lower left: Liss Platt, *Untitled (disk 60, holes 3 to 10)*, 2007, ink jet print mounted on dibond, 27 x 27", edition of 3.

lower right: An Te Liu, *Pattern Language: Levittown (brown/seafoam)*, 2007, hand-printed silkscreen on paper, edition of 30 rolls, each roll 30" x 16'.

of the work of eight artists: Adam David Brown, Kristina Lahde, An Te Liu, Ken Nicol and Joy Walker of Toronto, New York-based artist Tom Koken, Hamilton-based artist Liss Platt, and Instant Coffee (counting the Toronto/Vancouver collective, Instant Coffee, as one artist).

The gallery's press release put it all very simply: "In pattern theory, the belief is that the world is complex, and to understand it, or part of it, one needs realistic representations of knowledge about it." Sounds about right.

It may be that I simply didn't take the exhibition's avowed aims quite seriously enough, of course, but for me there was an axis of inescapable buoyancy—almost levity—running through the show. Not that

the clarifying and the quantifying of concepts need inevitably to be a sombre undertaking. It's just that you don't expect an exhibition called "Pattern Theory" to seem so charming.

It might have been better to have titled the exhibition "Pattern Practice" rather than "Pattern Theory." Theorizing seems to call out for a little more discursiveness than most of these eight artists felt it necessary to offer. Most of what I saw was the result of an adherence to the realm of pattern-as-discourse, rather than any unlocking of such ideas.

Take Instant Coffee's construction, *Platforms*, positioned forthrightly on the floor, right in the middle of the exhibition. *Platforms* is a rearrangeable stack of pallet-like, bed-esque foam slabs, each with its own set of castors and each fitted with pseudo-craftsy, macrame-like, acrylic knitted blankets. You could call this stack of retro-fragrant platforms modular if that didn't seem, in itself, so insipidly retro. Plentifully patterned—though in a wildly irregular, ad hoc way—the platforms of *Platforms* seemed too busy with both the mockery of, and the adhesion to, concepts of shelter and coziness than to any commitment or adhesion to the idea of pattern theory—except to suggest that pattern is anywhere you lay your theory-weary head.

Liss Platt is to graphic art what Instant Coffee is to nostalgia-tintured home furnishings. Her relentless employment of the Spirograph (you recall that insidious geometric drawing toy introduced by Kenner to North American kiddos back in 1966?), by which she offered some of the apparently infinite number of Spiro variations and combinations as ink-jet prints, resulted in aggregate pictures—row upon row of regular, if gnarled, graphic glitches in those unpalatably thin '60s toy colours: weak acid greens, chemical pinks, listless blues, Thrills purple—well, you remember. Arranged in rows (disc 60, hole 7), Platt's mechanical Spirograph blooms looked like a code or the phonemes from some needlessly ornate language.

Like Platt's Spirographs and Instant Coffee's *Platforms*, Ken Nicol's *Typer Grids* were pictures

made by employing the typewriter's clunky ease with repetition to create graphic patterns that tended towards the accumulative if not the strictly systematic. The work seemed to rescind pattern theory in favour of a kind of primitive systematic art—formulating patterns that lie, like Pratt's Spirograph drawings, somewhere between structure and utterance. Macrame, Spirographs, typewriters—how '60s it all seemed!

Tom Koken's tiny all-over oils on paper were visually mellifluous—though, for me, too reminiscent of pattern-devoted painters (like Joyce Kozloff) of the Pattern and Decoration movement of the 1970s. Kristina Lahde's one contribution to the exhibition was an invigorating little ink drawing called *Dark Corners*—a kind of matrix of hexagonal, beehive-like patterning—that looked as if she'd cut out a swatch of beehive-printed cloth and then drawn it in perspective: a colony of close-packed nascelles.

For me, the freshest and most provocative works in the show were by Joy Walker and An Te Liu. Joy Walker's taut, tense, geometrically precise, exhaustingly laboured graphic structures presented as silk-screen prints were grouped in sets of parallel lines arranged into some quite monumental and architectural shapes—arch-like structures, steles, portals, folds that erect three-dimensional places on two-dimensional fields. I loved the way Walker's line continually created fictively enterable spaces, graphic havens.

An Te Liu, who trained as an architect and works as an artist (he has the Canada Council Berlin studio this year), turned in "Pattern Theory's" wittiest work. His *Pattern*

Language—the title is a nod to architect Christopher Alexander's famous book, *A Pattern Language*, 1977—is an encyclopaedic work that attempts a systematic examination of what makes buildings, streets and communities work. An Te Liu takes an aerial view of the Long Island proto-suburb, Levittown (1947–51), cuts and reverses the photo into symmetrically ordered patterns and, in the form of hand-printed silkscreens on paper (in "brown/seafoam"), offers it all up again as wallpaper. The meaning of these overly rhythmic houses potentially pasted up inside other houses is dizzying, both optically, historically and metaphysically. ■

"Pattern Theory" was exhibited at MKG127 in Toronto from November 24 to December 22, 2007.

Gary Michael Dault is a critic, poet and painter who lives in Toronto.

HAPPY BIRTHDAY AT MKG127

The inaugural exhibition at Michael Klein's new gallery on Ossington Avenue is a group show fittingly called Happy Birthday. On Aug. 1, it gives way to a second group show, titled Friendly Greeting.

Happy Birthday is mostly smart and fresh and charming. Some of it is also sort of silly and conceptually overfamiliar (like Anitra Hamilton's *1/2 Miler* - 2640 feet of continuous grey acrylic corking, and Laura Kikauka's plaque-like roadside-souvenir-shop paintings, wherein winsome animals have blinking electric eyes).

It won't be possible here to mention all the meritorious work in the show (there are a dozen artists and a collective - Instant Coffee - represented here), but there are some standout works that serve as key to the exhibition's tone.

Chief among those is Toronto-based architect-artist An Te Liu's *Pattern Language: Levittown (white)* - a demonically cunning, environmentally scaled graphic work that takes aerial views of the rows of tract houses making up America's first numbingly tedious post-Second World War suburb, Levittown, N.Y., and, by folding them in on themselves like a Rorschach test, reworks their pattern into an optically maddening wallpaper. The other unforgettable contribution to Happy Birthday is a small pile of faux books by Roula Partheniou. Having purchased a number of tiny, pre-

stretched canvases, Partheniou then proceeded to paint them so they would look as much as possible like the books she decided to imitate (in this case, books about space and astronomy: *Stars*, *The Nature of the Universe*, *The Bridge to Infinity* and so on). There are precedents for this (namely Jasper Johns's bronzed and repainted beer cans), but Partheniou's "books" are so damned cute, they're irresistible.



Models for Tomorrow: Cologne, the European Kunsthalle's first exhibition, will be presented from 2 March to 28 April 2007. Twenty-one artists will show their designs for a new exhibition hall at both extraordinary and ordinary cultural sites in downtown Cologne. The sketches, planes, and models produced especially for this exhibition by international artists deal with two themes: the architecture for the new exhibition space and concepts for its possible use. Artists' pragmatic approaches are shown alongside works with utopian potential.

During the phase of its foundation, the European Kunsthalle does not have its own exhibition space. For Models for Tomorrow: Cologne, the institution will use the urban space with its range of publicly accessible sites. For the exhibition, a ring-shaped parcours has been set up in downtown Cologne that invites the art audience to walk along its path. The exhibition venues offer various spatial concepts with varying opening times, represent commercial or public interests, and are highly popular or exist on the city's periphery. They show that answers to the question regarding the future profile of the European Kunsthalle might already be there in one of the city's resources: its spaces. Moving toward the end of this two-year founding stage, the European Kunsthalle will use this exhibition to direct special attention to its specific location and starting point.

Lawrence Weiner subway stop Dom/Hbf, access via main station, Mon–Sun 0:00 am – 12:00 pm

Pia Ronicke Hilton Cologne, Marzellenstrasse 13–17, Mon–Sun 0:00 am – 12:00 pm

Vito Acconci Tele Café Köln – Am Dom, An den Dominikanern 3, Mon–Sun 9:00 am – 11:00 pm

Superflex Deutsche Bank Privat- und Geschäftskunden AG, Investment- und FinanzCenter An den Dominikanern 11–27, Mon, Thu 9:00 am – 6:00 pm, Tue, We 9:00 am – 4:00 pm, Fri, 9:00 am – 3:30 pm

Luca Frei Chamber of Industry and Commerce Cologne, Unter Sachsenhausen 10–26, Mon–Fri 8:00 am – 7:00 pm

Sean Snyder Library of the historical archive of the archbishopric Cologne, Gereonstraße 16, Tue, Thu, Fri 9:00 am – 4:00

Haegue Yang Statthaus, Steinfelder Gasse 33, 24h visible through window, access Mon 4:30–6:30 pm, Thu 2:00–4:00 pm

Michael Beutler square in front of Vic Cocktailbar, Friesenstraße 16, Mon–Sun 0:00 am – 12:00 pm

Erik van Lieshout Sportlounge Michael Janson, Im Klapperhof 33c, Mon, Thu 12:00 am – 3:00 pm, Fri 4:00 pm – 6:00 pm, So 2:00 pm – 6:00 pm

Tue Greenfort Christian Science Church Cologne, Albertusstraße 45a, Mon, Wed 4:00 – 7:00 pm, Tue, Thu 10:00 am – 1:00 pm

Alex Morrison bookstore Walther König, Ehrenstraße 4, Mon–Fri 10:00 am – 7:00 pm, Sat 10:00 am – 6:00 pm

International Festival Neumarkt-Galerie, Neumarkt 2, Mon–Thu, Sat 7:00 am – 9:00 pm, Fri 7:00 am – 10:00 pm

Jesko Fezer & Axel John Wieder Central Library Cologne, Josef-Haubrich-Hof 1, Tue, Thu 10:00 am – 8:00 pm, Wed, Fri 10:00 am – 6:00 pm, Sat 10:00 am – 3:00 pm

Bik van der Pol Aral gas station, Cäcilienstraße 32, Mon–Sun 0:00 am – 12:00 pm

Silke Schatz Jesuit Church Sankt Peter, Jabachstraße 1, Tue–Sat 11:00 am – 5:00 pm, Sun 1:00 pm – 5:00 pm

Tobias Rehberger Galeria Kaufhof, Dinea Restaurant, Hohe Straße 41–53, Mon–Thu 9:30 am – 8:00 pm, Fri–Sat 9:30 am – 9:00 pm

Andreas Fogarasi Wallraf-Richartz-Museum & Fondation Corboud, Obenmarspforten, Tue 10:00 am – 8:00 pm, Wed–Fri 10:00 am – 6:00 pm, Sat–Sun 11:00 am – 6:00 pm

Olaf Nicolai St. Kolumba, Kolumbastraße 2–4, Mon–Sun 8:00 am – 7:30 pm

Liam Gillick City of Cologne, Customer's Centre Laurenzplatz 1–3, Mon–Fri 7:00 am–7:00 pm, first Saturday of the month 10:00 am – 1:00 pm

An Te Liu Power Boxes RheinEnergie, 20–Unter Goldschmied / Kleine Budengasse, 21–Am Hof

Mon–Sun 0:00 am – 12:00 pm

Karl Holmqvist Deutsche Bank self service centre Köln Am Dom, Bahnhofsvorplatz 1/Trankgasse, Mon–Sun 6:30 am – 11:00 pm

Curated by Nicolaus Schafhausen, Vanessa Joan Mueller, Julia Hoener

Spatial concept by Nikolaus Hirsch, Markus Miessen, Philipp Misselwitz, Matthias Görlich ([Spaces of Production](#))



An Te Liu

Being Disposed, 2007

Ecke Unter Goldschmied / Kleine Budengasse sowie Am Hof, Mo–So 0:00–24:00 Uhr

Strom- und Verteilerkästen im Stadtraum bilden das Medium für An Te Lius textbasierte Eingriffe in deren funktionales Design. Seine Zitate prägnanter Begriffe aus der Philosophie Martin Heideggers thematisieren das Verhältnis von Funktion und Dysfunktion, das Konzept von „Zuhanden“ und „Vorhanden“, den Gebrauchswert von Dingen oder die Idee der diloziierten Lokation. In der Verdichtung theoretischer Wirklichkeitsanalysen auf prägnante Begriffe plädieren sie für eine der Evidenz alltäglicher Funktions- und Regulationsystemen vorgeschaltet Diskursebene, indem sie deren Bedingungen hinterfragen. Beiläufig auf technischen Apparaturen platziert, wirken die sperrigen, ihrem Kontext enthobenen Begriffe wie intellektuelle Störungen des öffentlichen Lebens, in das sie eingebettet sind. Bezogen auf ihren Ort und doch ihm fremd, insistieren sie auf ein Nachdenken über das, was als selbstverständlich gegeben erscheint.



STREET: BEHIND THE CLICHÉ



Robin Rhode, *The Storyteller*, 2006
Video still, 16mm film transferred to DVD, duration: 13 mins.
Courtesy of the artist and Perry Rubenstein Gallery, New York

September 9, 2006 - November 19, 2006

Witte de With is pleased to present the thematic group exhibition *Street: behind the cliché*. Open from 9 September until 19 November 2006, it features work in a range of media by 28 international artists.

'Art only has meaning in the stream of life'
Lawrence Weiner's *Plowmans Lunch*, 1982

In a city, the street can serve many purposes: it can be a sidewalk where a mass of people meet and pass each other on a daily basis; an infrastructure through which people move from A to B; an ideal space for consumerism to reach a broad audience. Today's city streets can be thought of as post-public spaces, intimately interwoven with market mechanisms and forcefully, politically designed. 'The street' that used to be a synonym for 'public space' has now become highly regulated, ordered and controlled.

Nowadays it is rare to encounter critical reflections on aesthetic representation that do not involve the concept of 'space', whether its a social, emotional, institutional or economic space. *Street: behind the cliché* considers the particular section of 'public space' called the street as a local theater, a stage on which the complex stratification of cultural codes is acted out and identity is formed. The exhibition therefore functions as an analysis of the interrelated phenomena that we encounter in our immediate surroundings, such as the fraught relationship between popular culture and sub-cultural identity, how 'underground' is now big business.

In the works included in the exhibition, twenty-eight artists express a varied fascination with city planning, failing modernity and its utopias, social and economic pressure, and the anonymity of everyday life and its worn-out routine. They dissect, analyze and redefine these phenomena to invite us to rethink contemporary society's existing symbols of iconoclasm and idolatry, causing us to look behind the clichés that we encounter in the stream of life.

Artists: Joachim Baan (NL), David Blandy (UK), Henning Bohl (DE), Martin Boyce (UK), Tobias Buche (DE), Jason Dodge (US), Marius Engh (NO), Gardar Eide Einarsson (NO), Iain Forsyth & Jane Pollard (UK), Isa Genzken (DE), Pieterjan Gincjels (BE), Sascha Hahn (DE), Laura Horelli (FIN), Pieter Hugo (ZA), Ian Kiaer (UK), Germaine Kruij (NL), Klara Liden (SE), Gareth Moore (CA), Alex Morrison (CA), Chloe Piene (US), Robin Rhode (ZA), Ugo Rondinone (CH), Matt Stokes (UK), Aram Tanis (NL), An Te Liu (CA), Luc Tuymans (BE), Silke Wagner (DE), and Tobias Zielony (DE).

Curators: Renske Janssen and Nicolaus Schafhausen.



PARTICIPANTS

Joachim Baan
David Blandy
Henning Bohl
Martin Boyce
Tobias Buche
Jason Dodge
Gardar Eide Einarsson
Marius Engh
Iain Forsyth, Jane Pollard
Isa Genzken
Pieterjan Gincjels
Sascha Hahn
Laura Horelli
Pieter Hugo
Ian Kiaer
Germaine Kruij
Klara Liden
An Te Liu
Gareth Moore
Alex Morrison
Chloe Piene
Robin Rhode
Ugo Rondinone
Matt Stokes
Aram Tanis
Luc Tuymans
Silke Wagner
Tobias Zielony

AN TE LIU



An Te Liu, *No Molestar*, 2006
Printed T-shirts
Courtesy of the artist

No Molestar 2006

An Te Liu's works are situated on the border between art, architecture and design, and explore the aesthetic of mass-produced commercial and urban design forms. By working at the junction between these three fields, he questions the idea of functionality that traditionally marks the distinctions between art and design: What something does (or is supposed to do), what it looks like, what other things it can do or appear like?. He often uses elements of street furniture and is interested in the simultaneous presence of different layers of signs in public space.

No Molestar explores clothes as an object of communication. The piece consists of a stack of T-shirts that bear the most common colors of the European countries, flags and the words 'No Molestar', i.e. 'Do not disturb' in Spanish. These T-shirts are ironically presented in a museological fashion, functioning as ethnographic objects of our contemporary society.

Biography An Te Liu (Tainan, Taiwan, 1967)

Lives and works in Toronto.

Witte de With, Center for Contemporary Art

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web: www.wdw.nl



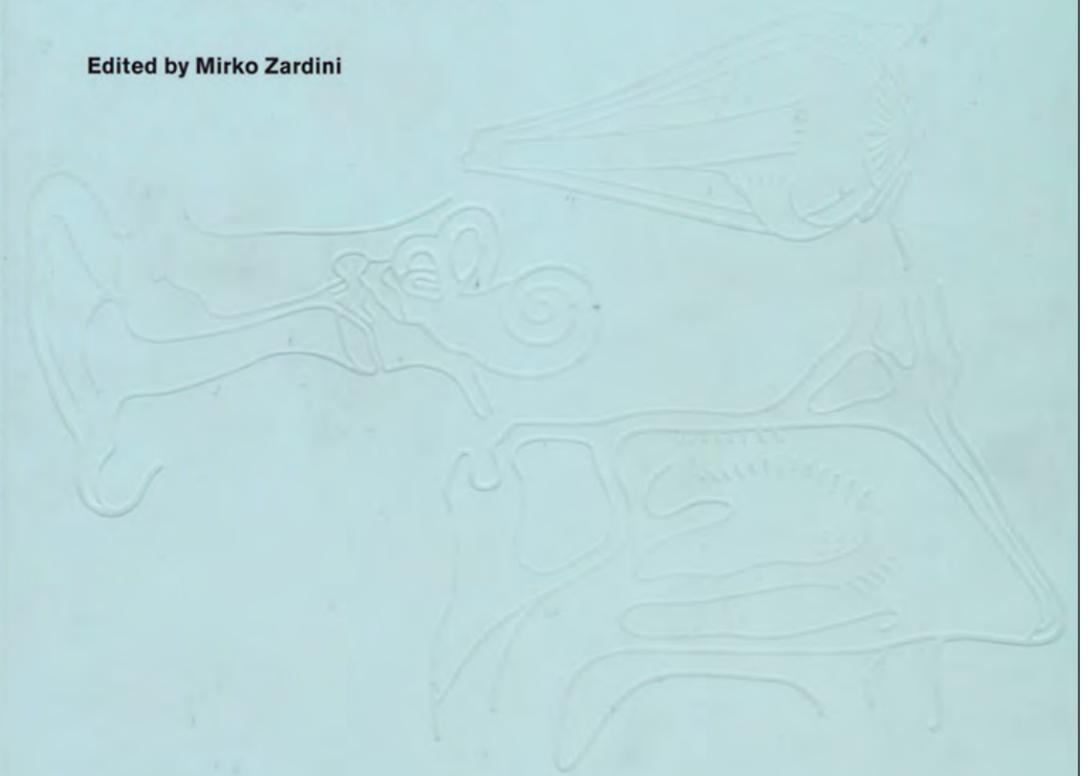
PROJECT

Street: behind the cliché

SENSE OF THE CITY

**AN ALTERNATE APPROACH
TO URBANISM**

Edited by Mirko Zardini



**CANADIAN CENTRE FOR ARCHITECTURE
LARS MÜLLER PUBLISHERS**



An Te Liu, *Airborne*, 2000

Several air conditioning units (ionizers and purifiers) are placed together here on a platform to suggest a scale model or a bird's eye view of a modernist city. Plugged in, the appliances are reminiscent of the type of buildings notorious for being hermetically sealed and having controlled-air interiors. The constant buzz of the units serves as a grating reminder of the contradiction between the noise-cleansing and climate-polluting effects of the equipment.



Theodor Horydczak, Electric Institute of Washington
Potomac Electric Power Company
Air Conditioning Displays II and V, c. 1920–c. 1950



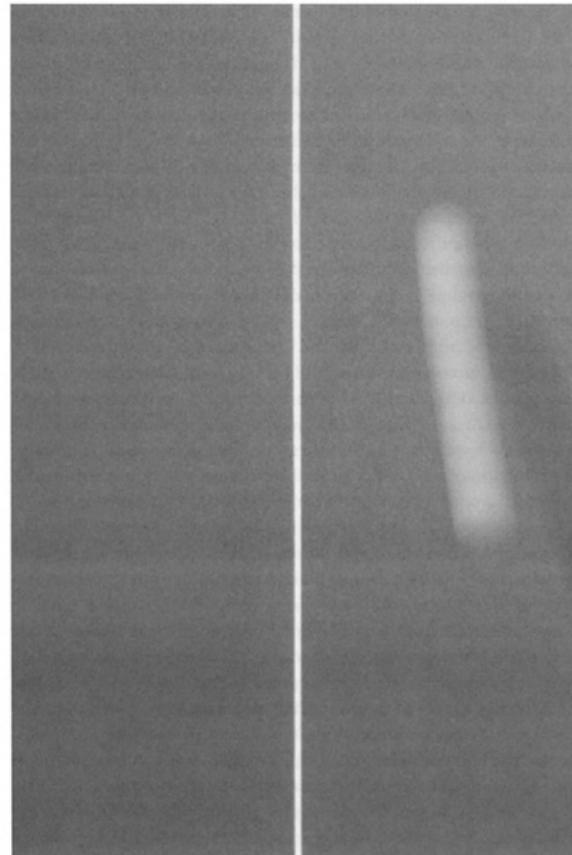
Le Corbusier's proposition to maintain a temperature of 18°C in buildings in all parts of the world [is] irrespective of local need or preference.

