

Exhibition: The Un-founded

For while now I have been entertaining the idea of bringing together some architectural structures set up in an anti-constructivist and somewhat anarchist way, thereby questioning the whole idea of a settled building and spatiality. When **Jelle Clarisse** recently presented the cardboard structures in **MARS** exhibit space, this idea evolved into an exhibition project. The paintings, drawings, sketches, collages and 3D works by **Jelle Clarisse**, **Antonio Cosentino**, **Can Aytekin** and **Mustafa Pancar** were selected within the framework of architecture and modernity, civil/monumental architecture and immigration; just as an "unfounded building" or "unfounded thought" would suggest, the title of the exhibition was inspired by the notions of roughness, temporariness and nomadism. What brings together the 3D works is that, fabricated out of already used up material and objects, they are all low-tech objects in opposition to the idea of a perfectly designed product. In an era of compulsive consumption, of ecological instability, and of recycling as a measure against these, – an era in which human life expectancy increases while objects and buildings become more and more ephemeral, – the artists have envisioned to use material in new and different forms and purposes, instead of transforming it into a rigid structure. Far from the architectural ideal of a noble, solid, sturdy and indifferent reality, the architectural sculptures and paintings are deliberately hypothetical, conjectural and frivolous; they care neither to exist persistently nor to reveal themselves with clear-cut precision. As such, they approximate the notion of "paper architecture" and roam around the very limits of creative work. The lack of concern for the reality of architectural structure highlights the meaninglessness of today's unabashed and expansionist notion of construction, and deconstructs the very act of construction.

Many architects are disappointed when they come to see how the houses they designed are inhabited: the houses are invaded and sullied by all sorts of objects. In early modern architecture advertisements, houses are, as it were, uninhabited; they are photographed with no people and almost no furniture in them. The very few objects, such as raincoats, pipes, and books, seem not to belong there. Yet objects are charged with memories, desire and fantasy. Since **Duchamp**, everyday objects have been viewed as "dream images" by the **Dadaists** and thence by the **Surrealists**. Similarly, setting up "light" structures with objects like cups, furniture, magazine pages, tin boxes, and used up cardboard, the artists in this exhibit explore the meaning and use of the object that was precisely left out by architecture.

P. Connerton claims that the act of remembering is always tied up with, or connected to, a particular place, and illustrates this by "monumental spaces" (war memorials, shrines, museums, etc.) and "local spaces" (houses, streets, civil architecture). In terms of bearing memories, locality outweighs monumental spaces, because the construction of a monument is mostly triggered by the desire to memorialize and by the fear of oblivion. The danger of being forgotten gives rise to monuments, and monuments bring about forgetfulness. As objects are used up more and more quickly in an age of mechanical reproduction, museums and memorials are erected in a morbidly compulsive way. Modernism expresses the contradictory character of the new conception of temporality: the museum culture was born out of the idea of constantly looking forward into the future while retaining the past only as souvenir. The works in the exhibit thematize the different ways in which monumental spaces as places of memory, and local spaces as bearers of cultural memory manifest themselves in processes of remembrance.

The works of **Jelle Clarisse** are comparable to plants that disrupt empty space in their organic growth, evolve, and finally stagnate and die. Like a vine spreading over the surface of a wall, or a spider web organically stretched over or almost floating into space, **Clarisse's unfounded** structures constitute one of the points of gravity of the exhibit. While explaining his use of ordinary wrapping materials such as package cardboard and paperboard, **Clarisse** refers to the notion of transience: "It is essential for me not only to build up my works enclosed in boundaries, but also to ruin and destroy them." Born and brought up in **Gent** in **Belgium**, **Clarisse's** works may be linked with the gothic structural construction form which probably persists in the depths of his memory. **A. Köksal** points out that Ancient geometry and perspective were forgotten in the Middle Ages, and that, in the same period, drawing as an architectural tool of representation had abandoned its function of reflecting physical reality. If, beyond its own constructed reality,

architecture had confined itself with that which is representable on a two-dimensional plane, the 12th and 13th century gothic architecture would not have existed. Medieval structures, whose construction spans decades, were generated instinctively – which explains their sculpture-like forms. Similarly produced throughout an improvisational process, **Clarisse's** works reach back into **Gothic** architecture by their unfinished and open character reminiscent of **A. Gaudi's** buildings. Clarisse's attitude thus falls right at the intersection of the exhibit's main motive of "transience" and the re-use of waste material.

