JONATHAS DE ANDRADE (b. 1982, Macaé, Brazil) lives in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil and works with installations, videos, and photo research. His work explores constructs of love and the process of urbanization, with an emphasis on Brazil’s northeast region.

SAMY BAILDI (b. 1978, Brussels/Luxembourg, Democratic Republic of Congo) lives and works in Luxembourg. His works combine video, photography, and archival documents to explore architecture and the human body as traces of social history, sites of memory, and witnesses to operations of power.

LATOYA RUBY FRAZIER (b. 1986, Braddock, Pennsylvania) works in photography, video, and performance to build visual archives that address industrial (utiutu) expropriation, environmental justice, healthcare inequity, family, and communal history. She is currently an assistant professor of photography at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago.

MELANE SMITH (b. 1985, Porto, Portugal) lives and works in Mexico City. She produces installations, videos, films, photographs, and paintings that reflect her interest in the legacies of modernism and post-avant-garde movements as they manifested themselves in Latin America.

Exhibition checklist

1. MELANE SMITH
   Fordlandia, 2014
   Single-channel video with sound, 3642 min.
   Courtesy the artist and Galeria Nara Roesler.

2. JONATHAS DE ANDRADE
   Fordlandia, 2013
   Prints on acetate mounted on plexiglass glass
   Courtesy Galeria Nara Roesler.

3. SRESHITA RIT PREMNATH
   Plot, 2015
   Installation: 405 x 107 x 180 cm
   Comprising corrugated plastic, sand and iron on rubber, aluminium tubes, measuring tape
   Courtesy the artist and Gallery SKE, New Delhi.

4. SAMY BAILDI
   Essay on Urban Planning. Photo essay on urban planning from 1940 to the present day in the city of Lubumbashi, 2013
   Digital inkjet prints
   Courtesy the artist and Auto gallery, New York.

5. LATOYA RUBY FRAZIER
   United States Steel Clairton Coke Works, C.I.T.E and Monongahela River, 2013
   Series: A Desolation of Water
   Prints on plexiglass mounted on plexiglass, 2013-2015
   Archival pigment print
   Courtesy the artist and Michael Rein, Paris/Brussels.

6. Fifth Street Tavern and U.P.M.C. Braddock Hospital on Braddock Avenue, 2011
   Series: The Grey Area
   Gelatin silver print
   Courtesy the artist and Michael Rein, Paris/Brussels.

7. U.S.G. Edgar Thomson Plant, Mon Valley Works, Braddock Avenue, 2009
   Series: Norton of Family
   Gelatin silver print
   Courtesy the artist and Michael Rein, Paris/Brussels.

CREDITS

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Artist biographies

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Introduction

Presenting contemporary artworks across video, photography, and sculpture, So-called Utopias examines the intersection of utopian visions with postcolonial and postindustrial sites. Traversing the dense forests of the Amazon to the urban sprawl of Brazil, the works in this exhibition variously interrogate the use of architecture and urbanism to further social, political and economic ideals. Taken together, they expose tensions between recontextualized notions of utopian space and the stark reality of its physical manifestation.

The global impact of American industrialization is the subject of Melane Smith’s Fordlandia, an immersive video installation portraying the eponymous industrial town and rubber plantation built by America’s Industrialist Henry Ford in the 1920s. Ford controlled every part of Fordlandia, from enforcing a corporate lifestyle on its inhabitants to urbanizing the grounds within the Brazilian Amazon. Ultimately a failed business venture, in the years since its construction nature has slowly reclaimed the city, almost burying its remains in flora and fauna. Smith’s piece situates this dystopian landscape, pits the triumph of nature over mankind’s expansionist impulse.

In a selection of photographs, artist and activist LaToya Ruby Frazier documents her hometown of Braddock, a once thriving steel town in Pennsylvania. Frazier’s images depict the empty shells and ruins of buildings including a tavern, hospital and steel plants that once served Braddock’s inhabitants. These sites have not been indifferent to the change of fortunes in the town; rather they are touchstones of the decline of America’s industrial heartland.

Failure is an essential function of Jonathas de Andrade’s Tombamento, a sculptural work comprising 56 glass slides embedded with photographs of the ocean tide rising and falling around the monumental building of the Argos Yacht Club in northeast Brazil. Tombamento has a double meaning, deriving from the Portuguese verb for falling, breaking, and referring to the 1937 Brazilian law that established the process used to identify and protect built heritage. Meandering in single file through the gallery, individual slides stand precariously next to each other until a misstep or tremor forces them to topple. De Andrade’s work simultaneously reflects on how buildings approach, integrate, and accommodate nature within Brazil’s modernist tradition while also meditating on the gradual decay of this heritage over time.

Questions of architectural legacy consume Sreshta Rit Premnath’s Essay on Urban Planning. Combing past and present archival views of his hometown of Ludhiana in the Democratic Republic of Congo with images of specimens of fish and mosquitos, Premnath examines the remains of the city’s 500-meter-wide conurbation established as part of an urban plan created by Belgian colonialists in 1916. The conurbation’s width was determined by the maximum flying distance of malariacarriers. Here, architecture is revealed as a pretext for health, hygiene, and segregation in the colonial imagination.

Moving to recent urban developments in the global South, Sreshta Rit Premnath’s quasi-architectural installation explores the contradictory forces of globalization and nationalism. The work displays interwoven views of the Indian Pavilion at the 1964 New York World’s Fair and billboard advertising for a residential complex in 2004, with the billboard bearing the slogan: “New York Living in Bangalore.” In this work, two conflicting notions of utopia intersect: India as a global center with capitalist and cultural power and the nation that marks the country’s contemporary politics.

In a special presentation during the exhibition opening, Premnath will read a few short experimental texts that take up the question of labor in urban development as well as the projections of otherness that permeate utopian imaginings in so-called developed and developing countries.

It should be noted that linear patterns and the logic of the grid provide a shared visual language across a number of works in this exhibition. Presented as key organizing principles within the search for modernity, they suggest idealized architectural forms as well as the projections of otherness that permeate utopian imaginings in so-called developed and developing countries.

Featuring

Jonathas de Andrade
Sammy Balodi
LaToya Ruby Frazier
Sreshta Rit Premnath
Melanie Smith

Exhibition


Reception

November 20, 2015, 6–9 pm