Reyner Banham, 1969

solely to road painting. In this worldly genre, an "end" is a limit or perhaps a functional goal. In the history of abstract painting especially, "end" connotes a terminus, a point of either futility or transcendence that has been envisioned in monochrome painting since Malevich's Suprematism and Rodchenko's materialism. These speculations on the end of painting took place within a decade of 1911 and have been renewed several times since. Thinking of how Wells' paintings, photographs, and performances link the everyday world and that of painting's habits and traditions, however, we might well ask what his work can say about painting's ends, its role and purpose within the social. To this purpose, let me imagine a rotographic text piece that takes off from *PLEINAIRISME*, one that – following Wells' punning practices – I will call Plain/Heir/ism.

In his two-part work with this name and in the exhibition generally, Wells plays with the tradition of painting outdoors, en plein air, in front of the motif, that we think of as quintessentially French. But as we have seen, he constantly schematizes, moves, and thus examines the ultimate outdoor painting, that done with line marker paint, by bringing it indoors and into "art." Substituting "plain" for "plein" suggests the connection to the semiotically saturated social world we live in, with its often invisible rules, boundaries, and materials. Plain is unpretentious but not unsophisticated: a new latex yellow superseding a slower drying oil. The line we see in *PLEINAIRISME*, framed by foliage and then by canvas, is plain in these ways. It works. "Heir" is of course what painting today is as a genre, the inheritor of high-art traditions. One does not need to paint consciously in the wake of these habits and reference points to have them figure in contexts of reception. To produce the abstract work in 1911 is to work in a line of production that includes the monochrome, field painting, formalism, conceptualism, and even the diagrammatic realities of Peter Halley's conduits, which I discuss below. In the same way, contemporary painting cannot but be the heir of many "isms," from the sweeping ones such as modernism and postmodernism, to those with more local inflections and varying suffixes. Especially when one paints in a way that looks abstract, "heir" and "ism" pull toward a separate world of aesthetic priorities and concerns. But in Wells' practice, "plain" keeps the social in our minds. Or perhaps he reminds us that the social has, more often than not, been in view in abstraction. Mondrian designed Neo-Plasticism to function as a template for ideal relations in society. Think of the spectacular career of Newman's *Voice of Fire* (1967), which was a touchstone of American cold-war liberty in the American Pavilion at Expo '67 in Montréal and then the butt of public outcries when purchased by the National Gallery of Canada in 1989.¹⁵ Contexts and meanings change, as we see in the movement from the road to the gallery and back in Wells' work generally. Walking or driving down the street, we may well reconceive the evanescent social life of abstraction.

Abstractions by C. Wells and Ellsworth Kelly that look alike may not be at all alike when their visual appearance is contextualized. This point applies equally to



44. An Te Liu, still from *Prepared Ground*, 2003. Colour film transferred to DV, 13:30 loop. Photo courtesy of the artist.

the work of An Te Liu. The enticing title of his 2004 show at Artists Space in NYC – "Tackiness and Anti-Power" – might, in a Greenberg moment, seem to allude to kitsch or its defeat at the hands of purified abstraction. But no. His elaborate piece *Prepared Ground*, (2 images), a sixteen-millimeter colour film transferred to digital video, has, when we admire a still, an immediate reference to Newman's signature zip paintings, some of which were green (Fig. 44). But what is that blur

on the right, and why are the surface and line so perfect? We can learn, but likely not exactly see, that the context is sport, specifically table tennis. "Tackiness" and "Anti-Power" are the names of energy-absorbing cushions – we might think of mats – used on ping pong bats. Liu recontextualizes other "abstract" sign systems found but again not much attended to in the world of recreation, such as marker lines on gymnasium floors. What he calls "game-space" is at once in dialogue with some of the abstract traditions we have been examining and also architectural. Liu's preoccupation with "surface" is evident, but it is a surface – whether of a floor or a paddle – that allows one to move socially. He claims to "unite the autonomous and the pure with the contingent, the real, and the possible" (Liu, 2003).

The purpose and production of a remarkable number of today's best known artists can be examined anew in the contexts of positive, social infection. Abstraction enters and contaminates social spaces, setting off reactions that test and reveal the resistance of both art and sociocultural systems. A short, representative, but by no means complete list would include Lydia Dona, Peter Halley, Fabian Marcaccio, David Reed, and Andres Serrano. Each one uses coordinates of abstraction discussed here to permeate the membranes between art and its social matrix. On a visual if not historical and theoretical plane, it would be productive to consider Jonathan Lasker's signature abstract units as infecting other such bodies. Are these diagrams intrusions into, interruptions of, conventional social relations? Connections of this sort could be multiplied with many other artists, but as usual in this book, I instead look in somewhat more detail at a much more confined set of instances. Serrano's early photographs of liquids are staged to look like neutral abstract art. But of course the potent associations of blood, milk, or urine spill over into social controversy.¹⁶ *Milk, Blood* of 1986 was Serrano's first apparently abstract photograph, though it was followed soon by *Circle of Blood* (1987) and others. Without language and its potent associations (Serrano's additional element, perhaps), these works might retain the aloofness of autonomy, a "proper" distance from society's anxieties about sexuality, motherhood, and other mores. Instead, as bell hooks has noted, "it is precisely Serrano's strategic merging of traditional aesthetic concerns with the social and political that gives his work its particular edge . . . [His photographs] critically interrogate the structure of patriarchal Christianity" (hooks, 1995, n.p.) and, I would add, patriarchal modernism in the form of the monochrome and colour field abstraction. Serrano claims that *Milk, Blood* is "a reference to Mondrian," by which he likely refers to the restricted colour range. "The work is about abstraction," he goes on to say, "I was amazed and pleased that the fluids had a life of their own and I had no control over the final image. Monochromes are a dime a dozen in painting, but you don't often see them in photography" (1993, 120). Blood's new association with AIDS displaces here its sacramental meanings. It portends death via infection, not life. Serrano is also frank about the racial implications of being of "mixed" blood, as he is, a state, more cultural than biological, that Morrison has investigated brilliantly



Vanessa Müller: *Therefore Beautiful*. Kraichtal: Ursula Blickle Stiftung, 2005.

„Das Schöne ist nicht real, lässt sich nicht eindeutig machen; es hat keinen festgelegten Sinn, ist scheinhaft, flüchtig, unwiderstehlich und unvergleichlich. Der Versuch, sich seiner zu bemächtigen, vernichtet es. Das Schöne ist Schein und als Schein Spiegelung in sich selbst. Es bildet eine auf nichts reduzierbare Welt und ist ohne Nutzen...“¹ Das schreiben Dietmar Kamper und Christoph Wolff 1989 in ihrer Einleitung zu dem Essayband *Der Schein des Schönen*. Dass das Schöne stets nur Schein ist, sich dem pragmatischen, es fixierenden Zugriff gleichsam entzieht, macht es schwer, zu formulieren, was es denn sei. Das Schöne existiert nicht als Gegenstand, vielleicht nicht einmal als vorgestelltes Bild, sondern lediglich als „Form der Unmöglichkeit einer definitiven Bildvorstellung“.²

Im Zentrum der Ausstellung *Therefore Beautiful* stehen denn auch nicht Werke, in denen sich der Schein des Schönen spiegelt, sondern solche, in denen der schöne Schein seinen Widerhall findet, ohne dass es sich dabei um eine negativ konnotierte Kategorie handeln muss. Der schöne Schein ist in unserer ästhetisierten Gegenwart, unserer ökonomisierten Lebenswelt, vielmehr ein Prinzip, das einerseits zielgerichtet argumentiert und Profitsteigerung durch verführerische Schauwerte vor Augen hat, andererseits aber ein von rein kommerziellen Strategien unabhängiges Eigenleben zu entwickeln in der Lage ist. Das ist dann der Fall, wenn von der Massenkultur entwickelte Modelle von Schönheit – oder besser: des schönen Scheins – auf eine Reflektion darüber treffen, was die Faszination dieser Modelle ausmacht, worin ihr visuelles Potenzial liegt, was jenseits der glamourösen Oberfläche liegt. Die kommerzielle Vereinnahmung von Vorstellungen des Schönen und Begehrenswerten führt konsequenterweise zur Gestaltung von Dingen, in denen sich ökonomische und ästhetische Kalkulation vereinen. Schönheit und Warenästhetik finden zu immer neuen Symbiosen, bei denen das Schöne in angewandter Form als Veredlungseffekt fungiert.

Therefore Beautiful lenkt den Akzent hingegen auf das „deshalb“, das jene Kausalität formuliert, die den massenkulturellen Fabrikationen des vermeintlich Schönen unterliegt, eigentlich jedoch eher in der künstlerischen Strategie als in den Dingen selbst zu finden ist. Wenn die visuellen Potenziale der angewandten Ästhetik des Schönen auf eine abstrakte Ebene überführt und von ihrem konventionellen Produktbezug gelöst werden, ist eine neue Sicht möglich, die sich einerseits zur Faszination des schönen Scheins bekennt, andererseits aber um seine Produktionsbedingungen weiß. Durch Strategien visueller Distanzierung tritt das Material und seine affektive Besetzung in den Vordergrund und das Konstruktionsprinzip wird sichtbar.

Viele der gezeigten Arbeiten greifen die Texturen des schönen Scheins auf, verschieben das mit ihnen verbundene Begehren jedoch von der konkreten Gegenstandswelt in eine diffuse Ferne. Sie verlagern die Schönheit zurück ins Auge des Betrachters, der auf sich selbst zurückgeworfen ihre Essenz imaginieren muss. Dass spiegelnde Oberflächen eine wichtige Rolle in den Arbeiten von Jason Dogde und Nicole Wermers spielen, ist deshalb kein Zufall – die reflektierenden Flächen eröffnen einen visuellen Sog, in dem

die vom Objekt ausgehende Aufmerksamkeit sich multipliziert, verdichtet und doch selbstgenügsam für sich selbst stehen kann. Andere Arbeiten beschäftigen sich mit konkreten Bildern des Versprechens eines schöneren Lebens.

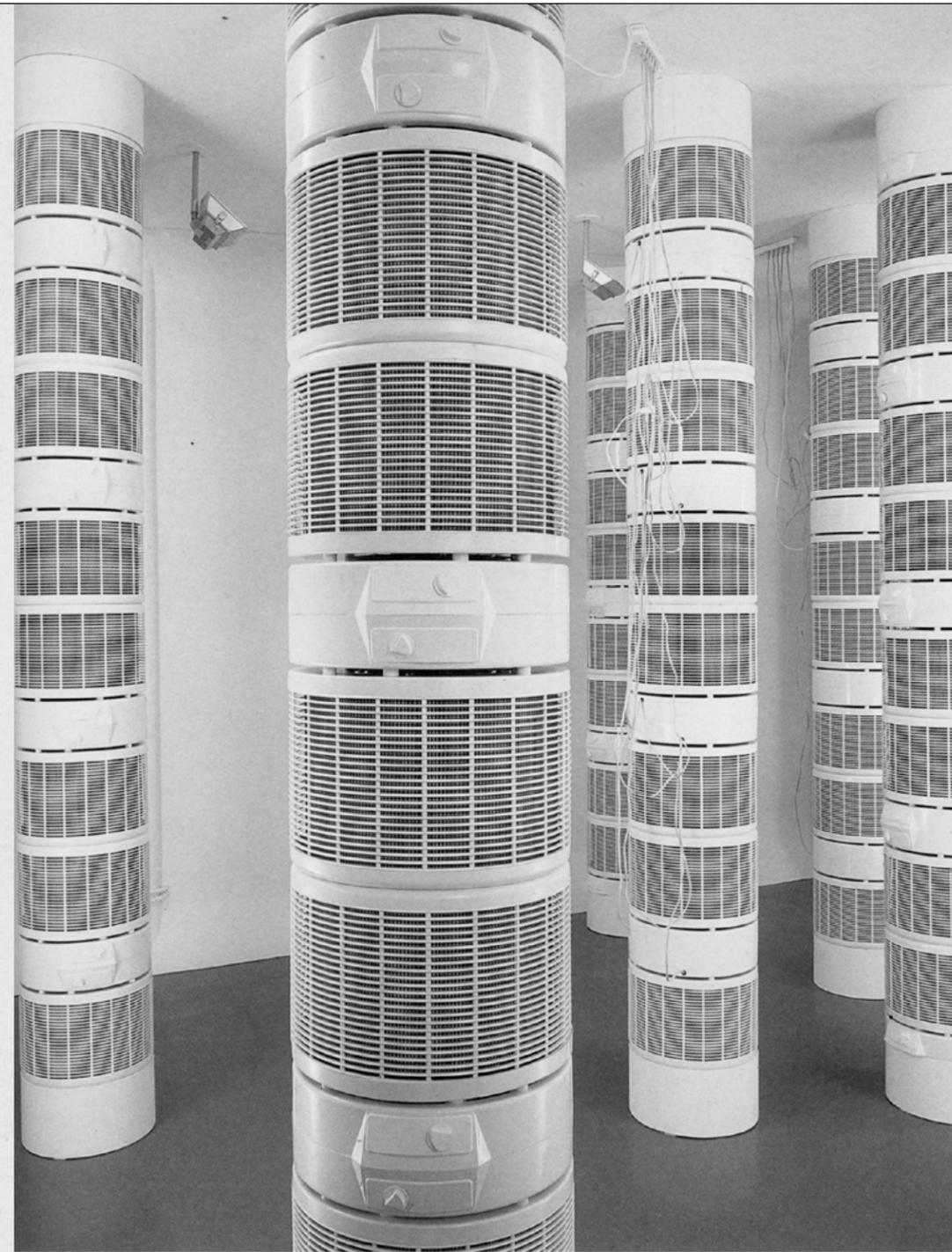
Sunah Chois Video *Views* zum Beispiel präsentiert ganzseitige Anzeigen asiatischer Zeitungen, in denen für Immobilien geworben wird. Die fiktiven, in ihrer Idealität imaginären Stadtsituationen präsentieren architektonische Zukunftsvisionen nach westlichem Vorbild. Die Zeitungsseiten, die leicht im Wind rascheln, bleiben in ihrer Materialität jedoch fragile Panoramen einer ungewissen, weil in dieser Form nie zu verwirklichenden Stadtlandschaft. An Te Lius Skulpturen hingegen wirken wie Modelle modernistischer Stadtplanung mit ihren Visionen einer eleganten Architektur voll von Licht und Luft. Die Vorstellung von Sauberkeit und umfassendem Stilbewusstsein, das den auf dem Reißbrett entworfenen Städten à la Corbusier anhaftet, nimmt Liu wörtlich und realisiert seine abstrakten „Modelle“ mit Luftbefeuchter und Apparaturen zur Verbesserung des Innenraumklimas. Henning Bohl nimmt sich nach Art des Japonismus vermeintlich asiatischer Motive an, bedient sich dabei jedoch vorgefertigter Formen des „guten Designs“ in Form von Ikea-Produkten, die ihrerseits für eine Demokratisierung des Geschmacks stehen. Er individualisiert, was für den Massenbedarf entworfen wurde und entwickelt skulpturale Installationen, die sich jeder Form von Benutzbarkeit entziehen. In Janice Kerbels Entwürfen für prachtvolle Gärten in Innenräumen wird die opulente Schönheit der Pflanzenwelt vollständig in die Imagination des Betrachters verlagert. Anhand exakter Daten und Auflistungen von Blumen und Gewächsen muss dieser die Interieurs zum Leben erwecken. Dass Abbildungen aus Hochglanzmagazinen bei diesem Vorstellungsprozess helfen, darf zu Kerbels Strategie gezählt werden. De Rijke/de Rooij wiederum setzen der überbordenden Bildwelt die monochrome Farbe entgegen. Ihre Diaprojektion *Orange* zeigt allein Abstufungen dieser Farbe, die sich als ausgesprochene „Wohlfühlfarbe“ erweist, über die Assoziationen, die man mit ihr verbindet, jedoch über das angenehm Anzusehende weit hinausreicht.

Ich danke Ursula Blickle sehr für ihr Vertrauen in das Ausstellungsprojekt, ihre großartige Unterstützung und die ausgezeichnete Zusammenarbeit. Nicolaus Schafhausen danke ich wie immer für die vielen anregenden Diskussionen und wertvollen Hinweise, Katja Schroeder für ihre Mitarbeit. ITF Grafik Design sei für die Gestaltung des Kataloges gedankt. Mein Dank gilt vor allem aber den Künstlerinnen und Künstlern, ohne deren Werke die Ausstellung nicht das wäre, was sie ist: Henning Bohl, Sunah Choi, Jason Dodge, Janice Kerbel, Ant Te Liu, Jeroen de Rijke, Willem de Rooij und Nicole Wermers. *Vanessa Joan Müller*

¹ Dietmar Kamper / Christoph Wolff (Hg.): *Der Schein des Schönen*. Frankfurt am Main 1989. S. 9
² Ebd.

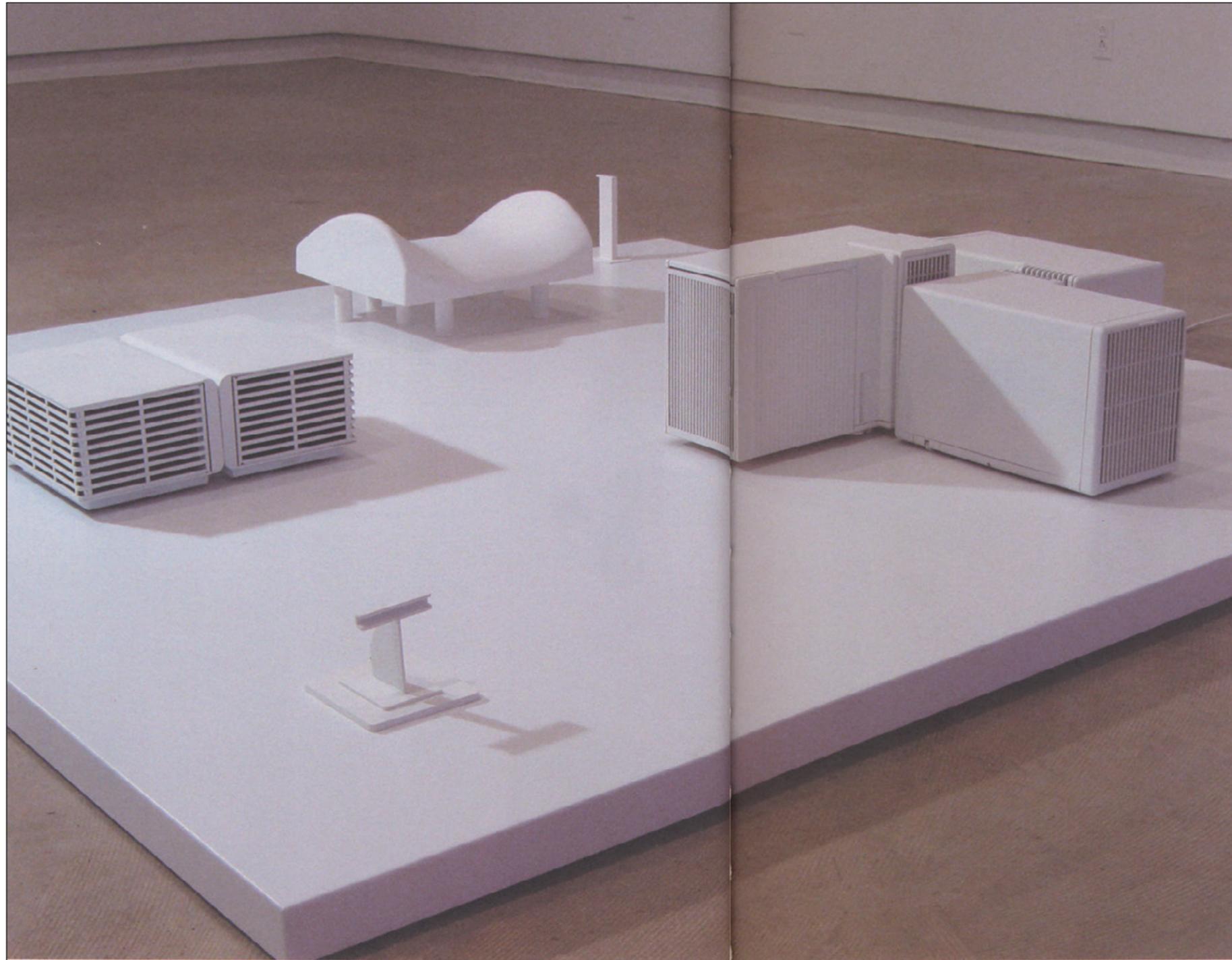
An Te Lius Werk bewegt sich zwischen Kunst und Architektur und übersetzt Parameter modernistischen Bauens in ihre alltagstauglichen Pendants: Skulpturen wie *Airborne* oder *Untitled (Complex II)* erinnern an Stadtmodelle, bestehen jedoch aus Luftbefeuchtern und Apparaten zur Verbesserung des Innenraumklimas. In hellem Weiß gehalten, strahlen die skulpturalen Anordnungen eine Form von Eleganz aus, wie sie sich auch mit modernistischen Lebensentwürfen verbindet: Schönheit als Resultat klarer Formen, Funktionalität, Frische. An Te Lius Entwürfe nehmen den Appell zur gereinigten Form ernst.

