

apexart

2017-18 Franchise Proposal

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Fordlandia Transmission

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Franchise location: Fordlandia, Brazil

In 1927, Henry Ford broke ground on Fordlandia, a plantation city along the Tapajos river in the Brazilian Amazon, with the intent to cultivate a steady rubber supply for his global motorcar empire. From the outset, Ford's attempt to colonize and industrialize the Amazon proved disastrous. The American managers first razed and burned the jungle forest, rendering the soil an infertile desert. The plantation's North American suburban aesthetics, Fordist labor regulations, and monocultural agriculture were met with widespread resistance from workers and nature alike. Ford introduced a hospital, schools, churches, dance halls, swimming pools, and shops to the jungle. But disease, riots, worker attrition, cabin fever, and an Island of Innocence for sex and drink just past the Ford property were indicative of the plantation town's paternalistic production failures for indigenous tappers and Dearborn managers alike.

In 1933, a widespread revolt at the property cleared the grounds almost entirely of machines, building, and managers, while obliterating crops of struggling rubber trees. After a few years of attempts by new managers from Detroit to coerce the debacle back to working order, the Ford crew declared Fordlandia a "research station" and set up a new plantation town--Belterra--just 50 miles downstream. The crew repeated the same mistakes every step of the way. In 1945, after years of fruitless labor, the cities were sold back to the Brazilian government, with Ford declaring from afar that they had been a failure at cultivating crops but a success in "civilizing men."

After years of collapse and abandon, these two jungle towns have been slowly resettled, with the soybean plantation industry continuing to accelerate post-Fordist development in Fordlandia and across the Amazon today. Small industries of craft, machinery, and agriculture support local inhabitants, but many of the machines, houses, and infrastructure remain defunct. It is said that the Fordlandia worker bell is still rung today--a mix of nostalgia, pride, and conversion of this legacy for the city's contemporary inhabitants.

We hope to explore Fordlandia's history and presence through a sound art exhibition that activates Fordlandia's industrial ruins, jungle environment, and contemporary contradictions. The jungle is notorious for its incredible auditory ecosystem, the cities of Northern Brazilian are notorious for their vibrant musical heritage, and the remainders of Fordlandia's machines can serve both as inspiration and instruments for site-specific sound interventions and activations.

We will partner with Fordlandia-based radio station Beto Paranatinga to select four Brazilian artists who work in audio media--music, sound, and storytelling--to compose an exhibition exploring the remainders and reminders of the city's foundation. The sound exhibition will be up for one month, with specially curated events performed live, transmitted over Fordlandia radio, and broadcast online to share with the world. A group of local youth will be invited to participate in the broadcast, learning sound, web, and musical technologies and techniques as part of the collaborative experience.

The exhibition will activate Fordlandia through a medium that transports participants and listeners into shared timescapes, exploring how industrial legacies continue to haunt the present and shape possible futures.

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