

D O R S K Y
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Curatorial Programs



SHIFT AND FLOW

LIDA ABDUL, ANDREAS FOGARASI, JONGGEON LEE, JULIE MEHRETU,
JASON MIDDLEBROOK, STEVEN MILLAR, ABELARDO MORELL, PETER OWEN,
MANUEL PIÑA, RENATA POLJAK, CHARLOTTE SCHULZ AND EMMA SPERTUS

Curated by Zeljka Himbele Kozul

September 11 – November 27, 2011

Opening reception: Sunday, September 11, 2:00–5:00 p.m.

Shift and Flow focuses on architecture as a framework in which to examine our everyday, individual and collective existence. It approaches the built environment as a platform for observing complex perturbations in contemporary culture, society and politics. Neither homogeneous nor static, our built surroundings reflect malleable and shifting social and cultural values; because of these conditions, places rapidly change their appearance, function and meanings, which profoundly affects the subjective experiences, interactions and relationships of their inhabitants.

The artists of *Shift and Flow*—Lida Abdul, Andreas Fogarasi, Jonggeon Lee, Julie Mehretu, Jason Middlebrook, Steven Millar, Abelardo Morell, Peter Owen, Manuel Piña, Renata Poljak, Charlotte Schulz and Emma Spertus—address, respectively, current rapid disappearances of historical structures, demolitions caused by modern warfare which overflow television and other mass media, changes in suburban spreads, erasures of familiar urban structures, global real estate crises, rebuildings, adaptations, revitalizations, preservations and collisions. For their works, they embrace a variety of techniques and mediums as well as multiple investigatory methods. The artists conduct interdisciplinary research of urban structures; reactivate various art history legacies; speculate about achievements and flaws of utopian architectural agendas as well as the most recent incentives of the global capital; use buildings or their traces as a backdrop for various performative actions; appropriate and fragment imagery of domestic and public places; and/or employ corporeal fragments of architectural elements as the physical building blocks of new art work. Using ambiguous imagery and metaphoric content, the present artists underscore the complex interconnections among our



Steven Millar *Overlay*, 2008/2010

built surroundings, everyday lives, current events, and social, personal, and cultural memory and history.

In *Shift and Flow*, factual contexts of today's living are examined through various perspectives and captivating narratives.

Julie Mehretu draws her inspiration from various depictions of built environments, such as city maps, architectural plans, urban planning grids, computer design schematics and video game simulations. Her meticulous, multilayered compositions blur the line between figuration and abstraction, and combine a whole range of historical references: abstractions of Malevich, Mondrian and Kandinsky; the exploration of movement and speed of the Futurists; traditional Chinese calligraphy, and on the other hand, popular culture iconography of graffiti, comic books and tattoos. Ghostly architectural fragments of buildings from different places and eras are merged with fictional elements. They are incorporated in whirling compositions with strong centrifugal movement, embodying energy, transformation and revolution. Against this backdrop, Mehretu adds personal markings, stained organic shapes and colorful pictograms, evincing active individual and communal agencies that destabilize dominant systems and make social and political changes throughout history.

Likewise, maps, architectural models and topographical sketches serve as a foundation for **Steven Millar's** objects. The artist conducts in-depth historical studies of New York City boroughs, with their diverse and constantly changing neighborhoods. While combining these studies with his own surmises and experiences, Millar abstracts the regular appearances of buildings and housings to avoid literal depictions. *Overlay* consists of a large quantity of geometrical blocks—modules in different colors and materials—that not only symbolize particular architectural units, but also evoke constant transformation and growth of urban environments; the amassed blocks dynamically overlap and seem like growing on top of shipping pallets, almost as a fluid, organic form that is rooted in the floor of the gallery and spreads across the walls.

Jonggeon Lee's sculptures and installations also delve on spaces as constantly changing and unstable entities. The artist focuses on both domestic and public architectural elements,



Julie Mehretu *Untitled*, 2000



Jonggeon Lee *Where It Stops*, 2008

such as staircases or hardwood floors, that have been removed from their original surroundings. These structures evoke both the time and space of their origins but in a different context; the artist distorts and crops them, reconfigures their scale and material, removes their initial function, and combines them with contemporary, everyday objects. Lee's preoccupations stem from his personal story of cultural dislocation, living in-between places, and a disrupted sense of belonging. The architecture thus becomes the metaphor for individual and social memories, their fragmentation and metamorphosis.