Sie sind für den Kunstkontext entworfen, präsentieren sich jedoch als Architektur. Die miniaturisierten „Wohnmaschinen“ wirken wie Anleitungen zu einem gesunden, schöneren Leben. Die Tatsache, dass sie sich als skulpturale Gebilde jeder Funktionalität verweigern, mindert nicht ihre visuelle Überzeugungskraft, da sie sich nicht nur im Raum platzieren, sondern sich auch mit der Luft in diesem Raum beschäftigen, die sie reinigen und erfrischen – jene Luft, die die Besucher atmen.

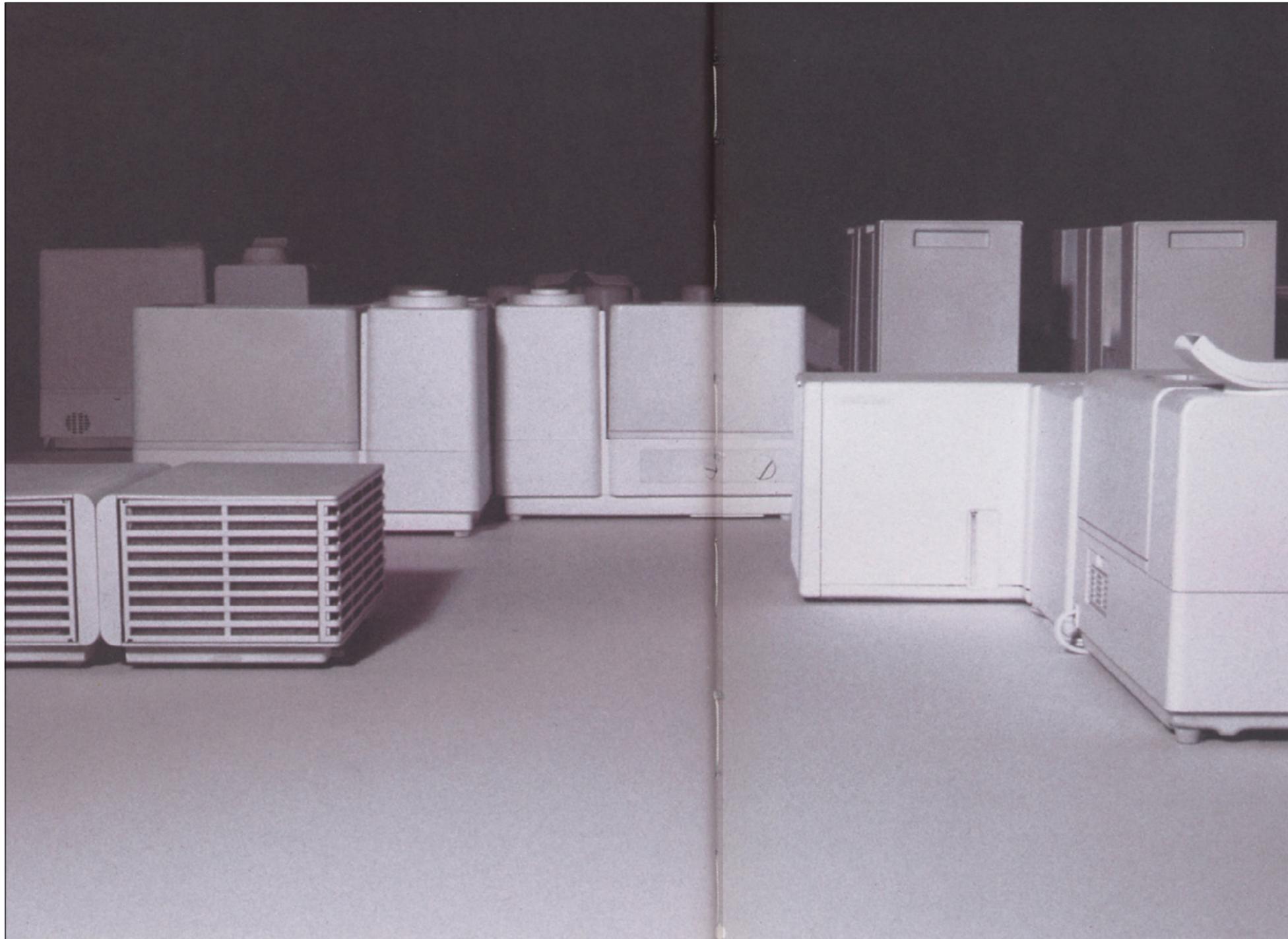


An Te Liu

An Te Liu: Exchange, 2001 (Detail)



An Te Liu: Complex II, 2002 (Detail)



An Te Liu: Airborne, 2000 (Detail)

The Edmonton Art Gallery presents:
Re: Building the World

The Edmonton Art Gallery (EAG) proudly presents *Re: Building the World*, curated by Catherine Crowston and, featuring the work of 7 Canadian artists: **Rodney Graham, Brian Jungen, Nestor Kruger, An Te Liu, Alex Morrison, Isabelle Pauwels and Natalija Subotincic**. The exhibition opens to the public on Saturday, February 19 and runs until May 8, 2005.

Re: Building the World features a new 3-d animation by Toronto artist, Nestor Krüger that is based on the plans of the interior of the Stoneborough House, designed by German philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein in 1926. Krüger's animation allows the viewer to move on a specific trajectory through the building, mimicking the movement of a film dolly cam and creating the illusion that we occupy its virtual space. The idiosyncratic design of personal space is taken up in Rodney Graham's five interior design proposals for the Brothers Grimm study, which are based on watercolour renditions of the space originally created in 1861. Graham proposes a doubling of rooms that would seem to be an architectural parallel to the brothers' close working relationship but also conveys a sense of the fairy tale quality of their work. Over the past several years, Winnipeg artist and architect Natalija Subotincic has conducted extensive research into the design of Sigmund Freud's famous consulting rooms and study. Her aerial and room elevation drawings illuminate how the design of his interior space can be seen to be a physical manifestation of Freud's theory of psychoanalysis.

In the 31 drawings of Alex Morrison's *Every House I've Ever Lived in Drawn from Memory*, the artist gives a glimpse into the spatial nature of time and memory. As well, in a new series of posters and drawings entitled, *Gesucht!*, Morrison imagines a way to document the life of the "wagenburgen" and urban squatters in the former GDR. Isabelle Pauwels book and installation, *Unfurnished Apartment for Rent*, looks at the narrative possibility that is literally embedded or constructed within every domestic setting.

Using the space of the Gallery as a workshop, Vancouver artist Brian Jungen has created a habitat for birds using only pre-fabricated materials purchased at the local Ikea: wooden file boxes, shelving brackets, placemats and other home decorator items. Through peep holes into the space and via closed circuit cameras, viewers are able to track the birds' use of their new environment – an environment based on the ubiquity of Swedish modern design. Working with these ideas of design and the design of planned housing, Toronto artist and architect An Te Liu's new wallpaper installation has been based on an aerial photograph of Levittown, one of the first suburban communities built in the U.S. in the post war period – paradisiacs for the single family suburban neighborhood. In this work, Liu conflates the ideal plan of the suburb with the design of wallpaper – a decorative embellishment common to domestic spaces in the 1950s and 1960s.

Everyday, we build and re-build the world in which we live. The artists in *Re: Building the World*, call our attention to the decisions we make in how we inhabit space, and how also, it comes to inhabit us.

AN TE LIU

Pattern Language: Levittown / White (UPC Edition), 2004-2005
Piezo print on vinyl
Courtesy of the Artist and Henry Urbach Gallery, New York

The pattern in An Te Liu's wall paper installation was derived from multiplying a single, perspectival, aerial photograph of Levittown, one of the first suburban communities in the United States. Levittown(s) were pioneered by William Levitt in Pennsylvania and New York in the post-war era and were seen to be prototypes for the perfect single family suburban residential area. Levittown is a physical and historical embodiment of post-war idealism, they represent a view of the world that promises individual freedom, prosperity and decent family values. There is an interesting irony, however, in that a built form connected with the ideals of open space, good health and wholesome living ultimately takes on such a serial representation - that the unique and the same are collapsed into an endless repetition of sameness.

While the design logic of the suburban development is based on the logic of pattern making (one unit repeated and modified and repeated ad infinitum), the pattern of the suburban development is constructed to disguise the sameness of the individual products, but in the wallpaper pattern this repetition the seriality becomes very evident.

In Liu's installation the representation of architecture is reconstituted as a textile-like pattern, recalling the theories of German architectural theorist Gottfried Semper, who believed that there was an elementary relationship between textiles (knots, weaving, fabric, pattern) and architecture - that the first architecture was one of strands of cloth and membranes. In Liu's work, there is a collapse of the 3-D physicality of buildings and the 2-D reality of wall covering.

Yet in Liu's work, the overall repetition of the image pattern is broken by a second that has been laid over top or cut out of the fabric of the wallpaper. This takes the form of a series of vertical voids or interruptions in the wallpaper that are derived from the rhythmic pattern of a UPC (universal product or bar code). Both the UPC and the suburban development form patterns; while the UPC is scanned in order to identify the product (inventory, price, company/maker, etc...), the houses themselves are also mass-market products, created at a larger scale, yet equally consumable.

MERCER UNION

An Te Liu *Ether* and Michael Meredith *Background*
Fabrizio Rivola *Oasis*

27 May – 26 June 2004 Opening: Thursday, 27 May, 8PM

Special Reception Saturday, 29 May, 2–4PM for *Oasis* a public intervention by Fabrizio Rivola at Historic Fort York, Toronto

Better Living 2004 Auction Thursday, 20 May at 129 Spadina Ave., doors 6PM, auction 8PM

Artist Talk Fabrizio Rivola Thursday, 27 May, 7PM

Platform Lecture Xandra Eden Tuesday, 8 June, 7PM

Front Gallery

An Te Liu *Ether* and Michael Meredith *Background*

The Shopping Mall and the Camp

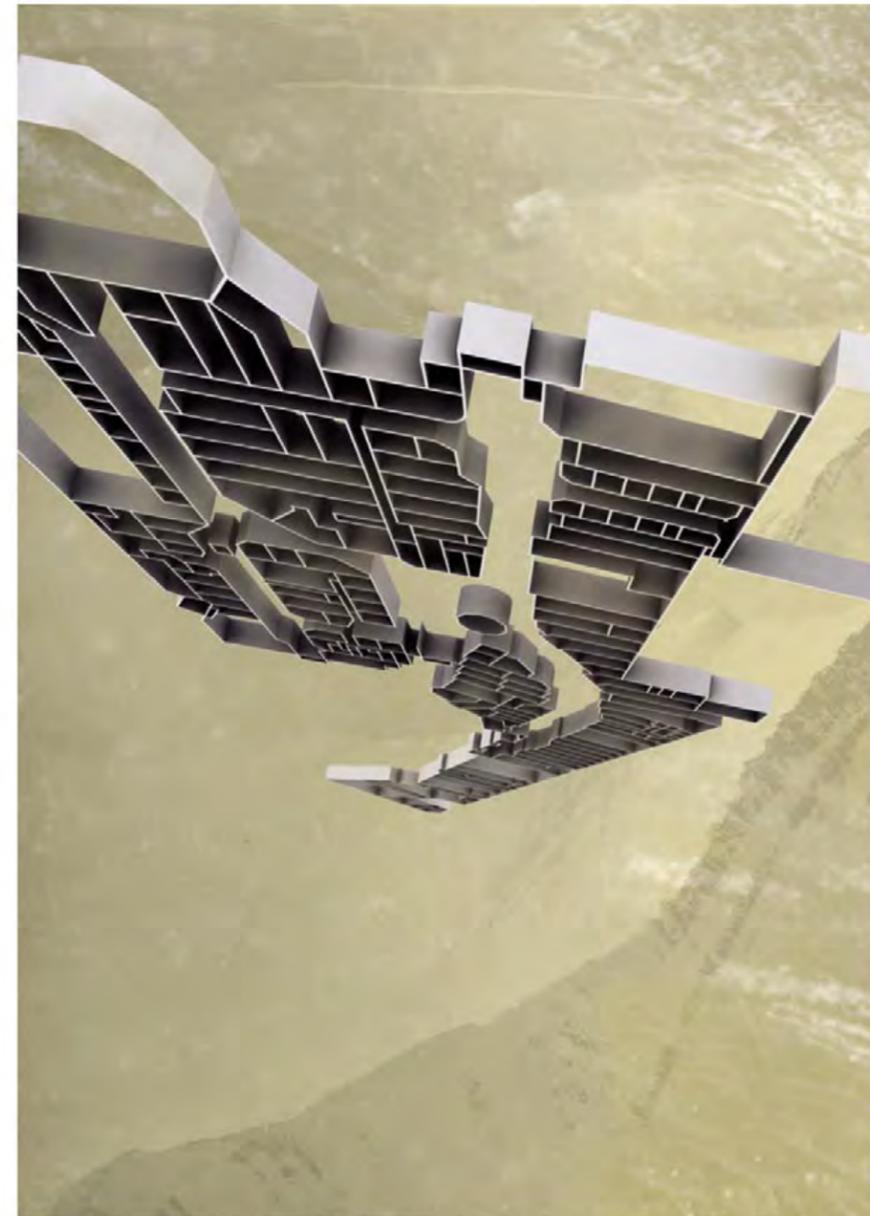
In *Ether*, An Te Liu presents a sixty-five-foot panorama of suburban architectures that appear like spaceships drifting in an ephemeral but emphatically vacant landscape. Based on and traced out of existing urban plans for suburban Chinese malls in the Greater Toronto Area—Mississauga Chinese Centre (Mississauga), First Markham Place (Markham) and Market Village (Richmond Hill)—*Ether* is structured as a Generic City with supreme banality, a testament to capitalist implosion and the concomitant surrealism of borders.

Michael Meredith constructs several works that complement *Ether* as ironic gestures towards lifestyle and design, highlighting the market fundamentalism of the urban environment as shopping centre. Meredith produces glow-in-the-dark floor mats, honeycomb light fixtures, and a special muzak mix for the gallery. This is literally the environmental condition of *Ether*'s city. The fixtures from ceiling to floor are drawn out of natural formations that rework rhizomatic clusters. The opposition between glow-in-the-dark floor mats and the light technology is not so much a contradiction as a statement on the randomness and discontinuity of the sensory dressing. Meredith insists on a synaesthetic experience that underscores *Ether*'s disembodied territories. Yet beyond this, his pieces offer no sensual comfort and the muzak (music produced to increase worker and consumer productivity) echoes the empty figures of *Ether*'s malls.

An Te Liu's earlier study of the new formations of diasporic ethnicities in *Migratory Studies of the North American Chinatown* (2004), inverted the generic enclaves of strip malls by infusing them with the urbane character of Chinatown. In this context, the racialized spatiality of Chinatown (and other such formations like Little Italy, Little India, Little Jamaica, etc.) is a clichéd articulation of the modern city—the techno-orientalism of the sci-fi film, for example. This cliché belongs to the utopian ideal of the urbane as place of heterogeneous commerce and cultural interface. But more than this, the very title of Liu's study calls forth both ancient and postmodern cultural practices, that sensational hybridity that in Ridley Scott's *Blade Runner* (a film that seems not to have aged) was said to produce an "eternal present" in which the temporal continuum collapses into an overdetermined present. There is in *Ether* something largely reminiscent of this science fiction film whose future city refracted the sheen of the computer in a virtual space that was built upward rather than outward simply because the inhabitants had run out of space.

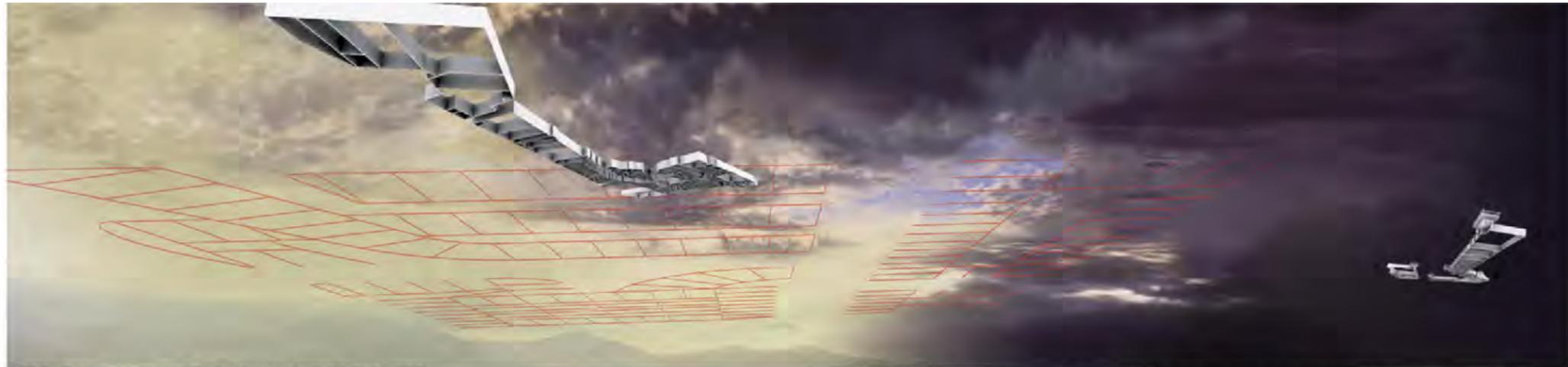
It is fitting that the first study of the North American Chinatown is reconfigured in *Ether* in a large panorama, the most appropriate form to carry historical narratives of military conquest. The panoramic scene is printed on Tyvek, that Dupont product that Federal Express uses for its envelopes. This industrial material, which is both lightweight and resilient to ensure the speed and efficacy of the global courier service, is unrolled like a continuous scroll across the wall. What has been lost or contained (which amounts to the same thing) in both *Migratory Studies*

6.01



An Te Liu, *Ether* (portion of a scroll), digital print on Tyvek, 26 x 780 in, 2004

6.04



An Te Liu. *Ether* (section of a scroll), digital print on Tyvek, 26 x 780 in., 2004



Michael Meredith. *Untitled (Modular Mat)* detail, 24 x 48 in each mat, 2004

and *Ether* is a history of movement and labour—the early history of garment factories, slave labour, and work camps that underpins the development of Chinatowns in North America. Instead, in both of these studies of urban sprawl there is an “ether effect,” a numbing lack of distinction and affect. The metal outlines of the malls are, as befits the society of the spectacle, both banal and spectacular.

In *Ether*, the ground upon which the architectural structures unfold is presented as a soft taupe of endless clouds and vague terrestrial formations. The half dozen or so malls appear as metallic braces, extracted and reduced to outlines that float promiscuously over this dematerialized space. In their instrumentality, these forms of life, staged in the middle of nowhere, conjure what Giorgio Agamben has described, as “dislocating localization,” an expression of the “hidden matrix and nomos” of the political space in which we live. Indeed, this is the hidden force of Michael Meredith’s environment—precisely, the subliminal effects of doormats, light, and music Agamben describes dislocated localization as the space of “camp” which is a pure expression of modernity. Its rise as an architectural and lethal technology coincides with changes in citizenship laws and the denationalization of citizens. It is the “fourth and inseparable element that has been added to and has broken up the old trinity of nation (birth), state, and territory.”¹ The camp regulates and inscribes order into the life that upsets the relation territory-birth. The process of “dislocating localization” contains all forms of life and norms that fall outside the boundaries of the nation-state. Thus we might say that hybridity, multiplicity, and difference are not produced by global economic flows, by diasporic cultures and technological circuits—the elements of globalization. On the contrary, the political-juridical structure, which defines the present situation, is one of containment, where politics must be understood fundamentally as biopolitics.

The shopping mall and the camp are seemingly located at the opposite ends of the political spectrum of freedom. Yet we must read these two spatial modalities together—their instrumental cartographies, their dislocating order, their strategies of surveillance, their “delirious normative definitions of the inscription of life in the city”² and their conjugation of biopolitics. These all stem from the same political-juridical situation. The works of this exhibition instill this kind of reflection by materializing spaces of instrumentality and functionality that are painstakingly referential. Lest we forget, this is a panorama of Toronto’s suburbs.

Janine Marchessault

¹ Giorgio Agamben, “What is a Camp?” in *Means Without End: Notes on Politics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), 44.

² *Ibid.*, 43-44.

