

LAURA GONZALEZ

## CITIES THAT FOLD IN ON THEMSELVES

Laura Gonzalez is a visual artist and a research lecturer.

Her practice encompasses drawing, photography, and sculpture and her work has been exhibited in the UK, Spain and Portugal. When she is not following Freud, Lacan and Marx's footsteps with her camera, she lectures postgraduate students at the Glasgow School of Art.

She is currently immersed in an interdisciplinary project that investigates psychoanalytic approaches to making and understanding objects of seduction within the fields of fine art, consumption studies and material culture. She has contributed to debates around knowledge production in the creative disciplines.

Her research includes an examination of parallels between artistic and analytic practices, a study of Manolo Blahnik's shoes as objects of desire and the creation of a psychoanalytically inspired *Discourse of the Artefact*, a framework enabling the circulation of questions and answers through a relational approach to artworks.

In his book on a fellow French philosopher, Gilles Deleuze wrote: 'the outside is not a fixed limit but a moving matter animated by peristaltic movements, folds and foldings that together make up an inside: they are not something other than the outside, but precisely the inside of the outside.' Folds, understood in this way, mark our experience of urban spaces. Home makeover television shows popularly exemplify this: when they say that they want to bring the garden into the living room, they mean they want to create a fold in our experience of space, a way of making sense of the wild outside in the cosy inside represented by the home. Deleuze's fold is, of course, also a metaphor for how we approach subjectivity, the connection between our inner life, and our relation to the other.

Cities are places for leisure and pleasure, for delight and enchantment. We play, we live, we work in them. Yet, they are also the locus of anxiety. This is evidenced not only in the relation between people, but architecturally: car parks, back alleyways, disused plots, scaffolding, defaced urban furniture, corners where people stand with no visible purpose heighten our sense of alertness in the face of potential conflict. It is also undeniable that cities are very creative, with an array of opportunities for artists to show and share.

At the PM Gallery & House, we find two types of spaces, common in any western metropolis: first, the safe space of the gallery; then, the more unsettling public home. In my short text, so far, I have termed the

home both cosy and unsettling and, although this may seem paradoxical, it is no mistake. Indeed, Sigmund Freud's original word for what in English we know as the uncanny was *das unheimlich*, literally the unhomey, referring to something well known that has, suddenly, been rendered strange. Each of the seven artists in *Urban Origami* explores aspects of the uncanny, as found in the cities we know or imagine. As they do it, the insides are turned out, unfolded.

Nowhere is my statement more verifiable than in the work of **Haegue Yang**. Just the titles and concepts explored in her video trilogy show the mysteries of the fold and the uncanny perfectly: while *squandering negative spaces* is what cities are made of, *unfolding spaces* are the task of the artist – in the gallery, the home or outside – by means of the restrained courage she elegantly proposes. In the almost accidentally beautiful *Holiday Story*, she approaches yet another contradiction, that of the relationship between work, as labour, and holiday, as deferred gratification.

Humour and a certain satire mix with a social and ecological conscience in **Leo Fitzmaurice's** work. His arrangements of flyers forming carpets update traditions where flowers are used instead. Yet, he recycles them, sourcing leftover, excess and out of date material from art marketing distributors, printers and recyclers. Sometimes, he also re-uses them from previous installations. A sustainable approach does not cloud his aesthetic judgment, however, so if he has made a choice on colour and subject matter but

the material is not readily available from suppliers, he ventures into the city and collects the flyers, like we do when we are interested in them. The critique of labour, of the entertainment and information industries, and of waste is present in his exquisite and intelligent work.

**Jools Johnson** and **Jost Münster**, like Fitzmaurice, have the environment in mind, but, this time, they approach it through the poetic dimensions of the disused. Johnson explores the auratic and the spiritual in the experience of finding ourselves drawn to the information and light networks in cities. These irradiate, thus changing the space surrounding us, mesmerising us, making us think. Not in vain he asks the ultimate existential question: *Will anyone miss me..?* This work is a pathos-filled cry not to be thrown into the oblivion of time (through death and forgetting), or space (in crowds), and it rightfully stands out.

Münster also asks questions, but this time, grounded in the materiality and objecthood of the city and its architecture. The elements that make the things we know and use are the focus of our gaze and he shows, through a play of balance and placement, a different way of seeing them, one that is mischievous and industrious at the same time.

Below: **Jools Johnson**  
*God Lives in Detail IX*, 2009.  
Recycled Computer Parts.  
11 x 31 x 28 cm.



In her video *Phi Building* and her *Untitled* light boxes, *Zip and Blue*, **Elisa Sighicelli** explores that most uncanny of experiences in a city: the night, interrupted by bursts of light, where the beams hit, or are shaped by, the architecture. This is a world of shadows and the concealed, but also of brightness, seduction and unparalleled beauty, where the homely and the unhomey fold.

**Gaia Persico's** animations and drawings speak of the intimate connectedness of the world's urban spaces. In her work, a city could be any and all cities. Yet, if looked at closely, there are moments of recognition, affirming that she was there. There is also a sense of marveling at surroundings, a contemplation that is not devoid of a subjective point of view. Her *Lonely Planet* book is consciously placed in the bedroom of the house: it conjures our dreams – or nightmares – of the places she represents, calling for our fantasy image of them. And the fantasy, in this case, is a shared one.

With his modern, lush palaces, created with everyday materials, **Matthew Houlding** also asks of us that we fantasise, emphasising not only architecture but lifestyle as well. His colourful and precise works are tongue-in-cheek critiques of the built environment and its surrounding space. We are asked to think and consider what our ideas – and ideals – of tropics, the ocean, paradise and social heaven are, while he gives them form. His works are suspended in time, past, present and futuristic at the same time, and, thus, eternal. In this way, they offer a convincing backdrop for our internal narratives. They put our imaginary to work and give us, as viewers, a chance to inhabit them.

With Houlding and his fabulous dwellings, the exhibition comes to a full circle, delineating its perimeter: labour, sustainability, the existential, the material, night, travel, and fantasies fold in on each other. *Urban Origami's* visual meditation makes visible political positions, and our innermost thoughts and desires melt into each other in a coherent, yet critical, embrace. This is what cities do to us.