Out of site: Fictional Architectural Spaces

In "Out of Site: Fictional Architectural Spaces," the constant shift from pictorial representations of space to its actuality inside the museum is relayed through deft juxtapositions between works ranging in media. Organizer Anne Ellegood asserts her curatorial hand with a light but decisive touch in a thoughtful installation that underscores several key themes.

Many abstract paintings on exhibit assure the need for human intervention to enliven and not just occupy an existing space. Drawing more from a pictorial tradition are painters who all reference, but don't always use, digital processes. While the degree to which each asserts the physicality of their chosen medium varies, all subtly implicate its tactile, painterly qualities. Dannielle Tegeder's paintings cross mechanical and biological systems, linear and splotch-like amoebic forms, while some "unfinished" brushstrokes disrupt the soft, geometric shapes floating on flat colour grounds in Adam Ross' digital landscapes. This also plays out through others' use of linear devices and grid systems. Walls painted in tile formation surrounding Still Life (2002), Haluk Akakce's two-channel video projection, are not visual cues to ground the viewer, but a point of departure linked to the work's conceptual justification. In Cannon Hudson's Colossus 1 and Colossus 11 (both 2002), formal elements like colour (blue for water), line (gesticulating its flow in liquid form), and shape (square grid tile arrangements) evoke domestic interiors through patterns and textures rather than realistic representation. Ironically, in revealing that visual language functions as its own form of "virtual reality," the focus shifts back upon real space.

Flawed interiors are also revealed through the paint stripped off Kevin Zucker's inkjet photo transfers that denote the precision and coherence of architectural drawings. Semi-ransparent images with phantasm-like appearances subject all of his works to a radiographic process. Thus, a dual sense of collapsed and infinite space pervade his colourless, slightly off-kilter interiors. In World Without End (2001), six empty stools set on an angle in front of an equal number of dressing room mirrors reveal endless images of the same arrangement directly opposite. Punctuating this reflection is the matching floor and ceiling tile pattern that shows up in all three exhibited works. They form a disconcerting enclosure similar to Craig Kalpakjian and Sven Pahlsson, whose photographs of workspaces and digital video of suburbia respectively investigate psychological forms of spatial entrapment.

Fittingly installed in close proximity is Stephen Hendee's trademark use of corrugated plastic, electrical tape and coloured light in Silent Sector (2002), a softly glowing square box relief structure covering the ceiling and side walls, mimicking the gradation of stairs leading into the exhibition. Like most of Aziz + Cucher's exhibited photographs of skin-covered interiors installed in odd spatial locations, Hendee creates what Ellegood calls an "immersive site" by using an existing transitional space in the museum to reveal how architectural structures can formulate an inhabitable, if otherworldly, whole.

Less subtle is Julie Mehrelu's large canvas Retopistics: A Renegade Excavation (2001), where implementing physical and social change to the built environment is foregone in favour of straight-up destruction. Her stylistic representations of fire, smoke and cartoon-like explosions of colour and line are ascribed as being neo-nomadic by Ellegood, and indicative of a "society characterized by movement, a breakdown of old borders, and an implosion of time and space" (p. 33). In "proposing new sites that challenge the dialectics of real and fictional, utopic and dystopic,

local and global, interior and exterior [...] the controversial claim that the primacy of the local is being replaced by a global economic system that promotes and perpetuates homogenization" (p. 34) proves ineffective. This plays out in many works like Ricci Albenda's People Pattern (2002), by grounding viewers firmly in the room. His literal translation of the word "people" repeats endlessly in a variable font size over one wall. Creating a vis ual spread similar in form to Aziz + Cucher's anthropomorphizing and full textural integration over existing architectural conditions, language becomes crucial in creating multiple readings of Albenda's work. People Pattern stands in for the real thing (viewers) and shows how the relationship to others depends on proximity, interaction and dialogue. Like past works where the artist used words like "small" and "breathe" in warped form to alter and effect the exhibition space, Albenda creates individual forms to actualize -- not describe -- a space.

Essentially, the exhibition explores how our understanding of space infinitely expands. Here site constitutes the conflation of multiple realities, or the fiction Ellegood speaks of and what these artists address through its many significant associations. Obvious references, influences and effects from science fiction, theoretical texts and writings on architecture infuse these artists' interpretations of space, where binary oppositions are meaningless because fact and fiction now co-exist.

This manifests in Nina Bovasso and **Matthew Northridge's** drawings of urban landscapes. Exhibited together, Bovasso presents heaps of abstract lines, colours and shapes while Northridge references box packaging in Untitled (2002). His other contribution, New City (1998-2002), similarly incorporates packaging to expose the ongoing and futile desire to erect utopic structures. On a low square plinth set askew, his pyramidal topography made using abstract colour cardboard fragments of barcodes, skies and fruit hints at familiar images from consumer culture. In fact, readymade source material is recycled, reused, and repackaged into all of these fictional spatial models. Each form another cohesive vision not utopic or dystopic, real or virtual, but where the realities of city life exist in tandem with the many imagined "fictional" views that perpetuate its continued existence.

Polymathicstyrene (2000) and Bionicpac (2001), Shirley Tse's exquisitely cut blue styrofoam sculptures, suggest computer mainframes and switchboards that balance Matthew Meagher's room installation, complete with foam chair and mouse to help navigate projected images of a "styrofoam blandscape" (his terms). Both render negative spaces positive, desirable, even commercially viable, using packaging materials to track the ebbs and flows of consumer culture. Giving shape to our material world by protecting the objects we value, styrofoam literally formulates the basis that ensures the maintenance of a global capital network.

If these artists play on how our environment is "spatialized" by products from the consumer world, imperfection is also used as its own device. Most works are not complicit with advanced digital technology, despite feigning an aesthetic of its desired effect, and assert themselves as art, instead of architecture or design. Particularly through those artists who acknowledge the fallibility in human gesture pictorially or through the process of making their work, the relationship of the body to these fictive spaces is revealed as a silent subject.

The author is an artist and curator currently pursuing a Master's Degree at the Center for Curatorial Studies at Bard College.