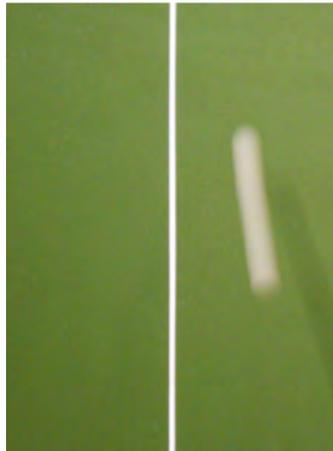
Current Exhibition at Artists Space > January 14 - February 21, 2004

Exhibition opens to the public Wednesday, January 14, 11am

Opening reception: Saturday, January 24th, 6-8 pm

Architecture and Design Project Series

An Te Liu *Tackiness and Anti-Power*



^ An Te Liu, still from *Prepared Ground*, 2003,
16mm Color film transferred to DV, 13:30 loop



^ An Te Liu, *Complex (tower of Squash no. 1)*,
2003, marking tape on acrylic

Exploring the rules, codes, and representations of 'game-space'- the carefully painted surfaces that delineate functions and govern activity in the realm of leisure and competitive sport- An Te Liu's new work brings together painting, sculpture, design, and performance. *Tackiness and Anti-Power* is concerned with different traditions of abstraction that have profoundly informed both art and architectural practices. Referencing table tennis, multi-use gymnasium floors, and other game surfaces, coating becomes coding, lines become boundaries, colors become rules, and surfaces become activated.

This project is funded in part by The Canada Council for the Arts.

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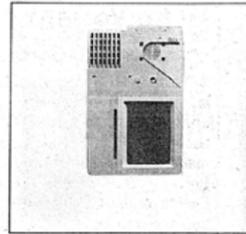
An Te Liu's aesthetically cool installations group forms and patterned surfaces to elicit an uneasy ambiance. His installations incorporate ready-made mass-produced commercial forms including stacked and humming cylindrical air purifiers, glossy white display surfaces and fractal-like graphics derived from suburban developments. Liu's forms of representation locate themselves between the schematic functionalism of architecture and the abstract uselessness associated with art. He blends objects of industrial design, digital graphics, subtle sounds and most recently, the moving image. The writer and architectural critic, Rudolphe el-Khoury claims An Te Liu's machine for living (is) seemingly designed to correct behavioral and environmental deviance. This statement assumes that some sense of foreignness is shared by viewers in contact with Liu's work.

An Te Liu locates the idea and the actuality of foreignness in a global environment, in which issues of translation are key. Every film has its foreign language audience as does every commodity, from air purifiers to can openers. An Te Liu uses the languaging of foreignness to address notions of individual and social/collective foreignness, its historical and arbitrary character.

He describes his project for MosaiCanada, YA, as follows:
"YA is a reconstruction of an L-858L airport taxiway and runway sign. Its size and type specifications are FAA (Federal Aviation Association) regulation. The font is a variation of Highway and redrawn for this piece. This sign, in context, tells pilots which runway they are on, and which way to go to get to the nearest other one.

In much of my previous work I have been curious about various ideas concerning functionality- what something does (or is supposed to do), what it looks like, what other things it can do or appear like."

YA
Light Box 92×66×66cm



An Te Lius Computerteile
Bild: Galerie

Galerie Fotohof: „Rethinking Photography III“ Dieses Foto ist kein Foto

Als Philosophie in Fotografie präsentiert sich die laufende Ausstellung „Rethinking Photography III“ in der Galerie Fotohof, in der mehrere Künstler ihr eigenes Genre reflektieren (bis 26. Juli). Dabei entfernt sich die Fotografie von den gezeigten

Objekten und von sich selbst. Ähnlich wie der Surrealist René Magritte in das Gemälde eines Apfels hineinschrieb: „Dies ist kein Apfel“, scheinen uns einige der Exponate zuzurufen: Dies ist (eigentlich) kein Foto! Inge Dick hat zwölf Fotografien

als mehr oder weniger bewegten Zoom-Vorgang radikal durchgezogen, bis zuletzt nur noch ein einziger Bildpunkt (ein Pixel) zu sehen ist. Günther Selichar hat einen Abzug von schwärzestem Schwarz produziert, das weniger dahinter liegenden magischen Raum eröffnet. Tamara Horáková und Ewald Maurer reizen die Möglichkeiten der analogen/digitalen Verwandlung und Rückverwandlung bis ins Letzte. Sabine Bitter und Helmut Weber interessieren „architektonische“ Strukturen von Bücherregalen. An Te Liu verleiht abgebildeten Computerteilen apothetische Monumentalität - das plastische Moment erreicht sie durch den Trick, die Fotos auszuschneiden und auf weißen Untergrund zu kleben. Bei Herwig Kempinger wird erst der Begriff „Wolkenmeer“ bewusst. Die malerischen Wolken-Wogen springen uns förmlich an. *Nikolai Janatsch*

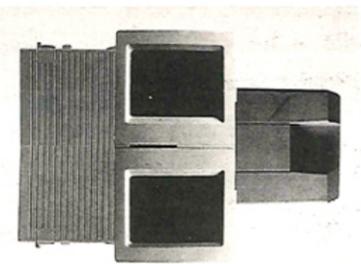
Was sagen Fotos?

Fotos, etwa von Computern, kennt man aus Werbeprospekten. Da denkt man keine Sekunde darüber nach, was das Bild sagen will: Hier gibt's mich, kauf mich!

In der künstlerischen Fotografie hingegen ist das abgebildete Objekt Träger oft vielschichtiger Bedeutungen - oder doch nicht? Wie weit die Vermittlungsleistung der Fotografie über das Abgebildete hinausreicht bzw. hinausreichen soll, ist Thema der Ausstellung „Rethinking Photography“ im Fotohof. Gezeigt werden Werke von acht KünstlerInnen.

Ein Buch zur Schau verknüpft Fotos und theoretische Statements zu den beiden Polen „Narration“ und „Reduktion“. Es ist um 22 Euro erhältlich.

Rethinking Photography: Über den Verbleib des Objektbezugs in der zeitgenössischen Fotografie.



Im Fotohof
u.a. zu sehen:
Werke von
An Te Liu.
Foto: Liu

PRESSEINFORMATION

AUSSTELLUNG UND BUCHPRÄSENTATION

RETHINKING PHOTOGRAPHY III

DIE RELATIVIERUNG DES OBJKTBEZUGS IN DER ZEITGENÖSSISCHEN FOTOGRAFIE

Sabine Bitter + Helmut Weber, Inge Dick, Tamara Horáková + Ewald Maurer, Herwig Kempinger, An Te Liu, Günther Selichar
Kuratorin: Ruth Horak, Wien

AUSSTELLUNGSERÖFFNUNG: Donnerstag, 12. Juni 2003, 19.00 Uhr

DAUER DER AUSSTELLUNG: 13. Juni bis 26. Juli 2003

Die Verbreitung der Fotografie im Alltag und in der zeitgenössischen Kunst sowie die Übereinkunft, sie ausschließlich als Nachricht zu benutzen, das sind die Ausgangspunkte für **Rethinking Photography**. „Fotografien sind wie diskrete Dienstboten, die ihre Botschaft überbringen, sich dann aber still zurückziehen, um den Rezipienten nicht durch ihre Anwesenheit zu stören, wenn sich dieser dem Inhalt widmet.“ (John Hilliard)

Die Ausstellung in der Galerie Fotohof thematisiert die Frage nach dem Objektbezug: Wie kann das fotografierte Objekt von seinem Realitätswert gelöst werden, und wie verändert sich dadurch seine Rolle? Wie verhält sich die Fotografie gegenüber immateriellen „Objekten“ bzw. welche „neuen“ Objekte kann sie hervorbringen?

„Bande test orange“ von **Tamara Horáková + Ewald Maurer** beinhaltet etwa nur mehr in minimalen Spuren das ursprüngliche Objekt. Ein kleiner Ausschnitt dieses Objekts war zur Fertigung eines Pöbestreifens bestimmt worden und ist seither die Vorlage, die bereits in einer Vielzahl von Operationen weiter bearbeitet wurde und ganz neue Objekte hervorbringt. Durch abwechselnd digitale und analoge Verfahren (verzerrern, invertieren etc. am Computer oder wieder abfotografieren des daraus entstandenen Fotos) wird das Objekt immer wieder ein reales, um dann im nächsten Schritt abermals als Vorlage für ein am Computer generiertes zu dienen.

Die Immaterialität des Himmels versucht **Inge Dick** in Serien wie „**Bleu du Ciel**“ zu „vergegenständlichen“. Die wolkenfreien Himmelaufnahmen durchlaufen die Farbskala des Himmels vom weiß überstrahlten Sonnenhimmel bis zum tiefblauen Nachthimmel - die Farbe wird zur bestimmenden Eigenschaft. Das Zoomen auf ein einziges Pixel bindet die Farbe weiter an die Fläche bzw. an die Form des Pixels, das Quadrat. So wird das Naturphänomen Himmel zum künstlerischen Format „Monochromie“.

Herwig Kempinger wiederum widmet sich den turbulenten Seiten des Himmels, den sich aufbäumenden Wolkengebilden. Kempinger fotografiert von seinen kleinen Dachfenstern aus stets ähnliche kleine Ausschnitte dieses überdimensionalen Bildschirms der Natur, und verdichtet dessen Variationsreichtum anschließend am Computer zu übernatürlichen Formationen.

Der Bildschirm, in seiner eigentlichen Rolle selbst Lieferant von Bildern, ist **Günther Selichars** und **An Te Lius** Objekt, dessen Realitätswert es zu brechen gilt. Liu klappt alle Seiten des Gehäuses in die Fläche, sodass der Computermonitor in seine Einzelteile - in den Raster der Lüftungsschlitze, in helle und dunkle Flächen zerfällt - und ähnlich einem Faltdesign erst zusammengebaut werden muss. Selichar setzt den Bildschirm so zentral ins Bild, dass das Gehäuse schmal angeschnitten zur inneren Rahmung wird, das Bildformat wiederholt und ins Bild selbst überträgt. Der Gebrauchswert eines Monitors (Preis, Leistung und Design) wird durch sein Bild ersetzt.

Sabine Bitters und **Helmut Webers** „**Superbooks**“ zeigen Einblicke in die ausgeräumte (ehemalige) Wiener Stadtbibliothek. Die tief liegenden Blickpunkte der Kamera, der gewählte Ausschnitt sowie die anschließende Solarisation der Fotos verwandeln die Gänge und Bücherregale in leere Straßenzüge durch modernistische „Superblocks“. Das Kippen zwischen Innen- und Außenraum, zwischen Kontur und Binnenform, bestimmt die neue Sicht auf das alte Mobiliar.

Durch die Relativierung des Objektbezugs ist der abgebildete Gegenstand nicht mehr das einzige Thema der Fotografie und die „Diskretion des Dienstboten“ aufgehoben.

Ruth Horak

NEWMODULR

JAMES CARL + BRIAN JUNGEN + NESTOR KRUGER + AN TE LIU + DAMIAN MOPPET

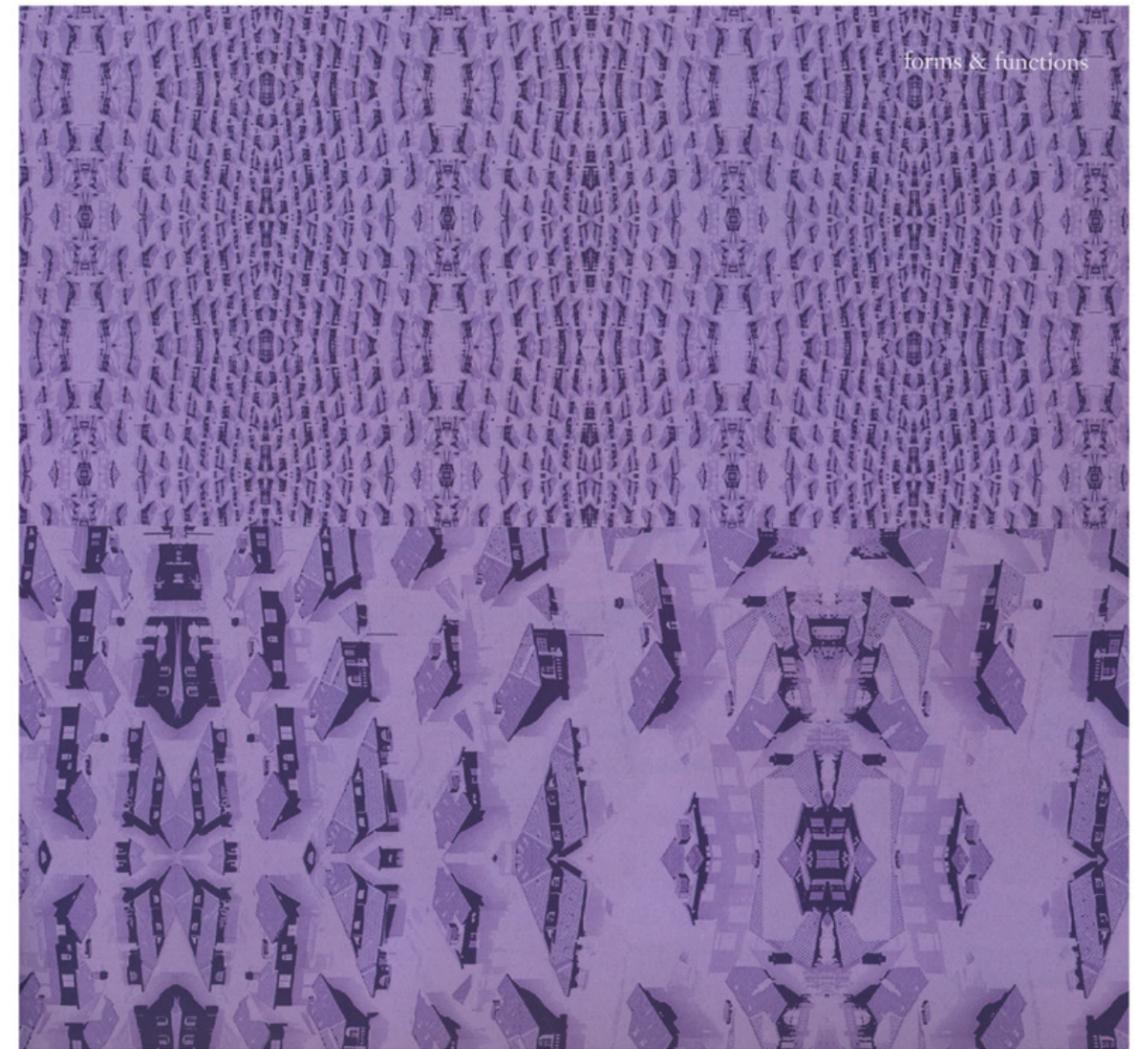
Blackwood Gallery, Toronto :: September 12 – October 20, 2002

Cell phones, lunch trays, air conditioners, tracts of suburban housing – the everyday is made up of modular clutter and all the artists in this exhibition make use of it. They do so either directly, or by replicating and representing it. Somewhere between design and architecture, close to both but not collapsing into the functions of either, the artists' works participate in the visual qualities of the modern movement (its visionary anticipation and elaboration of the grids of modern architecture, the stacks of standardized goods, the beauty of modularity); but they do not share the future-oriented convictions. Earlier, standardized equivalence could stand as a utopian image for social equality. Today, the modular is the very matrix of the material and social worlds, one that continues to replicate and realize itself — with intensifying permutations and variations – throughout all facets of everyday life. The works in this exhibition approach it as an action in process and as effects. They take account of it — highlighting the generic, following up on its wicked speed, its virtual multiplications, and its uncanny, ornamental, and aberrant aggregations.

In AN TE LIU's *Untitled (Complex II)*, (2002), the pervasiveness of modular construction is visualized in sculptural terms. Trained as an architect, An Te Liu has been experimenting with the modular forms of household appliances as stand-ins for architecture (which could imply the opposite as well). Several units of air-conditioners (ionizers and purifiers) are placed together on a platform to suggest an architectural model or a bird's eye view of a generic 'complex' of moderate, and modernist high-rises interspersed with a biomorphic structure and odd-ball public sculpture made from parts of exercise machines and orthopedic aids. Plugged in, the appliances look like the type of building notorious for its hermetically sealed, climate and air-controlled interior while the constant buzz of the equipment is a grating reminder of the contradictions of contemporary cleansing — its noise- and climate-polluting consequences. This inevitable infection of the idea of modernist "purity" is also at work in Liu's wallpapered version of aerial views of a Nevada suburb, titled *Pattern Language (tantric)*, 2002. Spliced like a kaleidoscopic image into a kind of multiplied Rorschach-test, the repetitive and generic form of suburban housing tracts not only looks like exuberantly decorative wall-paper, ornamental to the point of the baroque; it also suggests a charged "tantric" surface for projecting or reading there the most intimate, and apparently all-consuming desire for domestic stability and uniformity as bliss.

All the artists' works in this exhibition occupy the modular as perhaps the exemplary emblem of modernity. They evoke its thorough replication in the most minute and in its largest forms – from the digitalized module to consumer goods and to the very shape of the city. But, more than merely highlighting modularity — its ubiquity in contemporary culture, it is represented in the work as if on a knife's edge. It is equally the existing matrix of the everyday as it is a matter of its twisted, imaginative, estranged and aberrant appropriation. It is at once 100% generic and 100% specific*. This is no straightforward appropriation, a wresting away and assumption of power in different hands so much as it is a description of a process and of means.

-BARBARAFISCHER



forms & functions

The walls of perception

This is your neighbourhood on acid. Almost. This is wallpaper, designed by architect and artist An Te Liu to explore patterns of human construction and settlement. If you look closely at *Pattern Language II: Tantric*, you can see the recognizable configuration of suburbia. Liu multiplied an aerial shot of a housing development to distort the scale and meaning of the iconic suburb. As in previous works, such as *Condition* – his parody of the modern obsession with hygiene using stacks of air purifiers – Liu aestheticizes the mundane in order to evaluate it from a new perspective.

An Te Liu's work is part of *New Modular*, an exhibition on recent art practices involving design and architecture, at Toronto's Blackwood Gallery September 12 through October 20 (905) 828-3789

HEATHER MACKAY

Artist An Te Liu's suburb-distorting wallpaper. The top view is at 25% of real scale; the bottom view is a detail at 100%.

The Shape of the City

Boasting the mesmerising quality of a kaleidoscope, an ambiguous scroll of mauve wallpaper created by An Te Liu solicits personal interpretations from every viewer. From a distance the sinuous pattern looks like snakeskin, with a notion of fakery introduced through its purplish hue. While the reptilian association makes it at once repulsive and exotic, some observers experience the visual buzz of op art in the spliced pattern. Others see a series of multiplied Rorschach blotches. The less imaginative describe a patterned wall covering receding into the background.

As the sharp-eyed gallery-goer approaches the vertical surface, however, Liu's visual trickery reveals a series of Spanish-colonial houses, flipped 90 degrees. Taken from an aerial photograph of an anonymous suburb in the American Southwest, the basic motif is not overtly manipulated. It was simply copied and mirrored until the composition became so large that it resembled wallpaper, as any extensive, repetitive and decorative wall overlay would. To critics who claim Liu is 'aestheticising the mundane', the artist swiftly retorts that 'everything is aesthetic and nothing is mundane'.

The title of the installation, *Pattern Language II: Tantric (mauve)*, neatly captures its meditative and transfixing quality, while acknowledging the pattern-like appearance of residential neighbourhoods as seen from above. These patterns speak of Liu's interest in the thin line separating the normal from the pathological, while exploring the paradoxes of life in the suburbs.

'Suburban life is connected to ideas of freedom and individuality – having your own house and land – and to notions of safety and the desire for domestic stability,' Liu says. 'Also present, however, is a complementary set of anti-themes: conformity, subjugation, boredom, trauma and, of course, perversion.' What is especially disquieting about Liu's wallpaper is the implication behind the almost infinite array of houses. By repeating the repetitive, Liu renders the image even more disturbing than it already is.

Charlotte Vaudrey

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TORONTO, ONTARIO

By Glenn Williams

NEWMODULR (*Blackwood Gallery, University of Toronto at Mississauga, September 12—October 20, 2002*) exhibits work by five artists from Vancouver and Toronto that straddles the line between architecture and industrial design. Working in a variety of media including photography, sculpture and outdoor installation, these artists have cleverly situated utilitarian objects and materials to express new meanings and associations by using modular construction to explore aesthetic/philosophical issues and debunk the mythology of industrial production, rather than celebrate consumer culture.

By carefully considering the relationship of the artist's work to the surrounding space, the organizers of the show highlighted their individual styles and the inter-relationships between them, and emphasized the interchangeable, repetitious nature of modular design units inside and outside the gallery.

James Carl's oversize fiberglass replica of a beach ball with its red, blue, yellow and black stripes reiterates the curvilinear shape of the inner courtyard of the building that houses the gallery. The sunlight illuminating the courtyard scatters multiple reflections of the ball across the surface of the windows. **Nestor Kruger's** untitled vinyl on glass installation work reconfigures the physical dimensions of the modular units of the existing windows and doors to create a new composition of red and black vinyl strips.

Larger issues emerge as one studies the other works in the show more carefully, revealing the pervasive continuum of modular design and the potentially dehumanizing and de-sensitizing effects of post-modernism and

mass production that shapes and controls our daily lives.