Lida Abdul's videos explore the relationship between architecture, memory and identity in Afghanistan—a country which has, throughout the last several decades, continuously been stricken by conflicts, invasions, migrations and displacements, and has witnessed systematic destruction. Demolished landscapes and public and private properties serve as a stage for performing simple, but visually and metaphorically striking actions. *What we saw upon awakening* is video footage of men who, by pulling the ropes wrapped around architectural elements, are trying to pull down the ruined unidentified

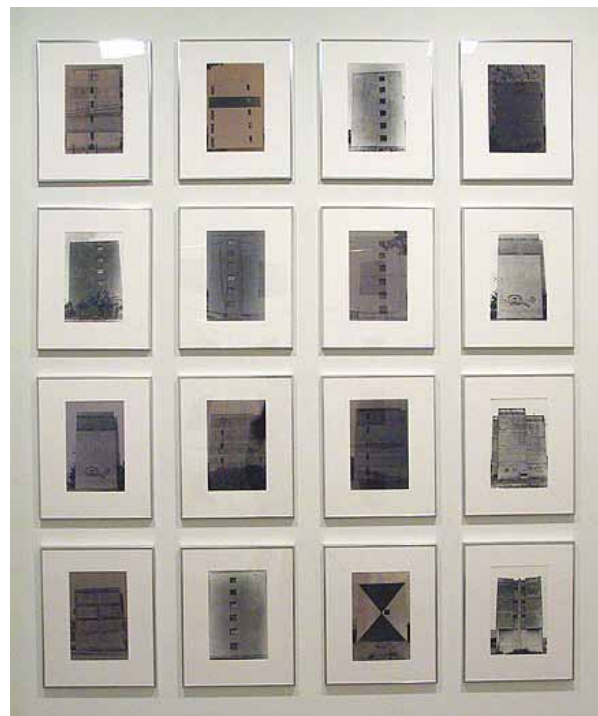


Lida Abdul *What we saw upon awakening*, 2006

building in a Kabul neighborhood. The action is delivered through poetic, slow motion camera panning and close-ups. Toward the end of the video, the performers bury a stone from the building into the ground—a ritualistic gesture which in Islam is associated with resurrection and recovery. The actions of the protagonists, therefore, point towards rebuilding, transformation and hope.

For **Manuel Piña**, buildings are traces of human activity in a particular place, and are indeed heavily inscribed into the individual and social memory, ideologies and politics. In making his photographic work, the artist is primarily concerned with utopian agendas and the possibility of their practical realization in architecture and urbanism. The series of black-and-white photographs, *Deconstructing Utopias*, depicts a particular example from the history of Cuban urban development—housing projects in Havana which were since the late 1960s built by the so-called *microbrigadas*. Due to the country's housing shortage, *microbrigadas* were self-organized teams of ordinary citizens who engaged in an effort to construct their own housing units, with materials provided by the Cuban government. Piña records the current state of these buildings in a documentary manner. He uses their present condition as an example of how humanist and populist ideas can be distorted: many of the units, built without knowledge of proper construction techniques, proved to be barely adequate for living.

Jason Middlebrook's working method revolves around appropriation and recycling. The debris from construction sites and discarded materials from streets and buildings are consistently discovered and reclaimed by this artist. For the exhibition *Shift and Flow*, Middlebrook has made a work out



Manuel Piña *Deconstructing Utopias*, 2000



Charlotte Schulz *The uneven intensities of duration: suspended in the midst of an encounter with a flood, the unknown past carries itself into a current location and pressures a rescue from geographical forces, 2010*

of the material found around the exhibition space and the surrounding streets of Long Island City—a neighborhood that is going through dramatic architectural, cultural and social transformations. Although altered and rearranged through the artist's interventions, the inherent nature of found materials still define the structure, forms and final appearance of each one of his works. For Middlebrook, the art work might serve as a trigger to evoke history and social and cultural importance of materials and particular sites, as well as to playfully comment on complex and often tense relationships between natural and built environment, raising questions about consumption and enhancement.