In **Antonio Cosentino's** paintings, one finds a wealth of images distilled from everyday life, the depths of personal memory, and the visual culture of the artist's city. These images are organized in a fragmentary way on the pictorial surface, and depicted like the pieces of a narrative or a list of objects that can be read in its own right, – which reminds one of **G. Perec's** address descriptions or object inventories or **I. Calvino's** lists of books to read. In his most recent work, **Cosentino** emphasizes repetition: the amateurish brand and font on wrapping papers (cf. his work "Cemal the Butcher") or the infinite reiteration of the ceramic tiles which decorated many façades in the city for a while, all reflect the same gesture. The cyclic, repetitive and ornamental attitude, essential to the tradition of Oriental local arts, can in fact be traced on the façades in modern urban landscapes. In the mushroom growth of residential buildings in the 70's, this tendency to highlight ornamentation at the expense of structure is reflected in **Cosentino's** paintings in the guise of the formal traces of an "architecture of a wave of immigration".

While the shifting character of high-brow and low-brow art was being discussed in the 90's contemporary art milieu, **Cosentino** and his artist friends undertook, as it were, the archaeology of a gaze which brought subculture into question. It is from this period on that **Cosentino's** painting incorporated materials from the visual culture of our geography with letting one dominate the others: panels, signboards, wrappings and ceramic tiles... The artist's images embrace an expression that is dislocated and fragmentary, but also somehow holistic and repetitive, thereby breaking open a third window: a mnemonic space that is at once colorful and meditative... While his memory constantly operates like an archivist, the artist documents all sorts of written and visual data. In the work entitled "The Institute for the Readjustment of Clocks", we are faced with an architectural structure that always remains askew, rickety and dysfunctional. With its ill-conceived perspective and the absurd and random way in which it incorporates architectural elements, this structure is imbued with the irony of communities, institutions and cities that were modernized as a result of a top-down project lacking solid foundations. It is telling that the building in "The Institute for the Readjustment of Clocks" is depicted on an island, since utopian spaces have always been described as an *island* in literary works. The building of the institute symbolizes the utopia of the modern republic while sarcastically turning into a dystopia. The dysfunctional and Kafkaesk "building" described in **Ahmet Hamdi Tanpınar's** novel, *The Institute for the Readjustment of Clocks*, is indeed a metaphor; it is rather society itself that is dysfunctional.

In the painting entitled "Snack Bar Hotel", the perspective of the façade is central and has a single vanishing point, such that each window and opening offers a different line of sight. As in Far Eastern, Islamic and many other non-Western systems, **Cosentino** treats the image from many different perspectives. This mode of expression may be read as a critique of the mechanism of the modernist outlook that never fully settled in the East.

In the work, "Leisure", which brings together pickup pieces of wood, the viewer is faced with a modern city square. The buildings, which may well be malls, office blocks, congress halls or hotels, stack up into a "modern architecture of boxes". The mobile character of the pieces enables them to match differently and make up a different urban landscape each time, yet the loss of one piece does not spoil the whole. **Cosentino's** mobile and ludic setup once again reminds us of the obliviousness typical of modernity, by suggesting concepts such as the fleetingness of megacities and urban architecture, the loss of humane scale and localness, the superhuman speed and even consumption.