In his "Empty Orchestra" series (1995—1997), Carl investigated the phenomenon of rapid change and product obsolescence. Mass-produced items such as the cell phone, microphone, diskette, disc player, videocassette and cassette player are hand-carved (full size) and immortalized in obsidian, pink marble and other materials. Soon to be rendered redundant and useless by further advances in technology, these objects occupy the display units in an eerie silence that resonates and initiates a dialogue between the viewer and the work.

In the process, new questions are raised: Does newer mean better? What is lost and what is gained? How necessary are these items? How do manufacturers and advertisers elevate their products to icon status in an effort to gain a greater share of the market place? What happens to the product once it has outlived its usefulness? Can the materials be recycled or does it more often than not end up in a landfill site?

Damian Moppett and **An Te Liu** use utilitarian objects and materials to create imaginary and whimsical structures to express their futuristic vision of urban life. While Liu's scaled down three-dimensional sculptural models are designed to interact with the surrounding space, Moppett's models are assembled in the studio and photographed in black and white. The photographs are then enlarged and enclosed in simple, white modular frames and presented as a series.

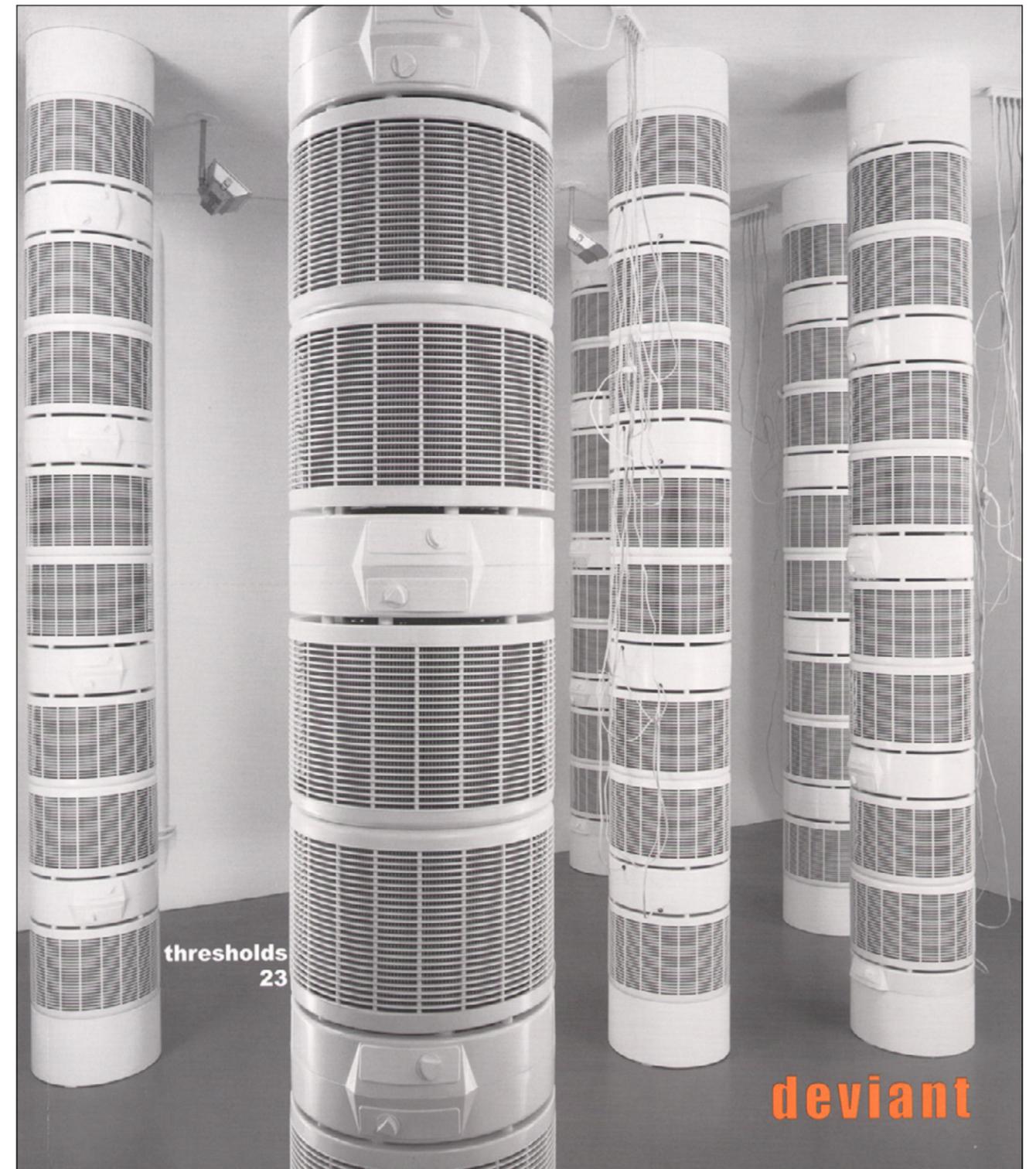
Constructed of foam-core and cardboard, Moppett's architectural mock-ups of monumental building complexes have a rustic, unfinished, homemade quality. Set theatrically against a backdrop of glue bottles, cloth draperies and other paraphernalia, these playful re-constructions represent the lin-

gering fragments and building blocks of dreams. Moppett endeavors to undercut the fantasy element and reinforce the feeling of actuality by using specific titles for his models such as *The Babich Arena with Ehrlich Amphitheater and Parking Complex* and *Century City* (1997—2002).

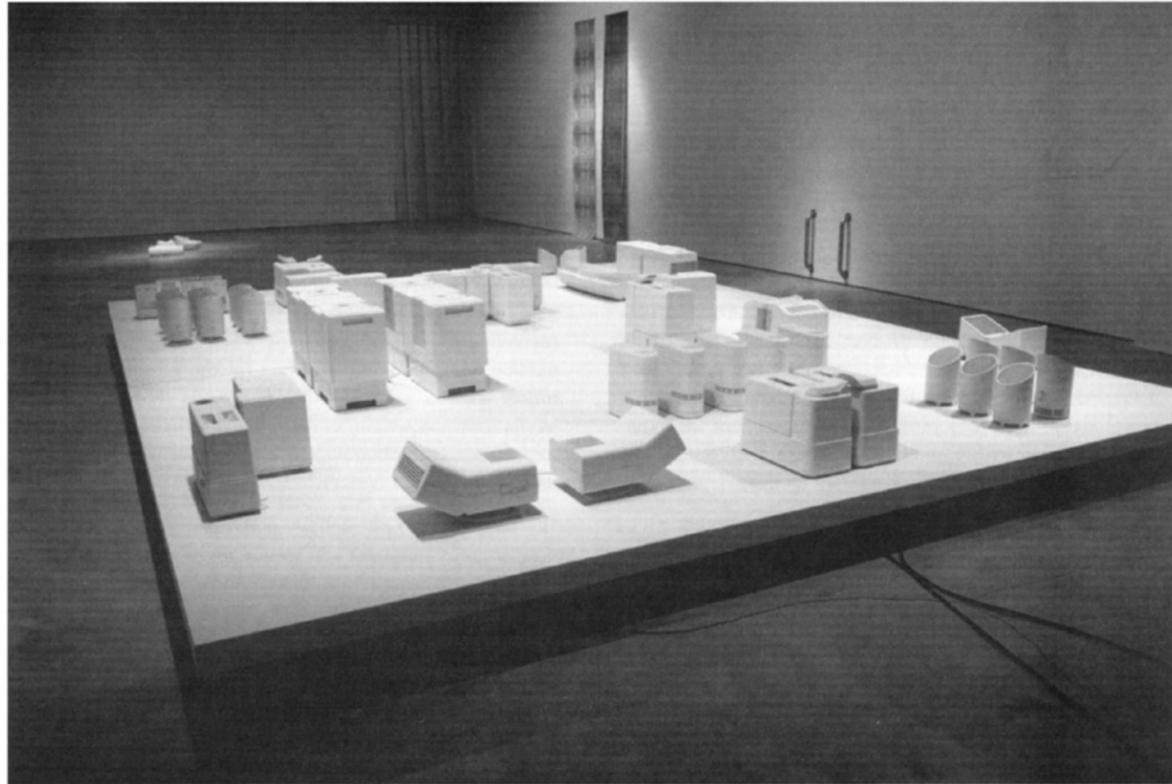
In *Century City* (1997), one of Moppett's more engaging and convincing works, the skeletal outlines of the four curvilinear structures embrace an elongated, partitioned, rectangular unit within its courtyard. This rectangular entity could be interpreted as an administrative center or double as a bookshelf or storage unit.

Several air-conditioning units (ionizers and purifiers), orthopedic aids and exercise machine parts represent high rise buildings, a biomorphic type structure and public sculpture in Liu's architectural model *Untitled (Complex II)* of 2002. Rendered in white paint and mounted on a platform, these utilitarian objects are transformed into a generic, modernist style urban complex devoid of people. Stark and bleak, this is no utopian vision of urban life; the constant hum of the air conditioners reminds us of the noisy, polluted internal environments of shopping malls and office buildings. Provocative and enigmatic, Liu's work demonstrates the critical thinking and creative use of materials employed by these artists.

Though **Brian Jungen's** *Isolated Depiction of a Passage of Time* (2001) replete with stacking trays seems incomplete without referring to the promotional literature and Moppett, Liu and Kruger are clearly influenced by the Bauhaus Aesthetic, the show is nonetheless probing and compelling. Leaving room for interpretation and analysis, "NEWMODULR" is visually stimulating and entertaining.

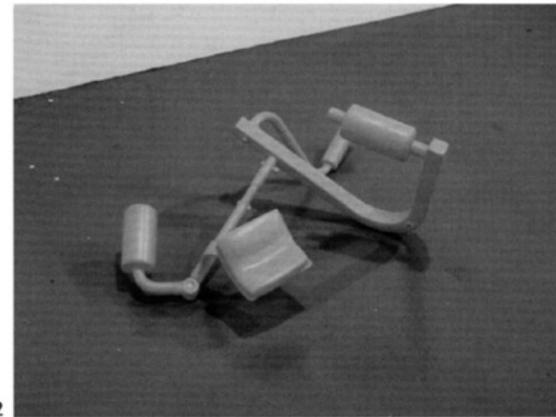


Rodolphe El-Khoury: Between Air and Space: Prologue to An Te Liu's Exchange, *Thresholds 23: Deviant*, Cambridge: MIT, 2002.

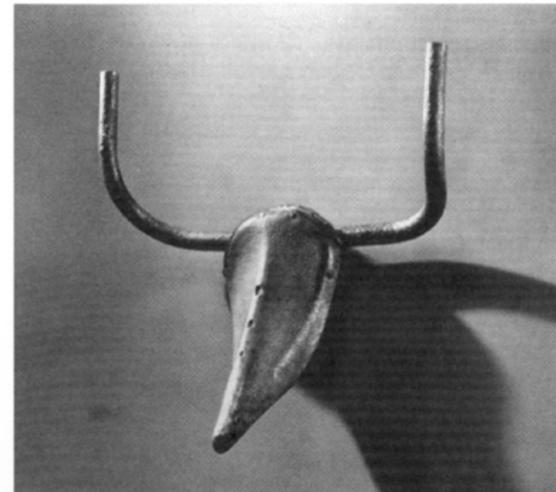


1 An Te Liu, *Airborne*, at the "Pathology" exhibition at the Contemporary Art Gallery in Vancouver, 2000.

RODOLPHE EL-KHOURY BETWEEN AIR AND SPACE: PROLOGUE TO AN TE LIU'S *EXCHANGE*



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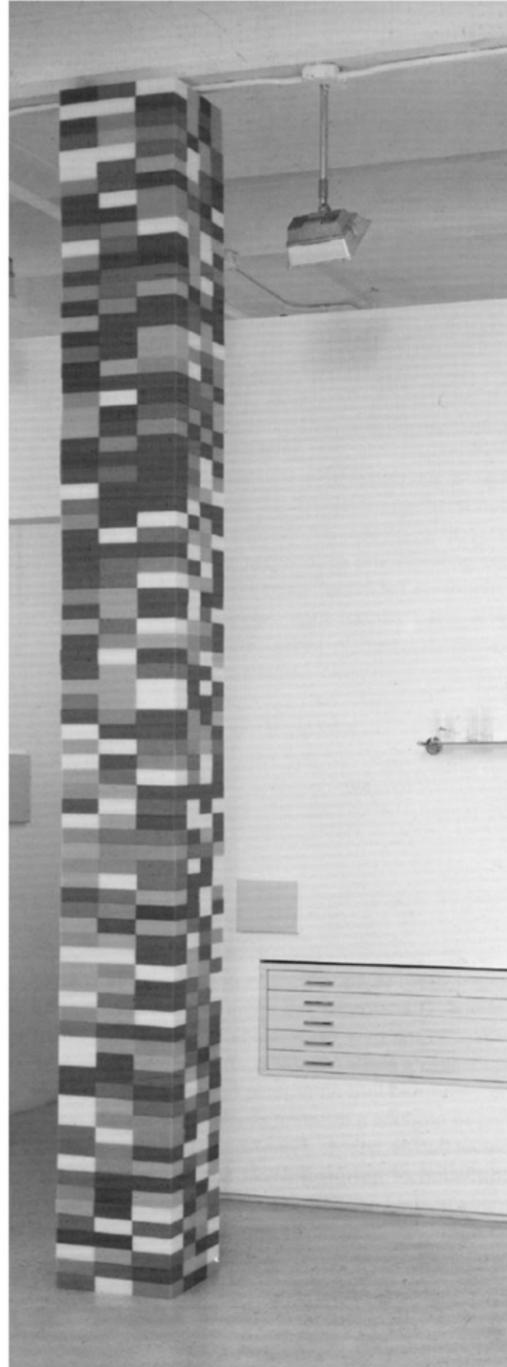


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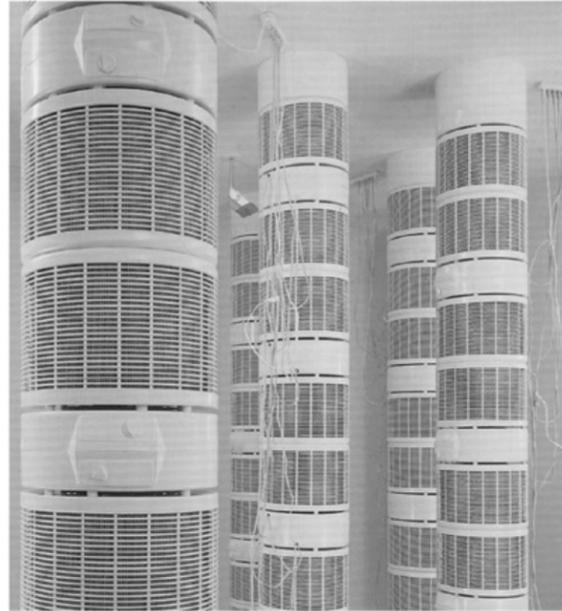
The work of An Te Liu is strategically situated between architecture and art. Unlike other works of architectural means and proportions that we are now accustomed to find comfortably installed in art galleries, some of Liu's more unsettling pieces are nowhere quite at home. They are designed for the gallery, yet they perform as architecture: "machines for living" seemingly designed to correct behavioral and environmental deviance. The fact that they perversely succeed in being totally useless does not detract from their pragmatic—architectural—logic.

"Condition," Liu's recent show at the Henry Urbach Gallery, featured *Type/Need* and *Exchange*, two new works elaborating themes initially tackled in the *Sclerotic* (1998) and *Soft Load* (1999) series.¹ Much like its precursor *Sclerotic III*—a pair of safety grab-bars flanking an electric outlet—*Type/Need* contrives strange but uncannily plausible artifacts from a dystopian universe where a hygienic re-construction of the body is played out to perverse extremes (Fig. 2).² Flesh-colored contraptions are assembled from salvaged exercise equipment in unlikely yet seamless configurations. The purpose and origin of the machine parts are still legible in the new assemblage, much like the latent bicycle in Picasso's *Bull's Head* (Fig. 3). The fragments here are not reconstituted into an organic figure; they are merely reshuffled to produce a different machine. A deviant machine. The perversion is latent: *Type/Need* is not so much an iconic conflation of the mechanical and the organic—the familiar topos of the historical avant-garde—but more of a catalytic platform for potentially grotesque rituals and obscene hybridizations.

Exchange, the *pièce de résistance* of the "Condition" show, aligns with the *Soft Load* series—household sponges



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arranged into architectural and artistic parodies (Fig. 4)—in staging the uneasy convergence of the aesthetic and the hygienic. *Exchange* presents fifty-six HEPA air cleaners in seven column-like stacks (Fig. 5). Together they are claimed to recycle the air of the gallery every twenty-one seconds. They also generate a considerably high level of white noise and a distinct odor akin to that of freshly opened plastic packages. The installation mobilizes all the senses to dramatize the discourse of hygiene in an assault on imperceptible air pollutants.

Exchange is consistent with Liu's earlier parodies of hygienic practice, contriving a "pathological" performance from "normal" domestic rituals. What is unusual here—and certainly not typical of contemporary art practice—is the empirical preoccupation with air, the air of the gallery. *Exchange* operates on the air of the gallery as much as in the space of the gallery. Ostensibly because of its hygienic mandate, modern architecture is known in particular to have occasionally equated air with space. Liu's work overlays a haptic experience of air on the abstract intuition of space—the ubiquitous medium of art.

Although equally fixated on space, architecture has had a more sustained dialogue with air. The notion that air has a critical role to play in the precarious equilibrium of health

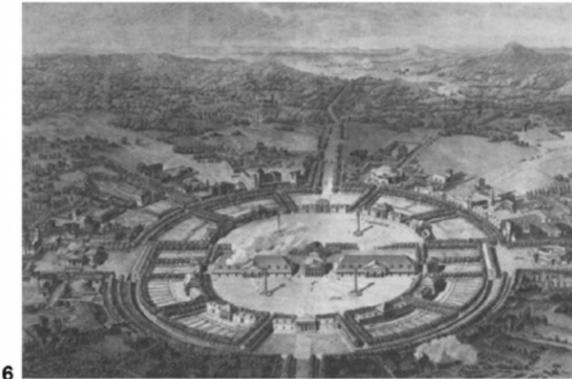
and is therefore subject to architectural speculation has been a commonplace since antiquity. Hence Vitruvius's instructions for the optimal orientation of the streets: "They will be properly laid out if foresight is employed to exclude the winds from the alleys. Cold winds are disagreeable, hot winds enervating, moist winds unhealthy."³ The mechanical and physiological intricacies of pneumatic processes remained confused and controversial until the dissemination of Antoine-Laurent Lavoisier's (1743-1794) research on respiration and Jan Ingenhousz's (1730-1799) on photosynthesis. Still, the beneficial effects of "fresh air"—i.e., freely circulating air—and the hazards of stagnation were never in doubt. The sight of laboratory animals promptly dying in hermetically sealed vessels was ample proof.

Air became a focus of scientific research after 1750, thanks mainly to Stephen Hales (1677-1761), whose work turned air, hitherto understood as an elementary fluid, into a heterogeneous mixture of chemical components.⁴ Research into its unknown and threatening composition was followed with particular urgency in the second half of the eighteenth century, when it was obsessively fueled by the anxieties of pre-Pasteurian mythologies.

The interest in air pathology was not limited to the scientific academies. By the end of the century, the trend spread toward the bottom of the social pyramid to become a staple of popular culture. Public opinion was repeatedly mobilized to protest the degradation of the urban atmosphere. The writer Louis-Sébastien Mercier's (1740-1814) invective is characteristic of the collective hyper-sensitivity to aerial pollution in eighteenth-century Paris:

The moment that air ceases to contribute to the preservation of good health, it becomes lethal. But health is that attribute which man treats with utmost indifference. Streets that are narrow and poorly accessed, houses that are too small and that impede the free circulation of air, butcher shops, fish stalls, sewers, cemeteries—all these corrupt the atmosphere. And the enclosed air becomes laden with impure particles, heavy and malignant.⁵

The city is consistently incriminated in this discourse: by virtue of its sheer mass, it is an obstacle to the movement of the air. Hence, a general tendency toward looser and more permeable urban fabrics, advocated in many treatises and partially tested in the "openness" of the Place Louis XV.

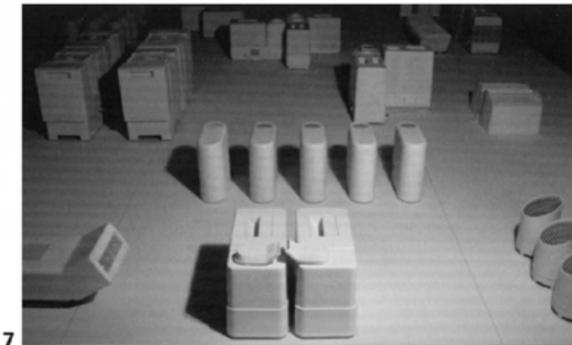


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Nicolas Ledoux's (1736-1806) ideal city of Chaux is a radical departure from the norm and yet is entirely consistent with the "decongestive" trend (Fig. 6). The traditional—and pathological—urban fabric is here entirely relinquished in favor of an open and expanded field where detached and individuated structures are bathed in unhindered airflow.