The elaborate charcoal drawings by **Charlotte Schulz** feature public tragedies sites, strange architectural compositions, surreal domestic interiors and dream-like landscapes interwoven through the combination of sharply executed details and delicate erasures. The artist's intense everyday research of newspaper clips and photographs of various international events serve as an inspiration for the work which integrates fragments of reality and the artist's fictional topographies, and reflects on how information today is shaped, mediated and experienced. The drawings are made on the physically folded paper, which encloses architectural imagery involved in dramatic scenarios, devoid of human presence. This multilayering technique activates various perspective points and creates open-ended narratives which seem as folding in and out of themselves.

Abelardo Morell's *Camera Obscura* series of photographs, featuring different places around the world, addresses passage of time, continuous changes and coexistence of old and new in our urban surroundings. For making his captivating works, the artist employs an elaborate process; he uses well-known camera obscura phenomenon of projecting an image on a wall.



Peter Owen *Untitled, 2010*

First, Morell completely darkens the windows of the particular apartment, house or hotel room interior, leaving only one hole acting as a lens, through which the light from the outside comes in—thus, physically transforming the particular room into a large camera obscura device.

Through the hole, the exterior images become projected onto the interior wall. This optical effect is then recorded by Morell's digital camera, capturing the astonishing melding and overlaying of the outside and inside worlds.

Peter Owen photographs daily routes and walks around New York City, as well as the overlooked details and architectural particularities of other cities he occasionally visits. His

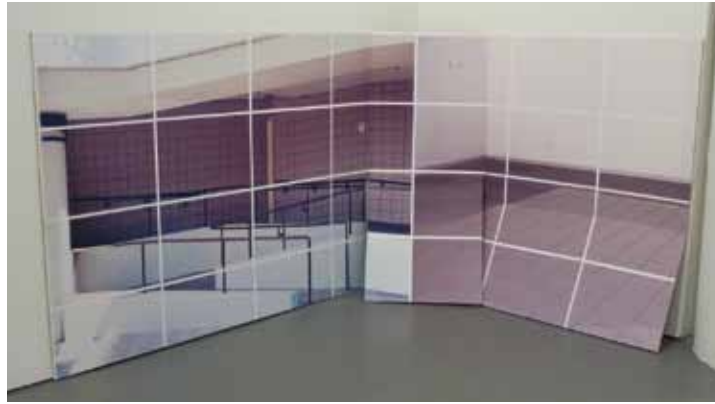


Andreas Fogarasi *Folkemuseum, 2010*

photo diary, published on the artist's personal blog, shows the artist's quotidian experiences and, in his own words, mappings of his life. It also serves as a foundation for Owen's studio work; his compositions feature strong and exhaustive drawing, combined with saturated layers of color, and atop of them, occasional scraps, paper bags or stain. The captured reflections of buildings on water surface, shadows, skylines, ruined facades, old wallpapers and interior details, graffiti—all become motifs in Owen's work, in an effort to retrace rhythms and patterns of urban living, and depict passage of time and continuous transformations, constructions and demolitions.

Folkemuseum—a single channel video by **Andreas Fogarasi**—takes on a peculiar collection of Norwegian historical architecture, which has been gathered since the 1880's on the location of today's Norsk Folkemuseum on the outskirts of Oslo. Accompanied only by environmental sounds, Fogarasi's camera slowly pans around the buildings which were deassembled from their original locations and reconstructed at this new locale. It captures individual edifices, staged to convey a national history narrative. Occasionally, this seemingly deserted artificial environment gets populated by visitors walking around. The footage from this open-air museum is combined with the shots of a contemporary interior of an architect's apartment, as well as an apartment of Pakistani immigrants, and overlaid by occasional textual messages—the artist's comments on historical and cultural ideas behind this museological endeavor, and the shifts of its meaning within the current political and social climate.

As a starting point for her installation *Spirit of the Age*, Emma Spertus took images of vacant showrooms at deserted car dealerships, along a disappearing auto-row in Oakland, California. The images—close examinations of facades, surfaces, doors, empty halls, corners and stairs—were taken with a film camera. Afterward, the negatives were scanned, enlarged and printed onto bent wooden display surfaces, and then carefully arranged within the gallery space. A grid—often used in shaping the interiors of commercial spaces, but more generally representing rationality, optimism and utopian idealism of modernist architecture—in white color is overlaid on top of this visually and conceptually intriguing imagery. Through the endorsement of formal, psychological and symbolic aspects of architecture, Spertus' compositions can be seen as a critical reflection on how current economic forces change the architectural heritage of the American 20th century capitalism; its corporate architecture, design and



Emma Spertus *Spirit of the Age*, 2010/2011



Renata Poljak *Great Expectations*, 2005

(sub)urban planning.