Mustafa Pancar's series, "Paths of Immigration", thematizes the modern buildings he photographed during his trip to **Munich**. Considering the fact that the worker immigration in the

60's started with Munich, **Pancar's** artistic gaze is also that of the people of his native land. While his earlier work dealt with the acts of middle and lower class urban people, in this series **Pancar** applies the attitude of figurative painting onto the stacks of buildings. Thanks to the collage technique, the buildings' soft and organic texture contrasts with their true geometrical forms. The modern buildings depicted from the imagery of an eye alienated from its surroundings follow a perspective that is far from perfect, yet the allure of the textures compensate this effect. As **Pancar's** buildings are sprinkled with gems of decorative gusto such as handicraft, colored paper and trinkets, they excite a sense of cheap taste. The instantaneous and hasty way in which the pieces of paper are patched together alleviates, lightens and transfigures the buildings before our very eyes. This stance lets **Pancar** conceptualize the idea of modern architecture precisely by distorting it. The magazine pages incorporated into his paintings gesture toward the fetishism of the world of media and advertisement, while the printed words on magazine pages refer to modernity's notion of history as well as to language. The artist's attitude in his oil paintings can be traced in his collages: nonchalant, experimental and contemptuous. As **Pancar** sorts our magazine pages according to their colors and shades, and then cuts them in thin strips, he seems to be in search for the right hue on his palette.

In his installation piece entitled "Kral Construction Ltd.", **Pancar** explores new montages on the meaning of used up furniture. Possible connections may be drawn between the shiftiness of second-hand objects that have lost their use-value, and notions of immigration, displacement and failure to settle. Transforming furniture such as closets, television tables and armchairs into buildings one can come across anywhere in Istanbul or Anatolia, he brings into question a nomadic society's provisional and hasty conception of construction. Fundamental elements of modern architecture such as transparency and the ample use of glass convey a sense of space where the inside and the outside are interpenetrating, and a sense of motion momentarily frozen in time resulting from, to use **Giedion's** phrase, a unique multifacetedness. In "Kral Construction Ltd." too, the use of plexiglass accentuates the transparency of the façade, and the cherry-picked images from magazines evoke a sense of frozen motion similar to the one described by Giedion.

In contrast to the questioning pursued by **Cosentino** and **Pancar** through subcultural civil architectural texture, **Can Aytekin** is interested in institutional buildings which may be counted among the major monuments of modern utopia. He works not only on modern idols which may be called architectural monuments, but also generally on shrines, monumental statues and the historically and ideologically determined forms they embody.

It is well-known that architects and artists have always come to use similar tools of representation and a similar language: perspective, models, two-dimensional designs, sketches, photos and, increasingly since the last decades, three-dimensional modeling and other digital techniques, as well as basic notions of form, color, texture, measure, proportion, light and shade... In order to get a preview of the monuments and statues most of which he has never seen, **Aytekin** makes drawings, sketches, and finally models of them to get acquainted with their forms. His work "Shrine" forges a skyline by juxtaposing many *monumental buildings* from different periods and cultures such as the **Temple of Jerusalem**, **Atatürk's Mausoleum**, and the **New York Guggenheim Museum**. Within this silhouette, a monumental building like the **Guggenheim Museum** may well be considered as a shrine, since museums today have assumed the role of temples. The range of cardboard and clay structures made out of objects of everyday use like plastic cups and toys mocks the seriousness and gravity implicit in the idea of a monument. Thinking as an archivist or a researcher, **Aytekin** abstracts the issue that intrigues him, then reduces it to one main chunk of thought, and finally starts collecting the images that correspond to that thought. As a result of a mental process which weaves together drawing and modeling, he takes hold of the action he really seeks: painting. In his work "Yellow Temple", **Aytekin** reduces the unique outline of the massive form of the **Guggenheim Museum** to a couple of curves on the canvas. The artist defines the act of painting as an extension of seeing, and, when asked how he paints, he replies: "By remembering." Without falling into nostalgia, the way to save the memory worn out by modern capitalism is precisely this: to remember.

Pinar Öğrenci