For Emil Kaufmann, whose formalist reading was largely responsible for the postwar revival of Ledoux as a "visionary architect," the *jeu de masses* of detached pavilions anticipates the freestanding blocks of Le Corbusier and Gropius's combinatorial of discrete spatial units. The freestanding structures, Kaufmann claims, are the concrete manifestation of the principle of autonomy in which the architectural object is released from all external contingencies to realize its own material, formal, and tectonic volution.⁶

For Kaufmann, architectural autonomy is indicative of a paradigm shift that is registered in other spheres of cultural production. It is recognized in the emphasis on line and contour leading to the formal detachment of the figure in late-



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eighteenth-century painting. It is also relevant to the formal structure of the political order theorized by Rousseau: "a form... by which each may be united to all but nonetheless retains command over himself and remains as free as he had been beforehand. Such is the fundamental problem that is resolved by the social contract."⁷

That the ideal city of Chaux should reflect the political philosophy of *The Social Contract* comes as no surprise, considering Ledoux's explicit allegiance to Rousseau. Still, beyond denoted affinities, the freestanding building represents the confluence of deeper structures converging on the transformation of the environment since the late-eighteenth century. From Ledoux to Le Corbusier, efforts at hygienic ventilation by means of decongestion and separation resonate with aspirations for a society of individuated and emancipated subjects, merging with longings for an unobstructed view in open space.

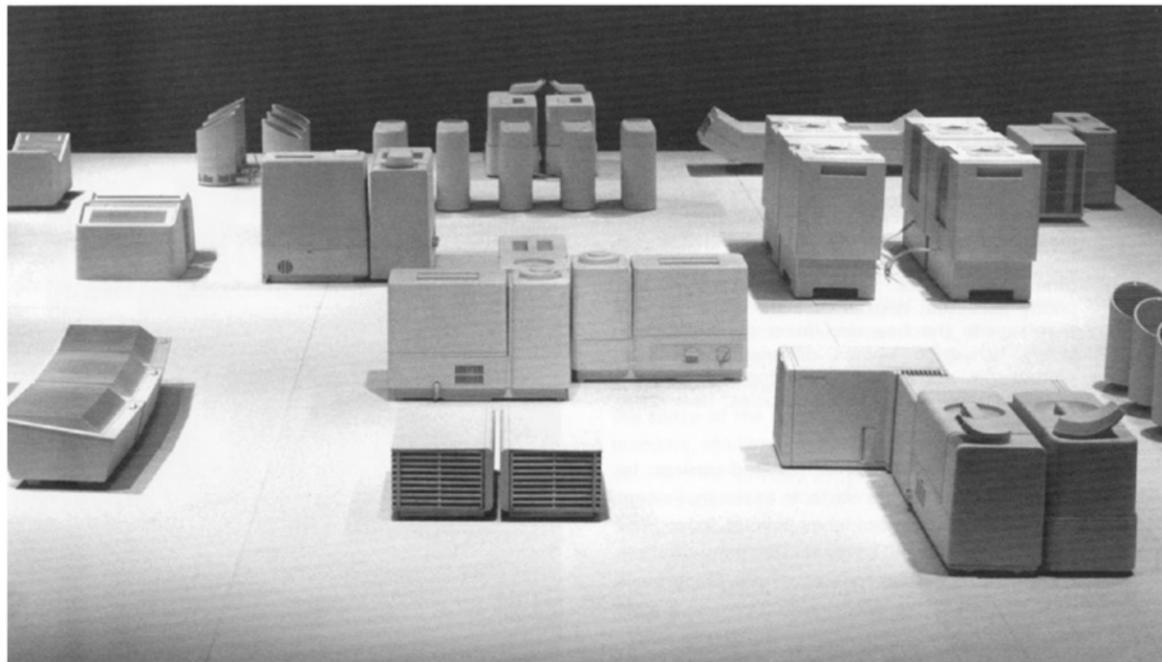
Hygienic arguments for thoroughly ventilated and separated dwellings may have driven the discourse of "decongestive" urbanism. Yet, the longing and struggle for open space is largely visual: an aesthetic impulse that was enacted and legitimized in various ideological registers—political, economical, and social.

The hygienic/aesthetic impulse is manifested in the great optical utopias of Fourier, Bentham, and Rousseau: imaginary worlds built on varying measures of transparency and visibility. While some strove primarily toward the transparency of the subject in a naturally crystalline nature, others had less faith in the purity of human nature; they sought the transparency of the environment only to precipitate the hopelessly opaque subject into greater visibility.

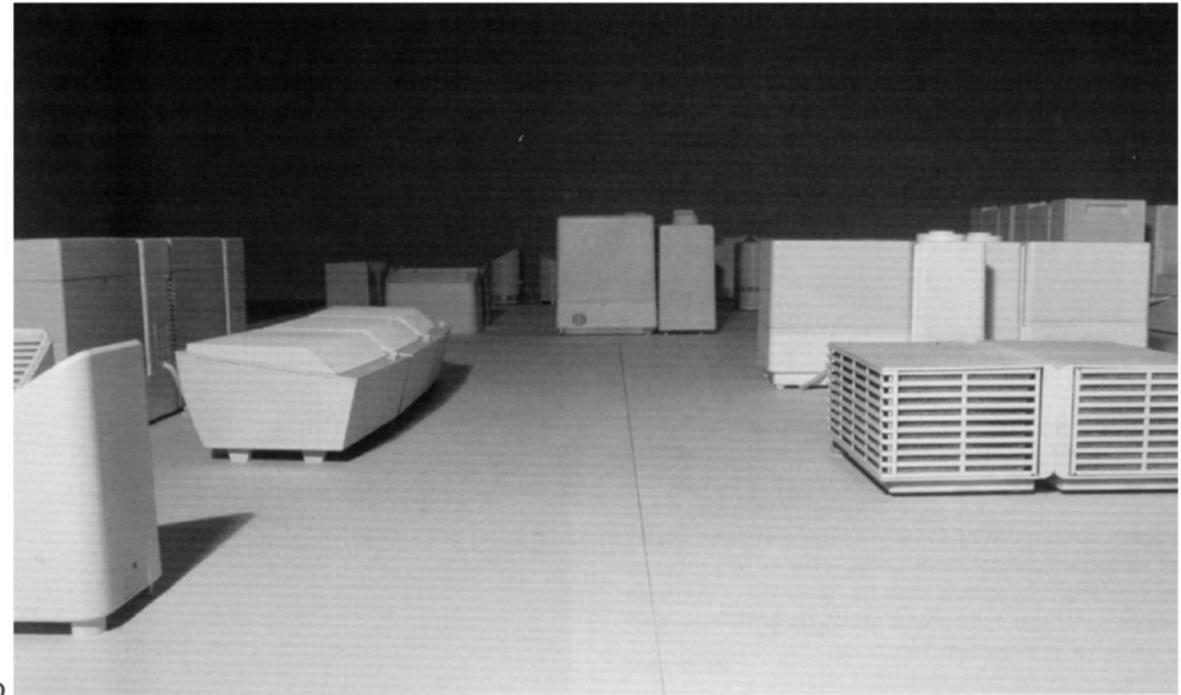
Hence the contradictions of the modernist city. The city mass is reorganized to benefit from greater exposure and permeability to its natural *milieu*: air—an empirical medium. The city is also reconstituted rationally in space—a theoret-



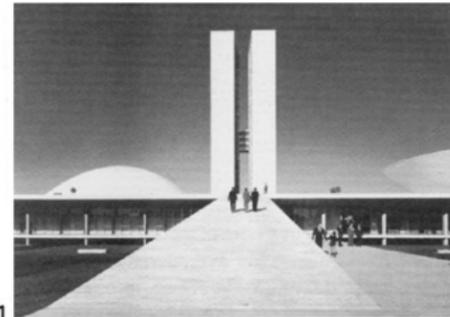
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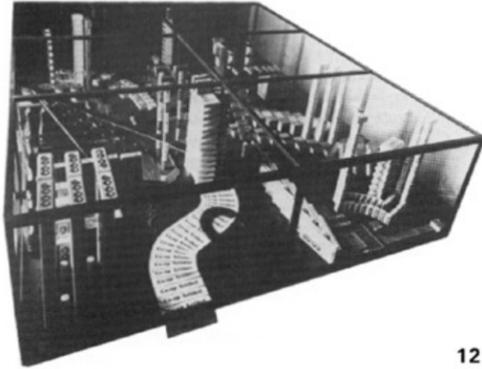
ical abstraction. The hygienic building is subject to external processes; it must be permeable to clean *air*. While the rational building is to be an object developed plastically in absolute space, it must simultaneously be made to go away, because it is an obstacle to the epiphany of transparency in open *space*: "Great blocks of dwellings run through the town. What does it matter they are behind the screen of trees."⁸

Similar contradictions are effectively rehearsed in Liu's *Airborne* exhibited at the Contemporary Art Gallery in Vancouver in 2000 (Figs. 1, 7, 9, 10). In this direct precu-

rior to *Exchange*, sixty household humidifiers, air purifiers, and negative-air ionizers are painted a uniform gray and distributed on a white platform in a composition strangely reminiscent of a modernist city. A scale-model of a modernist city, to be more precise, the kind we are accustomed to see photographed along with the disembodied hand of the architect ominously hovering above (Fig. 8).

The modernist city is most promising—and convincing—in model form, ideally photographed from above as a rational and total artifact. Ironically, the realized version is typically found lacking in the bird's-eye view: it looks too much like a model—the cliché reaction to aerial photographs of Brasília! (Fig. 11) The model satisfies the demand for the rational materialization of the object; the bird's-eye view frustrates the concomitant fantasy of its dematerialization in space.⁹

Airborne operates on several levels and scales, equally gratifying and frustrating in its oscillation between model and machine, between symbolic representation and indexical process, and between a position in space and a situation in air. It is at once a scale-model for an imaginary modernist

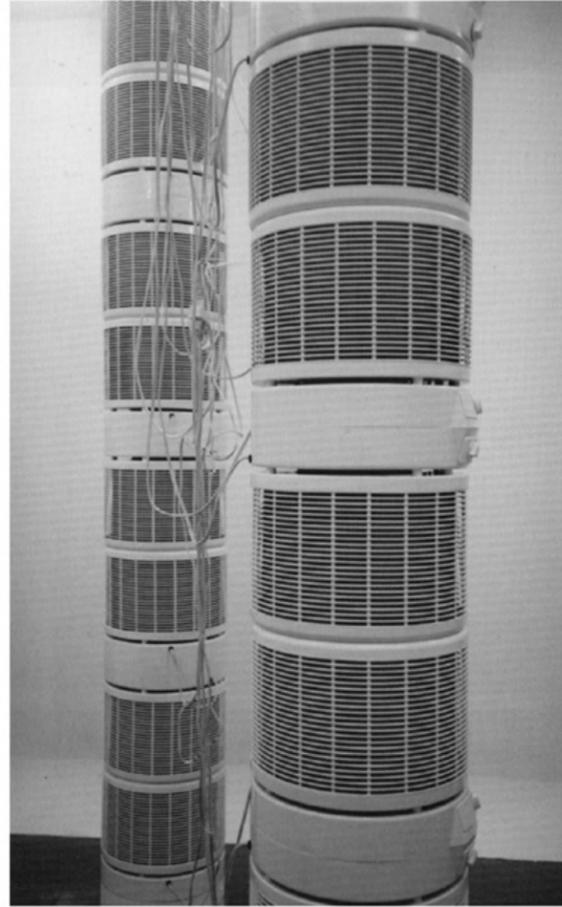


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city; a dizzying *mise en abîme* of the *Ville Radieuse*—imagine the same appliances plausibly deployed in Corbusian housing blocks, stubbornly filtering the air that was supposed to ventilate the same building; a Van Doesburg-inspired composition of solids in space; a sardonic display of mass-produced consumer goods—Hannes Meyer comes to mind (Fig. 12); a show room for *Honeywell*; a dystopian domestic setting; a minimalist sculpture; a new-age wellness center in downtown Vancouver.

The multiple readings and registers capture the predicament of the modernist city—and that of its legacy in today's urbanized world. Just like the air-cleaning appliance, which is promoted against all sorts of domestic pathologies from allergy to furniture damage, modern urbanism requires a leap of faith in its hygienic claims. Its short-lived success may have been due to the "placebo" effect rather than the "science" of the *Unité d'habitation*.¹⁰ It delivered the promise of a liberated and lucid environment as an aesthetic experience rather than a material and social fact.¹¹

The placebo appliance is most effective in its conspicuousness, as a physical presence in domestic space—the only tangible evidence of its remedial but imperceptible operation. As demonstrated in *Exchange* and *Airborne*, the cumulative effect of the residual but critical physicality—the noise-polluting, energy-consuming object—is psychologically counterproductive. An isolated *HEPA* machine may suggest the possibility of healthier air, but its relentless deployment is indeed more alarming than therapeutic. The air may be actually cleaner in the Henry Urbach Gallery—it is recycled and filtered every twenty-one seconds! Its hygienic virtues are hardly more credible.



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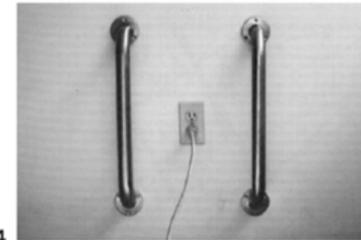
In Liu's installations, the effect of the placebo—dare we say "the aesthetic"—falters against the overpowering effect of the real. And vice versa. May we say the same of the *Ville Radieuse*?

The pragmatic and aesthetic agendas of modern urbanism are ostensibly consistent. Yet, they may not completely overlap: there is a gap between space and air in the world they project. This is where Liu's work is uncomfortably at home.

Notes

¹ An Te Liu's *Exchange* and *Type/Need* are part of the "Condition" show at the Henry Urbach Architecture Gallery, New York, 2001. Other works mentioned in this article were displayed at the following: *Airborne* and *Sclerotic*, "Pathology" at the Contemporary Art Gallery, Vancouver, 2000. *Soft Load*, "Luster" at the Henry Urbach Architecture Gallery, New York, 1999.

² An Te Liu, *Sclerotic III*, 2000 (Fig. 14).



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³ Vitruvius, *The Ten Books of Architecture* (New York: Dover Publications, 1960): 24-31.

⁴ Air, formerly an elementary medium of generation and vitality, was hence recast as a suspicious brew: "...a frightening mixture of the smoke, sulfurs and aqueous, volatile explosive, oily and saline vapors that the earth gave off, and occasionally, the explosive material that it emitted, the stinking exhalations that emerged from swamps, minute insects and their eggs, spermatic animalcules and far worse, the contagious miasma that rose from decomposed bodies." Alain Corbin, *The Foul and the Fragrant: Odor and the French Social Imagination* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1986): 13.

⁵ Louis-Sébastien Mercier, *Tableau de Paris*, vol. 1 (Paris: Mercure de France, [1782-88] 1994): 114.

⁶ In Kaufmann's words: "The new combination of parts is the free assembly of individual elements that do not have to sacrifice their particular existence and whose form is subordinated only to their own finality. It is their particular laws that determine their form." Emil Kaufmann, *De Ledoux à Le Corbusier* (Paris: Livre et Communication, 1990): 79.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 77.

⁸ Le Corbusier, *The Home of Man* (London: Architectural Press, [1942] 1948): 91.

⁹ Brasília and Chandigarh are most photogenic in wide-angle shots at eye level when the dwarfed monumental architecture defines—negatively—the far more sublime immensity of open space (Fig. 15).



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¹⁰ An Te Liu speaks of the appliance's placebo effect in an interview with Aaron Betsky: "My college roommate and I had two *Bionaire* purifiers/ionizers in our apartment. We would sit around drinking scotch in a smoky haze with the machines running full blast in case our parents showed up unexpectedly. After a few hours, the air seemed to tingle with clean, negatively charged ions, and we were sure we could feel it. Or was it the single malt? In any case, the indicator light was on, and we were assured that something good was happening, even if we didn't understand the mysteries of negative-air ionization. "Placebo" comes from the Latin "to please," and we were damn happy with our new devices." Aaron Betsky, "Safe Haven," interview with An Te Liu, *Surface* 25 (Fall 2000): 155.

¹¹ The social and political critique of the modernist city that fueled the post-modern return to a traditional configuration of block, street, and public space is beyond the scope of this essay but not foreign to Liu's work: that a display of consumer goods should so readily evoke a modernist cityscape is a striking but familiar demonstration of the affinities between capitalist and utopian logic.

Illustrations

Fig. 1: An Te Liu, *Airborne*, installation view, 2000. Exhibited at the "Pathology" show at the Contemporary Art Gallery, Vancouver, 2000.

Fig. 2: An Te Liu, *Type/Need*, 2001. Exhibited at the "Condition" show at the Henry Urbach Architecture Gallery, New York, 2001.

Fig. 3: Pablo Picasso, *Bull's Head*, 1943.

Fig. 4: An Te Liu, *Soft Load*, 1999. Exhibited at the "Luster" show at the Henry Urbach Architecture Gallery, New York, 1999.

Fig. 5: An Te Liu, *Exchange*, 2001. Exhibited at the "Condition" show at the Henry Urbach Architecture Gallery, New York, 2001.

Fig. 6: Nicolas Ledoux, ideal city of Chaux, bird's-eye view, 1804.

Fig. 7: An Te Liu, *Airborne*, 2000.

Fig. 8: Le Corbusier and Jeanneret, *Plan Voisin* proposal for Paris, 1925. The hand points out the business center of the proposed city.

Fig. 9: An Te Liu, *Airborne*, 2000.

Fig. 10: An Te Liu, *Airborne*, 2000.

Fig. 11: National Congress Complex in Brasília, view of ramp leading to the complex, 1958-60. Oscar Niemeyer, architect.

Fig. 12: Hannes Meyer, Co-op Vitrine with Co-op standard products, exhibited in Basel, 1925.

Fig. 13: An Te Liu, *Exchange*, detail, 2001.

Fig. 14: An Te Liu, *Sclerotic III*, 2000. Exhibited at the "Pathology" show at the Contemporary Art Gallery, Vancouver, 2000.

Fig. 15: Museum of the City of Brasília, 1958-60. Oscar Niemeyer, architect.

HENRY URBACH ARCHITECTURE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

GALLERY ONE: CONDITION
AN TE LIU

SEPTEMBER 11 - OCTOBER 20, 2000

Henry Urbach Architecture is pleased to announce two solo exhibitions, **Condition** by An Te Liu and **Starbong** by John deFazio. Each of these shows considers in its own way the relationship among fantasy, iconography, and the aesthetics of everyday objects.

Condition, Liu's first American solo show, critically and playfully examines how contemporary notions of hygiene and fitness shape our domestic environment. Dividing the gallery into two chambers, Liu will present *Exchange*, an installation composed of 56 high-efficiency particulate air purifiers. The white, cylindrical units are stacked to form 7 columns, and this forest has been plugged in to purify gallery air at an extremely accelerated rate. In the second chamber, Liu will present his *Type/Need* sculptures. These oddly indeterminate objects, covered in fleshy silicon rubber, join design features culled from orthopaedic devices, exercise equipment, and rehabilitation aids to suggest a kind of wellness run amok.

An Te Liu was born in Taiwan in 1967 and currently teaches at the University of Toronto. His installation *Pathology* was exhibited last year at the Contemporary Art Gallery in Vancouver.

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Better living through sterility

Like most things loved by children and feared by parents, dirt has a lot going for it. Architect and designer An Te Liu takes a critical look at the modern obsession with hygiene in *Condition*, a show opening this fall at New York's Henry Urbach Architecture gallery. *Condition* consists of fifty-six air purifiers arranged in a room and all turned on. Liu, whose resume includes stints designing retail clothing outlets and working on models in Frank Gehry's office, is a SCI-Arc graduate who now teaches at the University of Toronto.

Liu suggests that the current popularity of "hygiene machines" is evidence that human beings are uninterested in Le Corbusier's bigger-picture "machine for living." Instead, we retreat inside gated communities and sealed homes that we fill with small-scale objects that let us believe we are controlling the environment. We privately become slaves to purifiers, ionizers and humidifiers, whose authority derives partly from their resemblance to things we see in hospitals. Believing they work is, according to Liu, an act of faith.