Renata Poljak's 16mm film *Great Expectations* traces different manifestations of violence inherited from the years of war, and its impact on today's ethics, attitudes and social norms, as well as wider cultural and political landscape of Croatia. It consists of documentary shots of the artist's native town of Split and its surroundings, accompanied by her voice over. Brutal episodes of soccer hooliganism on the streets of Split are juxtaposed to the recordings of urban destruction—ongoing devastation of traditional Dalmatian landscape and this ancient town's features, ruined by unregulated development caused by mass tourism boom, transitional corrupted politics and run for profit. The narration accompanying these visuals deliver Poljak's personal account on her own family history and the example of

blatant architectural violence within it—also clearly present in the accompanying photograph entitled *The View*—which shows a view from the artist's family house terrace, intrusively disrupted by a new construction of another family member.

Through the prism of architecture, *Shift and Flow* touches on numerous subjects: class, ethnicity, nationality, conflicts and violence, power relations, socio-economic circumstances, globalization, migration, gentrification and destruction, recycling, invention, subversion and resurrection. Skepticism, loss and alienation are interwoven with idealism, fascination and optimism, sometimes in a single work. While mobilizing symbolic meanings of architectural imagery, the works in the exhibition stimulate contemplation and act as catalysts for critical reflection; the omnipresent transformation and changeability, shifts and flows, are the global multifaceted phenomena that compel the artists' attention.

— *Zeljka Himbele Kozul*
New York, 2011

BIOGRAPHY

Zeljka Himbele Kozul is a freelance curator based in New York City. She is a 2006 graduate of the Center for Curatorial Studies at Bard College. In her native Croatia, she worked for several years at the Museum of Contemporary Art, curated exhibitions for numerous non-profit spaces in Zagreb, served on the editorial board of *Kontura*, a Croatian art magazine, and recently, returned home to organize an exhibition at MK Gallery in Zagreb. From 2008-2010 she worked at the Contemporary Art Department of the Museum of Art, Rhode Island School of Design, Providence, RI, where she curated a series of solo and group exhibitions for New Media Gallery. She was a guest critic, lecturer or exhibition juror for the institutions Residency Unlimited, NY; Flux Factory, NY; Chester College, NH; Cambridge Art Association, MA; Parsons The New School for Design, NY; and Brown University and Rhode Island School of Design, RI, among others. Additionally, Mrs. Himbele Kozul was a Curatorial Fellow at Art in General, curating the exhibition at Bloomberg LP headquarters. She also co-curated exhibitions at NURTUREart in Brooklyn, NY and the Big Medium Gallery in Austin, TX.

CHECKLIST

LIDA ABDUL
(Afghani, b. 1973)

WHAT WE SAW UPON AWAKENING, 2006
Video; color, sound
7 minutes, looped
Courtesy of Giorgio Persano, Turin

ANDREAS FOGARASI
(Austrian, b. 1977)

FOLKEMUSEUM, 2010
HD video projection; color, sound
19 minutes, looped
Courtesy of the artist and Georg Kargl Fine Arts, Vienna

JONGGEON LEE
(South Korean, b. 1979)

WHERE IT STOPS, 2008
Poplar, pine molding, plywood, plaster
21 x 7 x 38 inches
Courtesy of the artist

JULIE MEHRETU
(Ethiopian, b. 1970)

UNTITLED, 2000
Ink, colored pencil and paper on mylar
18 x 24 inches
Collection of Martin and Rebecca Eisenberg
UNTITLED, 2000
Ink, colored pencil and paper on mylar
18 x 24 inches
Collection of Martin and Rebecca Eisenberg

JASON MIDDLEBROOK
(American, b. 1966)

FOUND IN LIC, 2011
Site-specific object
Courtesy of the artist and Dodge Gallery, New York

