If architecture and urbanism, as means of planning, have been the traditional sites for utopian projection in imagining ideal cities, the work in *Adaptations* draws attention to processes that fit within rather than the plan or the ideal: the flourishing of the black market and its impact on built space, the establishment and failure of experimental communities, randomized construction, and the necessity of makeshift solutions. Although at the margins of planned space, and at the narrowing end of modernity’s long shadow, these works do not give up on the prospect or project of articulating a utopian horizon. Rather, they shift the discussion away from traditions of development based on the tabula rasa, and toward processes of adaptive transformation. The frictions between centralized controls and autonomous initiatives, between regulated systems and dispened systems, are not approached with ready-made design solutions, but are engaged as forces enabling an analysis and rethinking of both lived and built space.

Nils Norman’s Proposal for an Entropy Information Kiosk (Church & Lippesland Streets) will appear for the duration of the show as a poster placed in a phonebooth kiosk near the gallery. Norman’s project is a proposal for a new kiosk in downtown Manhattan. A center for observing the effects of global warming, Norman’s proposed updates global temperature change, forecasts local weather, enables storm and drought tracking, monitors global oil consumption, and provides webcam views focused on prime glacial-lens disintegration. While all the component parts of this kiosk are fully functional, together they create an unwieldy, unworkable fusion of agit-prop and the entertainment industry. So seemingly of Manhattan’s delirious multi-functionality and yet impossible within it, the Entropy Information Kiosk raises questions as to the limits of contemporary urban space, as well as to the instrumentalization of public act in its redevelopment.

The Wild City: Genetics of Uncontrolled Urban Processes, a collaborative work by the STEALTH group (Ana Dzokic, Milica Tijakovic, Marc Neelen, and Ivan Kucina), examines the explosion of unregulated and illegal architectures stemming from Belgrade’s economic and political crises in the 1990s. While such building was decreed in the press as wild, chaotic, and destructive of Belgrade’s planned urban fabric, the STEALTH group developed a visual and verbal vocabulary for the regularities and patterns in struggles underlying processes like black-market street trade, urban transport, and roadside gasoline-selling. In their case studies, plastic kiosks grow coffee shops, concrete basements, and living spaces, entirely new shopping districts form along formerly empty pedestrian routes; and state department stores stay aloft by renting out vacant space to black-market vendors. Analyzing the complexities and contradictions relating top-down to bottom-up forces, the STEALTH group has developed this research into Processsmatter, a design computing program whose algorithms formulate the possible outcomes of these interactions.

The agonistic conflict of desires and designs is also a key concern of Gardar Eide Einarsson, who uses commercial wall paint to reproduce the signature orange-pink tones of the Financial Times newspaper. As a source of information on global industry, economics, and finance, the Financial Times adopts an editorially “neutral” tone, reporting facts and data for the global investor. In Einarsson’s painting, the neutrality of this tone tends to be institutionally suspended. On the one hand, as the artist writes, the painting “rinds the space of the (mock) neutrality of gallery white.” On the other it can easily be misrecognized as a curatorial accent-color. As a material support that tends to disappear while in plain view, the work subtly suggests the subsistence of alternative economies and black-market processes within more dominant economic forces.

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Kim Adams (Toronto), Arnait Video Collective (Iqaluit, Canada), Gardar Eide Einarsson (Berlin), Nils Norman (London), Ocean Earth (New York), Michael Rakowitz (New York), Raqs Media Collective (Delhi), Stealth Group (Rotterdam/Belgrade), Oscar Tuazon and Richard Fischbeck (New York)
Richard Jischbeck, 2001, aluminum and glass dome

Richard Jischbeck, Kiranlee, 1998, present, inflatable shelter made from plastic, tape, wire and metal lace

Kirk Adams, research desk, 1998, present, inflatable, shelter in a continuous projection

The reconfigured vehicles, adapted houses, makeshift monuments, and abstract machines that Kim Adams comes across in his travels are an essential part of the production of his large-scale public sculptures. They are pieces of a commodity world that has been taken apart and pieced together again along different lines: a pedestrian in Manila holds wreckage from the daily flows of traffic around it; a sedan is turned into a hunter's cabin, complete with stove, boat dock, and sleeping quarters; a house is built around a summer camper like a body constructed from a prosthetic limb. With these slides (from an archive numbering close to a thousand) and his 1:87 scale models, Adams mines the apparatus of contemporary production—long-haul trucking vehicles, farming supplies, work sheds, garden equipment, construction gear—and re-assembles it into public objects whose apparent functionality conceals the fact that they refuse to do any of the things we expect them to.

The paraSITE shelter, a double-membranated structure that latches onto exhaust ducts, capturing the flow of waste air in order to inflate itself, takes advantage of the overlooked infrastructures that keep cities running smoothly. Michael Rakowitz initiated the paraSITE project in 1998 in response to the aggressive anti-homeless measures (such as homeless-“proof” vents and benches, along with the enforcement of anti-camping laws) being taken in Boston and New York. Each paraSITE (of which there are approximately 30 in existence) is the result of a design process that involves working directly with the homeless person who will use the shelter. Variations have included pockets for messages and belongings, extended necks to reach upper-storv vents, a shelter shaped after the Star Wars character Jabba the Hutt, and a low-slung tube designed to fall within a loophole in New York’s anti-tent laws. In this sense, the paraSITE project is as much a tactic of visibility as a functional shelter, a means of a collaborative addressing of the visibility of unacceptable circumstances that continue to exist within the carefully policed space of the city.

Craig Buckley
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