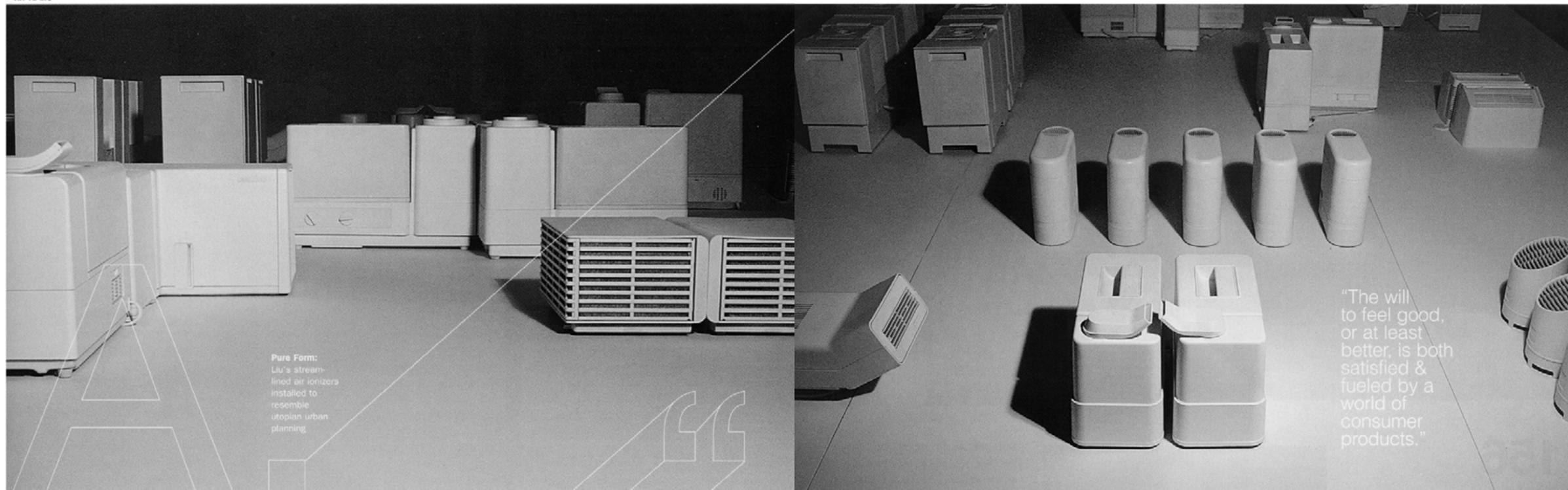
Surrounded by three-metre stacks of humming machines, visitors to *Condition* will experience the effects of home-purification-on-steroids. If it's like Liu's previous installations in Los Angeles and Vancouver, some guests will leave feeling cleansed, while others will complain that they've been breathing, as one gallery-goer put it, from "a freshly opened plastic package." But for the hygiene marketers, there is no such thing as overkill: it's in their best interests to sell health as a commodity whose value increases with redundancy.

Condition is on view from September 11 to October 25 at Henry Urbach Architecture in New York (212) 627-0974

HEATHER MACKAY

Architect and artist An Te Liu installs fifty-six air purifiers in *Condition*, opening this fall in New York. By amassing these columns of "hygiene machines," Liu creates a sterile environment to demonstrate what happens when the fear of dirt goes too far.

AN TE LIU



Pure Form:
Liu's streamlined air ionizers installed to resemble utopian urban planning

"The will to feel good, or at least better, is both satisfied & fueled by a world of consumer products."

"Airborne,"
mixed media
installation,
2000

"Airborne,"
mixed media
installation,
2000

Safe > Haven

Talk about OCD. Artist An Te Liu is obsessed with society's compulsive goals of hygienic, pure and perfect. Take his *Airborne* installation (recently shown at his Vancouver exhibition *Pathology*)—dozens of streamlined air purifiers organized to map out a sterile utopian town that borders on the diabolical. An architect and designer who has built retail boutiques and helped model Gehry's *Disney Concert Hall*, Liu's art culls from his professional activities, but draws more abstract conclusions. For instance, he made psychedelic wallpaper patterned with warped reprints of overhead views of the utopian suburb Levittown. Altering and recontextualizing objects that are supposed to make our world a better place, Liu ponders the scientific truth behind authoritative designs and the neurosis behind a global populace that buys good health like a hot commodity. In turn, Aaron Betsky, the outspoken design and architecture curator at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, investigates whether Liu—for all his meticulous white plastic, clean air and conditioned white noise—is making any sense. >

Aaron Betsky: What do you mean by "domestic technologies," and how are they different from appliances or domestic implements? An Te Liu: I am currently interested in a genre of domestic environmental control products that promise to eliminate all harmful pollutants from your personal airspace—sleek, specialized 'hygiene machines' such as air purifiers, negative air particle ionizers and ultrasonic humidifiers—high-tech, plug-in improvements on traditional cleaning implements. **What is the relationship between these objects and the whole history of purification, from ritual baths to the craze for bottled water?** That's a big question. One general observation might be that our means of purification seem to be working at increasingly microscopic levels, and our concerns with air and water reflect that. There isn't easy evidence, say, that a washing machine provides—Tide's in, dirt's out. Now we know that a dust mite is so small it just blows through the vacuum cleaner bag and back into the room. Water that looks and tastes OK isn't neces-

sarily that good. We are in the realm of the invisible and we have new devices which actually require 'faith,' and maybe that brings us back closer to ritual. But our rituals seem to be increasingly private—the Romans baths were a kind of civic space, whereas now we have lots of personal devices. **How do the shapes of the purifiers answer or ignore those traditions? Are you not talking about a class of objects that are emptied of the kinds of signals that, for instance, a dildo or a Braun coffee maker have?** A dildo usually resembles what it substitutes in a fairly straightforward way. It works on the body by mimicking the body—it's kind of a portable prosthetic. The Braun coffee maker is by now an iconic piece of industrial design. It's taut body shape comes from an extrusion of the coffee pot and filter, so as with the dildo, there's still a correlation between what the thing looks like and what it does. I suppose the machines in the current installation appear to 'breathe'—and that's what they are supposed to help us do better. They have gills, vents

and orifices and they hum gently. What's interesting is that they become iconic in an architectural way and can be misread as Modernist building proposals—'machines for living' as it were. The Modernists had a persuasive rhetoric of fresh air, hygiene and greenery, which accompanied huge utopian architectural schemes such as Le Corbusier's 'Ville Radieuse.' Both the argument and the abstract formal logics live on in the Bionaire or 'Ionic Breeze' purifiers, but now at the scale of the room instead of the city. **Isn't it a little far-fetched to think that the designers of these purifiers have any consideration of what they are doing in terms of architecture?** Every object tells at least one story—stories about function, design, cultural inflections, and the current state of desire on the part of the maker and the consumer. I don't know if the air purifier people are thinking about architecture specifically, but I can't help noticing the correlations. Plus there is no shortage of architects within the world of industrial and product design. **Isn't the point that they seem to do nothing,**

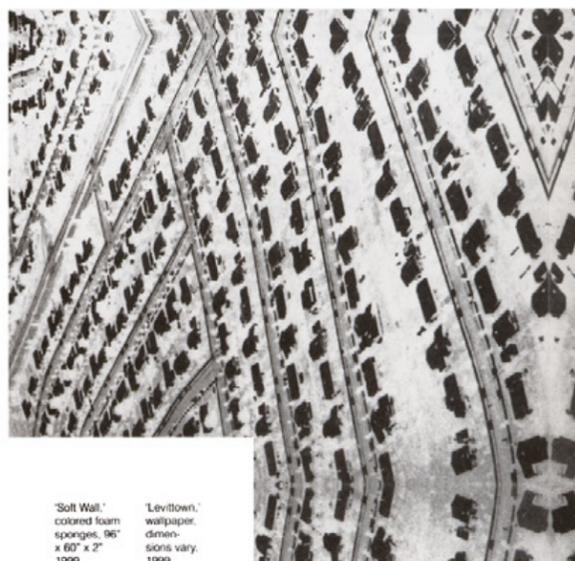
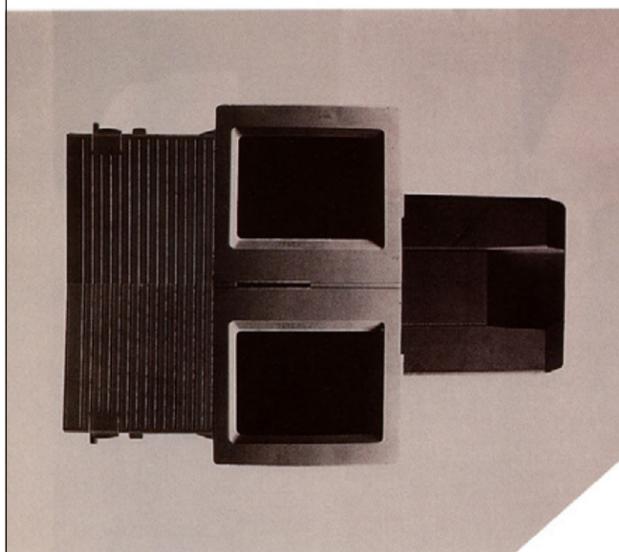
and represent an emptying out of things we can experience? That's the most curious question—is it real, or is it placebo? My college roommate and I had two Bionaire purifier/ionizers in our apartment. We would sit around drinking scotch in a smokey haze with the machines running full blast in case our parents showed up unexpectedly. After a few hours the air seemed to tingle with clean, negatively charged ions and we were sure we could 'feel it.' Or was it the single malt? In any case, the indicator light was on and we were assured that something good was happening, even if we didn't understand the mysteries of negative air ionization. 'Placebo' comes from the Latin 'to please', and we were damn happy with our new devices... **Are we talking sublimation, our current interest in intangibles, from spirituality to virtual reality? Or is it still just gadget lust, but now repressed?** Gadget lust, clean living, self preservation. These are pretty strong motives. I think the will to feel good, or at least better, is both satisfied and fueled by a world of consumer prod-

interview Aaron Betsky

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ucts. A lot of these do seem to be dealing with intangibles. The other day I saw a 'white noise machine' which relaxes you by delivering 'conditioned' sound—ie, smooth rushing air. It's a small 5" white capsule and it costs \$100, and people swear by it. **Does that not imply that they are implements of fear, part of our desire to remove any sense of unpredictability? Are they not white and streamlined and blank because they have quasi-medical connotations? Do they exist halfway between the hospital and the house?** The distinction between home and hospital seems increasingly blurred these days. Pills, massagers, reflexology kits, therapeutic and rehabilitation aids...procedures and implements connected to health and healing are becoming more and more domesticized. And yes, a lot of the implements seem correct and assuring because they have sterile appearances. They connote hygiene and scientific authority. A lot of our motives seem to stem from fear and control, so that no harm can come to us. This is certainly reasonable, but I often wonder >

'United (Unit III),' collage on paper, 15" x 15" 1999

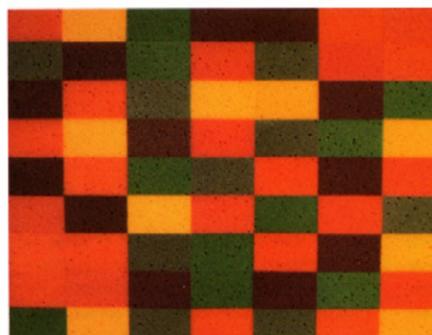


'Soft Wall,' colored foam sponges, 96" x 60" x 2" 1999

'Levitown,' wallpaper, dimensions vary, 1999

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how far we extend this control over danger and unpredictability. There was a great article in *Harper's* a while back called something like *The Death of Fun*—it began with the author's observation of yuppies riding thousand dollar mountain bikes on a flat, smoothly paved bike path along the Potomac river. The path is divided, and they're going about eight miles an hour and all of them are wearing crash helmets... Now, I don't want to glamorize head injuries, but this image stuck with me, and you often notice related evidence of where we are heading. The removal of danger and unpredictability is becoming a leitmotif, and it extends to the way we are cleaning up our cities and envisioning new ones. Disney's Celebration is an extreme example. In the 1940s, Karl Popper argued that the idea of Utopia was untenable because you could never get consensus on the realization of abstract ideals. Instead he called for the elimination of 'concrete evils,' which people could agree and act on. I would say that this idea informs the conception of new towns in both subtle and decisive ways, creating partial, say 'inverted,' Utopias. Bad things go away—poor people, crime, garbage...and at Celebration you can be punished for planting an undesirable shrub on your front lawn. Little is left to chance. Total control of your environment. **Why keep bringing it back to urbanism, other than that you trained as an architect? Aren't we talking about an engineer's utopia?** Maybe the connection is loose, but I do see relationships between private, domestic syndromes on the one hand, and patterns of



"Scientists now say that clean living can be bad for you—Kids are microbe free but biological wimps."

settlement and modes of 'urban conduct' on the other. Yes, it is an engineer's utopia that we are witnessing, and this involves environmental, social and community engineering. Duany and Plater-Zyberk of the New Urbanism could be seen as planner-engineers, and people respond to them. There is a lot of concern and pragmatism in the air, which is not wrong, but aesthetically, we are left with a pretty retrograde state of affairs. **Is there not a difference between the manipulation of the body and the sterilization of the environment?** Yes, there are more manual manipulations like exercise and cosmetic surgery which alter us physically. But the sterilization of the environ-

ment is slowly changing us biologically, and not necessarily for the better. Scientists are now saying that clean living can be bad for you—that our sanitary lifestyles are spawning bored, ineffective immune systems that lead to more asthma and other ills. There are parents who won't let their kids play in the dirt—these kids will be microbe free, but biological wimps. These issues are still unclear, and there is of course the strange role that psychology might play. Did you see Todd Haynes' *Safe*? Julianne Moore is this affluent suburban housewife who is slowly unravelled by ennui and environmental illness. She ends up carting around an oxygen tank and living in a sealed dome. Really sad and mesmerizing. **OK, but again: How do I know this by looking at this stuff? Todd Haynes works really hard at 'strange-making.' I keep looking for the 'tude, or the act of the artist...** *Safe* is strange and alienating, but Haynes' devices are quite subtle. In terms of the 'airborne' installation and the purifiers, I have collected many of them, refinished them, arranged them in a gallery, and turned (Continued on page 260)

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'mass housing' which appeals to the broader populace, not just a select group of digital design connoisseurs.

Not content with practicing solely in the realm of images, Kolatan/MacDonald are currently overseeing the construction of a house addition in Connecticut. Related to the *Housings* project in its use of the chimera as a guiding model, the Raybould House is fused to an existing traditional "saltbox"-type house. Elements of the existing landscape—including pool, barn and original house—are digitally combined to create a new hybrid outgrowth. The structure of the new house will be a plywood rib skeleton infilled with spray-on foam. A soft, leathery, aluminumized polyurethane skin will cover the entire structure, while the interior shell will be finished in a smooth cementitious acrylic mix.

With the completion of the Raybould House this summer, Kolatan/MacDonald will take a crucial step towards transforming their mythologically-inspired hybrid dwellings into material, consumer-accessible reality. Coming soon to a store (or site) near you.*

A. LIU > (continued from page

156) them on. I would like that the piece opens up some thinking around issues of hygiene and environmental control, and the way they are manifested materially via consumer object fetish (and redundancy). I would like to 'make strange'—to make the air feel 'airy,' to tease out the very plastic and formal qualities of the machines, but to do so without overt manipulation. There is much strangeness in reality, in our routines and what exists around us, and that is the kind of strangeness I want to preserve and heighten. **OK, so let's get right down to this, shall we? If this is a piece about the invisible, about the suppressed, about what we want to keep out—what are you as an artist doing to make us aware of all of this?** There will be about 60 machines in the Airborne piece, arranged on a 12'x16' platform. They have all been painted out in a particular off-white color, returning them to a kind of 'prototypical putty' condition. Visually, the arrangement can be read as equal parts showroom/test lab display, and, interpreted at another scale, an odd quasi-urban model. But the real test will be sensory—what happens when the units are turned on. About 40 will be running simultaneously. More than that, and the gallery blows up. The exhibition space is a classic white cube, 1000 square feet exactly, and the

entrance to it will have a special threshold that keeps the air sealed in the cube. With the machines running continuously, I figure the space will be purified at about 10 times the normal rate, not to mention creating a big loud rush of clean ionized air. It will be interesting to see if one can feel the difference inside the space, and how we come to conclusions on what the nature of that difference is. On the one hand there are the pristine consumer products that we trust to do something, then there is the sound, and finally the air, hopefully made palpable. In a larger sense, I am intrigued by the space between knowledge and belief—the complex play of evidence and desire that drives our motives and reactions to things. **I see what you mean by a city. Are you going to imply relations between these buildings beyond those the eye makes between the shapes?** Read as a collection of consumer products, I wanted the piece to work as a kind of taxonomy of domestic 'types'—grouping and re-combining similar forms in order to study their features. When I began deploying them in a big field, other relations—architectural and urban—began to imply themselves, and it became a planning exercise, rational verging on the diabolical. I didn't know how it would all pan out, to be honest. In the end there are plazas, courtyards, grand allées, strange complexes—to me it resembles a weird campus or office park, but I wanted to keep the reading as open as possible. **When are you going to grow up and make real buildings? If you aren't, why not?** I have made a few real buildings, and their best features came as a result of my not being too grown up. So I might say that I would like to not grow up and make more buildings soon, but always in tandem with the art and installation work, which I consider a crucial mode of research and critique. **How do you define what you do as an artist?** I try to employ 'parallel thinking'—to make connections between things and ideas which are related but might not normally converge, and to re-present ordinary artifacts of living in a way that invites a revised and hopefully more critical way of understanding them. **Since it seems to be a requirement to be a Major Artist these days, would you be willing to pose either with your shirt off or putting? Would you need to go to the gym beforehand? I would need to go to the gym even for a shot of myself with a snowmobile suit on. But I can put...**

D. VAN NOTEN > (continued from page 170)

every piece that I thought was so beautiful, she told me, "That is so classic, so boring." And everything that was ugly, really ugly, she said, "That is so modern." There has to be something fragile about it. What

CONTEMPORARY Art Gallery

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NEWS RELEASE

AN TE LIU | PATHOLOGY

July 22 to August 26, 2000

Reception: Friday July 21 8:00 pm. All Welcome.

The Contemporary Art Gallery is pleased to present an Pathology, an exhibition by An Te Liu, a young Vancouver artist/architect whose dual practices are manifested in his art. Liu is interested in contemporary society's obsession with the improvement and perfectibility of our bodies and environments. The work he is exhibiting concerns itself with domestic technologies, both high and low, as well as urban planning, as they relate to desires for safety, health and the prolongation of life. The pieces reflect popular obsessions with the prevention of an imagined onslaught of physical and social maladies through the control of our living environments.

Pathology consists of various works that are connected by their minimal aesthetic, architectural references, and everyday use-value. In *Airborne*, a large installation of air purifiers, negative ionizers and clean mist humidifiers theoretically create a 'charged' hygienic atmosphere that alludes to a purifying of both domestic and urban environments. Architectural in design, these machines also double as buildings by being deployed on the floor to mimic a city grid. The ionizers function as much psychologically as they do physically, as most users lack an understanding of how the machines work and the impact they actually have upon the environment or the body. *Soft Load* is a polychromatic column of household sponges. These utilitarian objects are placed within the aesthetic realm while retaining their functionality as potential cleaning aids. Loosely-hung samples of decorative wallpaper have near-psychedelic patterns that are derived from an overhead view of *Levittown*, a utopian, ordered suburban town plan. They are also like a Rorschach test, which again introduces a psychological element. Together, these and other works play upon society's need to create defences and find comfort in a world full of unknown threats.

This is An Te Liu's first solo exhibition in Vancouver. He has previously exhibited at the Henry Urbach Gallery in New York City and the Pacific Design Centre and SPARC Gallery in Los Angeles.

Gallery Hours are 11-5, Tuesday to Saturday. Admission is free.
For further information contact Keith Wallace or Sylvia Blessin at 604.681.2700

This exhibition is funded by the Canada Council for the Arts

An Te Liu

Contemporary Art Gallery, Vancouver,
British Columbia

July 22 - August 26, 2000

An Te Liu is a young Vancouver artist and architect whose dual practices find a meeting ground in his art. The work in *Pathology* concerns itself with domestic technologies, as well as urban planning, and how they are linked to a desire for health, safety, pleasure and prolongation of life. This first solo exhibition consists of various works that are connected by their minimal aesthetic, architectural references, and everyday use value. *Airborne*, a cluster of sixty clean-mist humidifiers, air purifiers and negative-air ionizers, creates a "charged" atmosphere, promising to eliminate all harmful pollutants from one's personal airspace.
— Keith Wallace, curator

While the installation most obviously recollects mid-century modernism, or as Sarah Milroy put it, "ionizer Brasilia", *Airborne* actually links the ill-fated elegance of Le Corbusier's master plan to the contemporary developer's spoiled child, the gated community. "Maybe the connection is loose but I do see relationships between private, domestic syndromes on the one hand, and patterns of settlement and modes of urban conduct on the other.... Disney's Celebration is an extreme example," An Te

Liu writes in an e-mail interview by Aaron Betsky, titled *Air of The White Cube*. "In the 1940s Karl Popper argued that the idea of Utopia was untenable because you could never get consensus on the realization of abstract ideals. Instead he called for the elimination of 'concrete evils', which people could agree and act on. I would say that this idea informs the conception of new towns in both subtle and decisive ways, creating partial, say, inverted Utopias. Bad things go away — poor people, crime, garbage. ...At Celebration you can be punished for planting an undesirable shrub on your front lawn. Little is left to chance." Which could be why, after painting the sixty ionizers, purifiers, and humidifiers a matte off-white, An Te Liu's placement of the "buildings" was not in dialogue with professional urban planning discourse, but intuitive and playful, the automatic writing of town planning.

Airborne is reminiscent of architect/designer Hannes Meyer's 1925 displays of Co-operative Standard Products. These were mass produced goods in boxes, cartons, cans, and bottles arranged to look like futurist cities. The air-improving function of Liu's machines folds an element of 'wellness' into the retro-futuristic architectural model, but this notion of wellness is paradoxical.... Our late 20th-century subscription to ionizers, humidifiers and air purifiers is a small-scale, domestic realm acknowledgment that the cities we've created are not healthy places in

which to live and work.... Ironically, it's the manufacture of that world of consumer products that contributes to the lousy state of our air and water. (If we didn't make so many objects like these, we wouldn't need so many objects like these). — Robin Laurence, Georgia Straight (10.08.2000)

"Our means of purification seem to be working at increasingly microscopic levels," Liu observes. "Our concerns with air and water reflect that. There isn't the easy evidence, say, that a washing machine provides. Now we know that a dust mite is so small it just blows through the vacuum cleaner bag and back into the room.... We are in the realm of the invisible and we have new devices which actually require 'faith.'"

