



Ward Shelley and Alex Schweder, *ReActor*, 2016, wood, concrete, household items, 44 x 8 x 8 feet [photo: Leslie Lyons]

Inside the gallery were sculptures by Cree-Métis artist Gabrielle Hill, whose work is similarly rooted in local histories and spaces. These two artists' works reflect the vital and potent space of anti-hegemonic discourse being forged by contemporary indigenous artists in the region. Hill's assemblages from the *Waste Lands* series (2013 – ongoing) bring together found objects from Vancouver's "interstitial spaces"—those subterranean wrinkles in the official urban fabric. Empty beer cans, rusting pipes, blankets, and wires join into unassuming but peculiarly seductive entities. Fittingly, many hovered in inconspicuous parts of the gallery—hung above our heads or tucked into a dim recess. These mangle formations revealed in an improvisatory aesthetic, evoking the droll play of David Hammons' sculptures. Typically, the logic of the assemblage elevates the repurposed object from mere material to art by foregrounding its formal value. With Hill, as with Hammons, the discarded, decaying, soiled, and broken resist the restraints of formalism: the objets trouvés retain the textures of a furtive, irreducible material surplus, meaningful precisely in their excess of the formal.

A sensual surplus also threaded through both the works of Melanie Gilligan and those of the artist duo Richard Ibghy & Marilou Lemmers. Gilligan, a Canadian artist working between London and New York, catapulted to ubiquity by her uncannily timely *Crisis in the Credit System*, which debuted at the height of the financial meltdown, in October 2008. Shown in Vancouver, however, was her recent science-fictional drama *The Common Sense* (2014), which imagines a world in which humans can physically sense each other's emotions. Gilligan's speculative fiction animates emotions as a potent social force and essentially dramatizes the thesis of affect theory, as succinctly put by Kathleen Stewart: "Power is a thing of the senses." The Quebec-based Ibghy and Lemmers indulge in material excess with *The Prophet* (2013–ongo-

ing), an installation of 500 or so handmade models of economic diagrams variously charting income, welfare, trade, debt, and even altruism and happiness. Since its conception, the work has continually accumulated new parts, all of them made of cheap commonplace materials in cheerful colors. These constructions are, in fact, appallingly imprecise, mathematically—they barely maintain their conceptual roof and constantly threaten to slide into their pure materiality. Ironically, the artists' horde of DIY models infiltrates economic abstractions with abstraction of a different kind: the model labeled "Probability of Disaster Following Political Revolution" resembles, rather aptly, a suprematist composition; whereas "Temporal Elasticity," if you stare long enough, begins to look like a miniature mock-up of an Olafur Eliasson installation.

In a show that began with Nicolson's intervention into local history, an obvious outlier was the New Delhi-based Raqs Media Collective. Projected onto a monumental screen was their video work *Re-Run* (2013), which restages a photograph by Henri Cartier-Bresson taken during the 1948 financial crisis in Shanghai. Raqs revives Cartier-Bresson's photograph, which show a sclerotic line of people waiting to collect their assets, as a moving image, evoking capital's temporal dimension in which value derives from flow. What drew this work together with the others in the show was not its topical content, as might be expected from the curatorial premise, but its sensual treatment of time: the video is slowed down to a barely perceptible speed, bringing forth a radical expansion of the moment. The other works in the show, whether by appropriation or speculation, likewise tested art's ability to evoke unruly forces that infect and lurk in the very space of rigid structures. If there was a concerted refusal to be found here, it was the refusal to turn away.

—Amy Luo

Alex Schweder + Ward Shelley: *ReActor*

Omi International Arts Center, Ghent, NY

To date, Ward Shelley and Alex Schweder have created five inhabitable sculptures. In each instance, they have employed a set of controls with the attention and care of a rigorous scientific experiment, all seemingly in hopes of arriving at a better understanding of the drives that choreograph human relationships. Their individual practices boast a multitude of projects that, in varying degrees, relate to this inquiry. Supported by Warren James at Omi International Arts Center | Architecture Omi, in Ghent, NY, with several performances, the most recent of which took place in May 2017, *ReActor* is the most recent in their series of performative, "social relationship" architectures—a burgeoning art historical category matured through Shelley's drawings, Schweder's theorizing, the curatorial work of Pedro Gadanho, and the writings of Agnieszka Gratzka.