STEVEN MILLAR
(American, b. 1968)

OVERLAY, 2008/2010
Plywood, formica, cement
Dimensions variable
Courtesy of the artist

ABELARDO MORELL
(American, b. Cuba 1948)

CAMERA OBSCURA: IMAGE OF THE COLISEUM INSIDE ROOM #23 AT THE HOTEL GLADIATORI, 2007
Pigment ink print
30 x 24 inches
Courtesy of the artist and Bonni Benrubi Gallery, New York

CAMERA OBSCURA: VIEW OF THE MANHATTAN BRIDGE APRIL 20TH/ EVENING, 2010
Pigment ink print
24 x 30 inches
Courtesy of the artist and Bonni Benrubi Gallery, New York

PETER OWEN
(American, b. 1977)

INTERSECTION 3, 2011
Mixed media on panel
30 x 30 x 2 1/2 inches
Courtesy of the artist

UNTITLED, 2010
Mixed media on panel
40 x 40 inches
Courtesy of the artist

UNTITLED, 2010
Mixed media on panel
20 x 20 inches
Courtesy of the artist

MANUEL PIÑA
(Cuban, b. 1958)

DECONSTRUCTING UTOPIAS, 2000
16 Gelatin silver prints
20 x 16 inches each
Private collection, New York

RENATA POLJAK
(Croat, b. 1974)

GREAT EXPECTATIONS, 2005
Super 16mm film transferred to HD video; color, sound
17 minutes, looped
Courtesy of the artist and Gallery Ernst Hilger, Vienna

THE VIEW, 2004
Photograph
39 x 59 inches
Courtesy of the artist and the Artist Pension Trust (APT Dubai)

CHARLOTTE SCHULZ
(American, b. 1960)

THE UNEVEN INTENSITIES OF DURATION: SUSPENDED IN THE MIDST OF AN ENCOUNTER WITH A FLOOD, THE UNKNOWN PAST CARRIES ITSELF INTO A CURRENT LOCATION AND PRESSURES A RESCUE FROM GEOGRAPHICAL FORCES, 2010

Charcoal on paper
34 x 40 x 4 inches
Courtesy of the artist

THE UNEVEN INTENSITIES OF DURATION: TEA AND BISCUITS ARE SET UPON OUR OBJECT OF DESTRUCTION FOR THOSE ACTING WITHIN THE CENTER WITHOUT OUR KNOWLEDGE, 2008
Charcoal on paper
38 x 45 x 3 inches
Courtesy of the artist

EMMA SPERTUS
(American, b. 1979)

SPIRIT OF THE AGE, 2011
Digital prints on wood
Dimensions variable
Courtesy of the artist



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Split



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Cover:

Abelardo Morell, *Camera Obscura: Image of the Coliseum Inside Room #23 at the Hotel Gladiatori*, 2007

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

My deepest appreciation goes to the artists Lida Abdul, Andreas Fogarasi, Jonggeon Lee, Julie Mehretu, Jason Middlebrook, Steven Millar, Abelardo Morell, Peter Owen, Manuel Piña, Renata Poljak, Charlotte Schulz and Emma Spertus, for making their inspiring works and participating in this exhibition. Thanks to all of you for wonderful studio visits, numerous conversations and your precious input in every phase of the exhibition making. I am also grateful for the tremendous support and expertise of the extraordinary Dorsky Gallery Curatorial Programs team—Karen, David and Noah Dorsky—as well as to Stacy Koon, Registrar, and Deborah Rising, Graphic Designer, for their impressive work. Special thank you to all the generous lenders of the works: Giorgio Persano, Turin; Georg Kargl Fine Arts, Vienna; Martin and Rebecca Eisenberg; Dodge Gallery, New York; Bonni Benrubi Gallery, New York; the anonymous collector in New York; Gallery Ernst Hilger, Vienna; the Artist Pension Trust (APT Dubai); and the artists. I would also like to thank to the City of Split and Croatian Audio-Visual Center for supporting Renata Poljak's participation in the exhibition and the related programming.

The exhibition would not have been possible without the support of my loving family and friends, nor without the thoughtful insights of my fabulous colleagues from around the world. Lastly, I am thankful for the fiction by Haruki Murakami, which profoundly inspired the concept of *Shift and Flow*.

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