Aaron Betsky, curator of Architecture, Design and Digital Projects at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art: Isn't the point that they seem to do nothing, and represent an emptying out of things we can experience?

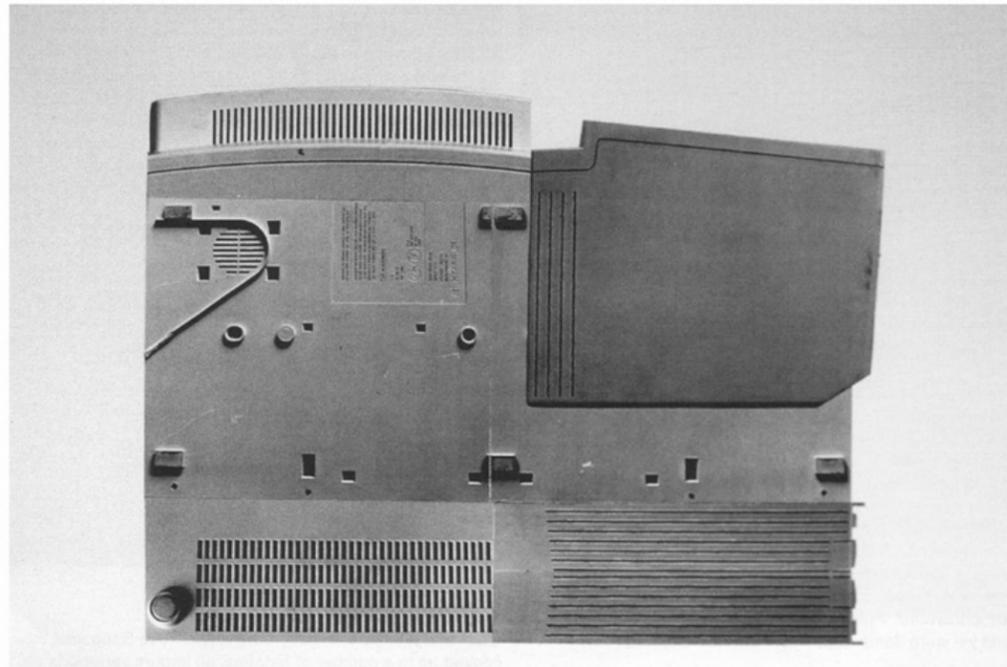
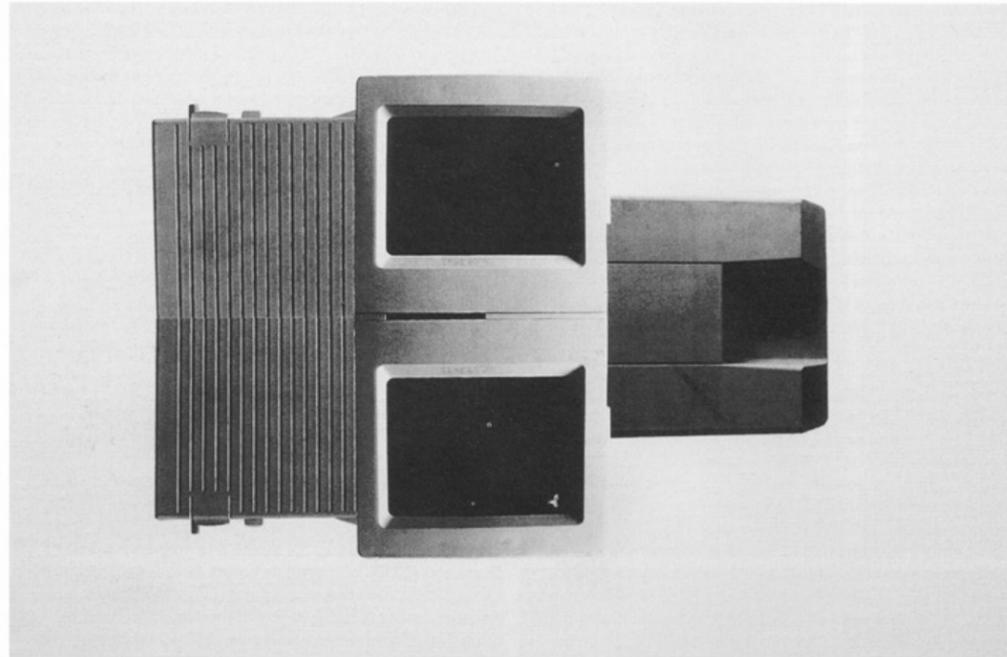
An Te Liu: That's the most curious question — is it real, or is it placebo? My college roommate and I had two Bionaire purifier/ionizers in our apartment. We would sit around drinking scotch in a smoky haze with the machines running full blast in case our parents showed up unexpectedly. After a few hours the air seemed to tingle with clean negatively charged ions and we were sure we could feel it. Or was it the single malt? In any case, the indicator light was on and we were assured that something good was happening, even if we didn't understand the mysteries of negative air ionization. "Placebo" comes from the Latin "to please" and we were damn happy with our new devices.

Vancouver Sun art critic Michael Scott describes the experience in other tones: "The result, in the Contemporary Art Gallery's enclosed exhibition space, is a fen of brackish air, one that promotional brochures might trumpet as painstakingly filtered and salubrious, but that our own senses register as denatured. The artificial scent emitted by the ionizers is a terrible burlesque of real flowers. Breathing in this processed air is, as gallery staff member Sylvia Blessin observes, like inhaling from a freshly opened plastic package."

Now living in Toronto, teaching architecture at the U of T, An Te Liu gave us his untitled collages (unit III) 9906.1 and 9905.1 to publish (see page 20). "These collages are assembled from photographs of a Mac Classic and Mac Plus to form newly redundant devices for the desktop."

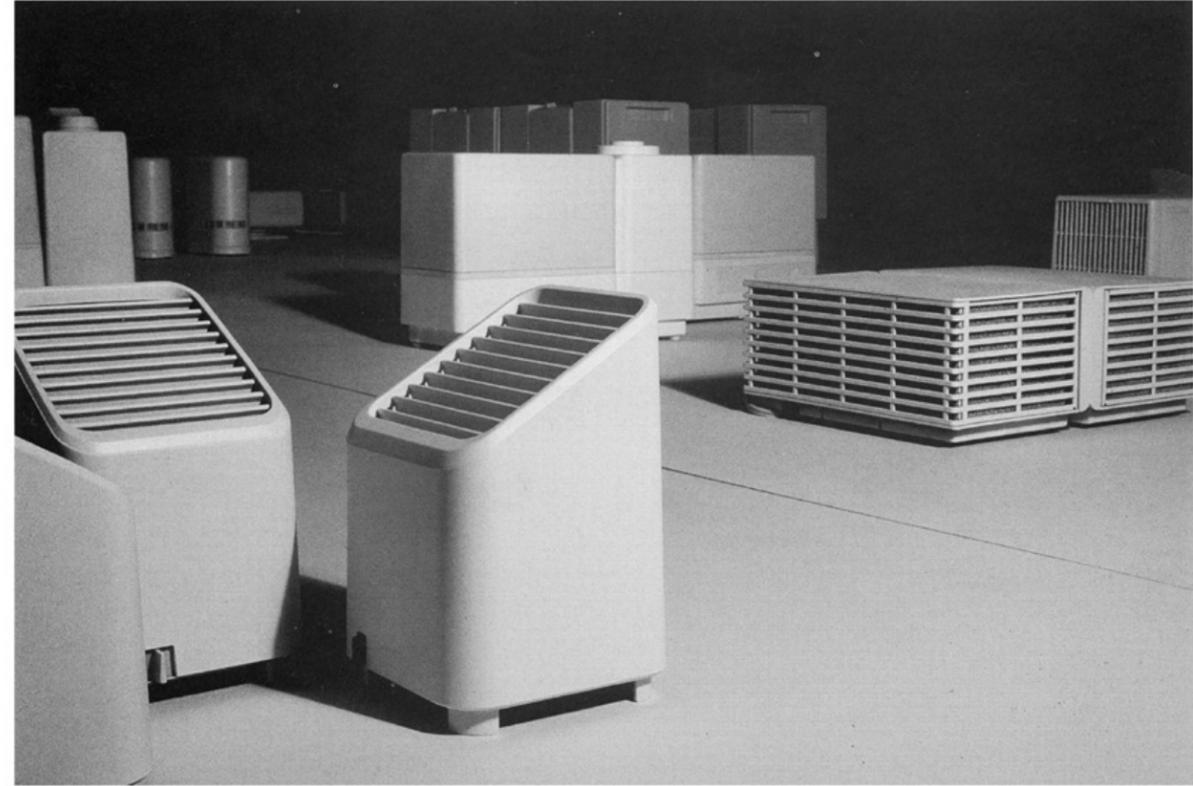
An Te Liu
Untitled (unit III) (1999)
collage on paper
15" x 15"
courtesy of the artist

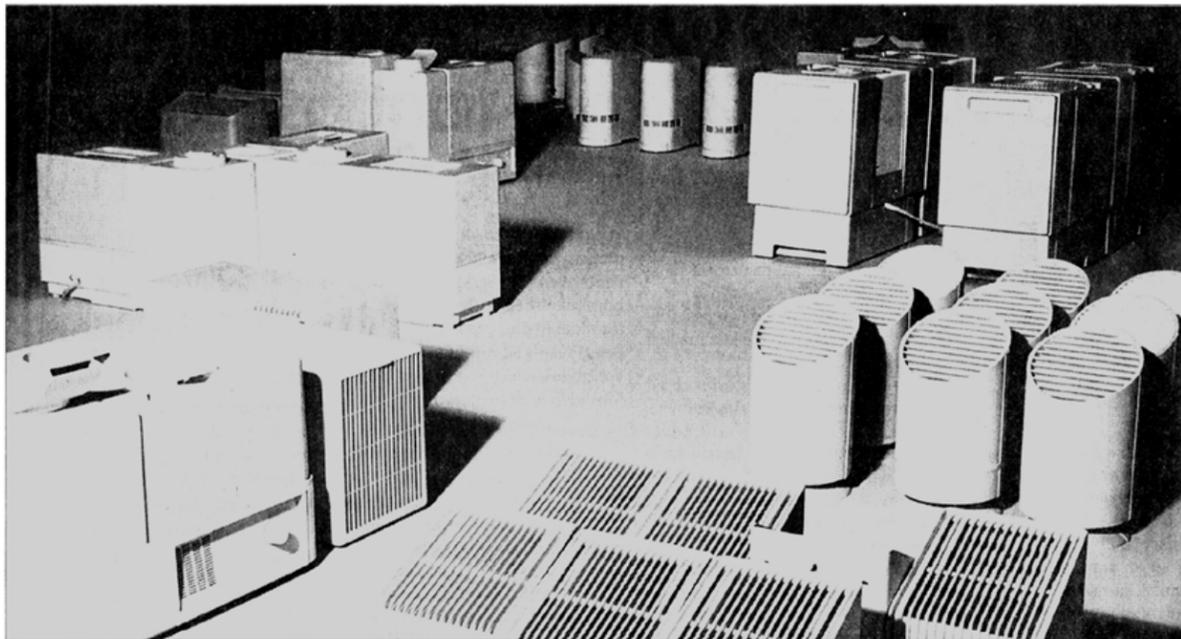
An Te Liu
Untitled (unit III) (1999)
collage on paper
15" x 15"
courtesy of the artist



An Te Liu
Airborne (2000)
details from installation
60 purifiers, ionizers, humidifiers
courtesy of the artist
Contemporary Art Gallery, Vancouver
top and centre and bottom right

An Te Liu
Pattern Language 1 (Levittown) (1998)
photocollage on wall, variable dimensions
courtesy of the artist
Contemporary Art Gallery, Vancouver
bottom left





A detail of the exhibit by An Te Liu, *Airborne*, which includes air purifiers, humidifiers and ionizers.

Home sterile home

Vancouver artist An Te Liu turns a critical eye on our urban environment.

By MICHAEL SCOTT

PATHOLOGY

New work by An Te Liu

Contemporary Art Gallery, 555 Hamilton Street, until Aug. 26.

The city stretches away into the bone-coloured distance, a grid of office towers, housing projects and discouraged-looking open spaces. The air is sluggish and thick. An endless industrial hum prickles at our ears.

Vancouver artist and architect An Te Liu conjures up a vision of urban life in which the planning may be impeccable but the actual quality of life is depressingly dystopian. Our tragic sense that technology can cure any ill is unfurled here, in Liu's devastating installation piece, *Airborne*.

Liu, who trained at the adventuresome Southern California Institute of Architecture in Los Angeles, after a degree in art history and Renaissance studies at the University of Toronto, sets out 60 household humidifiers and negative-air ionizers as though they were the apartment blocks and skyscrapers of a modernist city. The appliances are spray-painted a featureless pearl grey and arranged in multiple groups, like the buildings of some futuristic

city where healthful air is a machine-made promise.

The result, in the Contemporary Art Gallery's enclosed exhibition space, is a fen of brackish air, one that promotional brochures might trumpet as painstakingly filtered and salubrious, but that our own senses register as denatured. The artificial scent emitted by the ionizers is a terrible burlesque of real flowers. Breathing in this processed air is, as a gallery staff member observes, like inhaling from a freshly opened plastic package.

"Theoretically, these machines create a 'charged' atmosphere and promise to eliminate all harmful pollutants from one's personal air-space," writes CAG director Keith Wallace in a program note. "They are promoted as preventing everything from parched sinuses to furniture damage. Yet most users lack an understanding of [the machine's] technological principles, and these 'machines for living' ultimately have as much a psychological function as they do a physical one — the results are unproven and faith is a necessary component."

Uncertainty and blind faith in technology are organizing principles in the other pieces by Liu that comprise the Pathology exhibition. In *Pat-*

tern Language: Levittown, for instance, the artist manipulates the details of an aerial photograph of the world's first cookie-cutter suburb, Levittown, N.Y. The kaleidoscope pattern of those tacky-tacky little boxes, all just the same, invokes the same kind of tight-grinned belief in the future that the ionizers and humidifiers represent.

In *Untitled: Sclerotic*, a pair of safety grab bars, the kind that an elderly shut-in might want near her bathtub, are fixed to the gallery wall at knee-height. Their presence is an ode on the subject of social safety nets and our willingness to feel ourselves protected and improved by technological accouterments.

"Our means of purification seem to be working at increasingly microscopic levels," Liu observes. "Our concerns with air and water reflect that. There isn't the easy evidence, say, that a washing machine provides [antiseptic cleaning]. Now we know that a dust mite is so small it just blows through the vacuum cleaner bag and back into the room ... We are in the realm of the invisible and we have new devices which actually require 'faith.'"

Vancouver Sun Visual Art Critic
mscott@pacpress.southam.ca

View of Urbanization Is a Breath of Fresh Air

VISUAL ARTS

An Te Liu

Pathology
At the Contemporary Art Gallery until August 26

• By **ROBIN LAURENCE**

August is such a paradox: so glorious outside, so dispiriting inside—especially inside the city's art galleries. Most of the artist-run centres close for the month; most of the commercial galleries show their artists in incoherent group shows (aggregations, really, of what's left over from last season); and most of the larger public galleries' programming seems to be the visual equivalent of summer reading: lots of vacation sensation and very little perceptual or intellectual provocation. It's refreshing, then, to walk into the Contemporary Art Gallery and have my brain cells nudged a little—even if they're nudged by yet another bleak assessment of the failures of modernism. Let's say it's refreshing in a dispiriting kind of way.

An Te Liu is described in the show's introductory panel as "a young Vancouver artist and architect whose dual practices find a meeting ground in his art". He has been teaching in the architecture program at the University of British Columbia and is about to depart the city for an academic position in Toronto. This makes his first solo show, which is also his first Vancouver show (he has participated in group exhibitions in Los Angeles and New York City), both a debut and an adieu.

Airborne, the principal work on view at the CAG, is an installation comprising some 60 air purifiers, ionizers, and humidifiers, set out in geometrical groupings on a low, white platform. Thus configured, the little machines—painted a uniform off-white colour, turned on and humming in a quietly reassuring way—establish an architectural metaphor. Their streamlined, orderly, clustered forms, with pleasing expanses of space around them, seem to constitute a model of an idealized modernist city. The machines read as windowless buildings (who needs air when you have air conditioning?) and the spaces read as plazas, courtyards, streets, and promenades. Toronto art critic Sarah Milroy, who happened to be passing through the gallery when I was there, described the installation as an "ionizer Brasilia". CAG curator Keith Wallace analogizes the appearance of the work to just such postwar utopian urban-design projects. But *Airborne* is also reminiscent of early modernist design ideas, especially Hannes Meyer's 1925 displays of "Co-operative Standard Products". These were mass-produced goods in boxes, cartons, cans, and bottles arranged to look like futurist cities.

The air-improving function of Liu's machines folds an element of "wellness" into the retro-futuristic architectural model, but this notion of wellness is paradoxical. Ideally—

utopianly—modernist architecture and postwar urban planning were supposed to guarantee our physical and emotional well-being. Our late-20th-century subscription to ionizers, humidifiers, and air purifiers is a small-scale, domestic-realm acknowledgment that the cities we've created are not healthy places in which to live and work.

In a strikingly articulate interview accompanying the exhibition, Liu talks about danger and safety, hygiene and sterility, and about blurring the distinctions between home and hospital. He elaborates on the particular phenomenon of individuals attempting to control their environments, purifying their air and water with small, expensive devices. He talks, too, about the element of faith we must possess to believe in the efficacy of such devices in ridding our lives of unseen microscopic threats, and the triumph of the marketplace in generating these consumable objects to assuage our anxieties. "Gadget lust, clean living, self preservation. These are pretty strong motives," Liu says. "I think the will to feel good, or at least better, is both satisfied and fuelled by a world of consumer products." Ironically, it's the manufacture of that world of consumer products that contributes to the lousy state of our air and water. (If we didn't make so many objects like these, we wouldn't need so many objects like these.)

In addition to being an installation of subtly altered found objects that deploys a number of visual metaphors and cerebral musings, *Airborne* is an environment that plays upon our psychic and physical beings. Liu wonders if viewers will experience a sensation of well-being in the superpurified, super-humidified, superionized gallery. Without consciously engaging this question at the outset of my note-taking, I was quite certain I felt better after half an hour of being in the gallery space. But I was not at all certain whether my reaction was psychological or somatic.

Less successful than *Airborne* are the small works that accompany it and that comment again on modernist urban planning and contemporary domestic technologies. (These works include a couple of scrolls of "wall paper" that make Rorschach tests out of aerial images of suburban tract housing, and a couple of personal shiatsu units.) Still, this show is an introduction to a subtle and erudite mind.

Airborne is minimal in form and sterile in appearance, but that sterility speaks of a larger social condition. It's a condition defined by a desire to adjust immediate circumstances, to create a safe place within the home, without addressing the global impact that industrialization, overconsumption, and urbanization have had on our environment.

But who wants to think these rattling thoughts in the mindless month of August, especially while being washed over with euphoria-inducing streams of pure, moist air and negative ions? ■

Eric Howeler

surfaces of pleasure: *luster*

Luster, the dictionary tells us, is a quality of a surface that is characterized by brightness, or radiance - gloss or sheen. It shares the root of lust which comes, like illustration, from the German. So, lust and luster are surfaces and pleasures, surfaces of pleasure and the pleasure of surfaces. The works collected by Henry Urbach all deal with surfaces in delightfully different ways. *Luster*, the new show at Henry Urbach Architecture, features work by a group of artists and architects addressing issues of surface, space, desire and pleasure. As stated in the press release, the participants "share a common obsession with the surfaces we construct and how they serve to manage anxiety and focus desire".....

Two of my favorite pieces are by An Te Liu: a column of household sponges entitled *Soft Load* and a swatch of wallpaper entitled *Levittown*. The odd tower of sponges makes up a polychromatic columnar member, tentatively installed under an exposed beam. The sponge, an instrument of hygiene, for maintaining clean (if fetishized) surfaces, is transformed into a bogus structural member, which feigns structural support, while made up of porous blocks of sponge, suggesting obsessive maintenance of surface. The classic opposition of structure/surface is put into play by this witty piece. Liu's other piece is a sample pattern of wallpaper made up of kaleidoscopic aerial views of Levittown. The source image, a view of the monotonous pattern of suburban tract housing in Levittown is reproduced to create a Rorschach-like surface. The aerial perspective, implying surveillance, is confounded by the multiplication of images and becomes decorative pattern. The bi-axially symmetrical pattern of generic American post-war landscape transforms to the erotic, traumatic form of the biomorphic. Wallpaper, at once a noun and a verb, parallels the reality of a speculative development of the American suburb that consumes both the suburban and rural frontier with a repetitive pattern of the familiar.....

Luster's steamy innuendo and its discursive underside illuminate much of what makes contemporary spaces stimulating and compelling, sensual and repulsive. Henry Urbach's curatorial effort is sharp and timely.....The works raise important issues, calling into question normative spatial practices and banal quotidian surfaces.