The significance of *ReActor*, unlike Shelley and Schweder's previous collaborations, is its utter and complete contingency on the site. The artists appear determined in their effort to test pressing and fundamental phenomenological questions that inform our thinking on the nuances and nature of coexistence. The landscape and, perhaps even more importantly, the weather, in all its permutations, affect the behavior of the artwork in its totality.

Winding up the hill, visitors embark on a pilgrimage to find truth embedded in what might transpire between a building and its inhabitants. *ReActor*'s rectilinear box, lifted above ground level by a single column, colonizes the vista. Its patterning of colors—strips of black framing transparent walls that shelter planes of red, sky blue, and orange—suggests modernism as a relevant touch-point. Ludwig Mies van der Rohe's early houses come to mind. Until you get closer.

When I visited, on a blustery Sunday last fall, skies vacillated between overcast and blue, always with the wind howling and pushing the building, making it spin around at a dizzying speed. Although a rotating house is not a new idea, a home built for two that cycles 360 degrees at a velocity determined by the wind and at an incline affected by the movements of its inhabitants would seem to be. Buckminster Fuller's Dymaxion House and the many subsequent architectural iterations of this concept were designed to efficiently capture and use the power of the sun and maximize enjoyment. These aims do not appear to drive Schweder and Shelley.

Since their first collaboration, *Flatland* (2007), the artists have worn a distinctive uniform for their performative appearances. This costuming is paramount to the project of delineating subject and object/inhabitant, and building/performer and stage. Whereas *Flatland* involved a group of six people inhabiting a narrow, multistoried home, testing the development of community in the face of interpersonal relationships within extremely rigid architectural, physical constraints, Shelley and Schweder's four subsequent endeavors have taken form

exclusively as inhabitable sculptures. In each instance, the artists have delved into different aspects of human interdependence and coexistence.

Schweder and Shelley wear orange and red jumpsuits. Although it is tempting to draw allusions to prison life as related to domestic life, that reading seems inaccurate. Instead, what is afoot is something more closely related to the stabilizing influence of power in the context of social intimacy. Approaching *ReActor*, walking around it, and experiencing the effect of it dipping to the ground, one end at a time, which allows for erratic conversations with the performers, collectively feels almost religious. Dressed in spare uniforms, the artists move meditatively through the building. So long as the winds are in agreement, Shelley and Schweder can choreograph exchanges between the building, the pilgrim, and the artist. But the winds abide by their own laws.

The modular aesthetic of *ReActor* is achieved through the use of readymade construction materials—standardized sheets of plywood and Plexiglas. At the structure's center is the column that contains the requisite plumbing systems and, nearby, the entrance and exit hatch. Built with the efficiency of a ship destined for turbulent waters, the kitchen surfaces unfold to provide counter space, cooking appliances, and a water source. Pots and pans are magnetic to ensure they can be safely secured in place. The residence is framed by porches at each end. Arrayed symmetrically away from the columnar center are two bedrooms, two studies, and then the outdoor spaces. Unlike Shelley and Schweder's earlier projects, such as *Stability* (2009), *Counterweight Roommate* (2011), or *In Orbit* (2014), *ReActor* does not demand extreme interpersonal negotiation. In *Counterweight Roommate*, for instance, in order for one inhabitant to cook dinner, the other had to retreat to the bathroom. As Heraclitus mused (ca. 500 BCE), "All things come into being through opposition, and all are in flux like a river."

The sumptuous scene at Omi, set in the rolling hills of the Hudson Valley, is a dreamscape of architectural propositions. Just as *ReActor* moves its artists in space, viewers, too, are moved through a very strange process. The work's relationship to the sky and the ground sets domesticity in a profound context. The tensions inherent in the artists' earlier collaborations seem to have been switched out for an engagement with the sublime. In previous iterations of their architectural work, the haptic was somehow extracted, or perhaps simply abstracted, through the mechanics of everyday life. In this work, there is a palpable intimacy. Yet, perhaps by virtue of its landscape, *ReActor* moves well beyond long-standing discussions tackling domesticity and surveillance, as these issues have been elevated by such architects as the visionary duo Liz Diller and Ricardo Scofidio. Their long-standing inquiry has moved into a new age, organized by age-old considerations that complicate the ties between subject and object, bodies and buildings, to suggest the presence and power of nature, and specifically site, as determinate factors in design and life.

—Yasmeen Siddiqui