

February 2009
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

MoCP

Museum of
Contemporary Photography

COLUMBIA COLLEGE CHICAGO
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THE EDGE OF INTENT
May 1 - July 5, 2009

Work by:
Liset Castillo
Dionisio González
Andrew Harrison
Tim Long
David Maisel
Simon Menner
Danielle Roney
Christina Seely
Eric Smith
Joel Sternfeld

RELATED EVENTS:

Opening reception
May 1, 2009, 5 – 7pm

Curator's Tour and Artist Talk
Natasha Egan with Christina Seely, Tim Long and Andrew Harrison
May 1, 2009, 5pm @ MoCP

Panel Discussion: Saskia Sassen & Simon Menner
May 27, 2009, 6:30pm @ MoCP
In conjunction with the Chicago Council on Global Affairs, the MoCP welcomes Saskia Sassen, the Robert S. Lynd Professor of Sociology at Columbia University (NYC), and exhibiting artist Simon Menner for a panel discussion on urban planning and sustainable human settlements. Reservations required.

Chicago — The Museum of Contemporary Photography at Columbia College Chicago is proud to present *The Edge of Intent*, an exhibition looking at the utopian aspirations of urban planners, and how their idealistic visions sometimes become static and incapable of adapting to changing environments and systems. The works in this exhibition warn us of the hazards of “thinking big,” while urging us to consider the centrality of dynamism in successful urban design. *The Edge of Intent* opens May 1, 2009 and runs through July 5, 2009.

The Edge of Intent exhibition at the Museum of Contemporary Photography coincides with the centennial celebration of Daniel Burnham’s 1909 plan for the city of Chicago. The exhibition will reflect the centennial celebration’s statement of “advancing bold new plans” by encouraging and inspiring viewers to look at the ways urban planning has been instituted in a variety of settings and to learn from the past successes or failures in implementing these plans. By looking through the unique lens these artists provide in their work, the exhibition will challenge the audience to see beyond existing notions of a city’s layout and to consider the effects a working plan can have upon an area’s inhabitants, and vice-versa.

The exhibition will present the work of ten artists whose works offer diverse perspectives on urban planning:

Liset Castillo's (Cuban, b. 1974) photographs of sand castles document her construction of a fictitious city, a utopian microcosm where particular aspects of different world civilizations converge and fuse in the universal experience of creation and destruction. Castillo builds intricate sand castles collapsing different world civilizations and architectural monuments, such as the Taj Mahal, the Coliseum, the Vatican, the Great Wall of China, Wright's Guggenheim in New York, Rio's monumental Christ the Redeemer and the Empire State Building. Utilizing projections, drawings, her hands, and a trowel, among other tools, Castillo builds, photographs, destroys, and photographs again her sand sculptures in her backyard in Brooklyn. The resulting images resemble dilapidated cities surrounded by rubble, mountains, and craggy terrain.

Dionisio González (Spanish, b. 1965) pieces together images of the *favelas*, or shanty towns, of São Paulo, Brazil into long panoramas to which he adds bits and pieces of pristine, contemporary architecture. Very much a reaction against the government project Proyecto Cingapura, a re-urbanization scheme meant to provide better living conditions to the *favela* residents that has recently been criticized for not maintaining its buildings and not living up to its goals, González conceives of his works as proposals for new social centers. Instead of imposing a systematic, orderly structure from an outside urban planner, González's structures reflect the spatial order that already exists in these neighborhoods, one that is chaotic and in flux.

Andrew Harrison's (American, b. 1970) work explores the utopian aspects of urban planning by reconstructing the current layout of cities and states into unobtainable and fictional settings. Through the systematic transformation of idealized forms into maps, models, photographs, and short films, his work simultaneously engages the viewer with the history of utopian production and the unfolding of the utopian now. Focusing specifically on the Burnham plan for this exhibition he will continue his investigation of remapping the Garden State of New Jersey, his home state, into the idealized formation of Burnham's 1909 Plan of Chicago. This map will be added to his collection of re-contextualized maps of New Jersey as utopian.

From a kayak and along the shore, **Tim Long** (American, b. 1951) records the balance between industry and recreation and the transition from urban to rural along the Illinois Waterway to the Mississippi River. Initially flowing east into Lake Michigan, the Chicago River was reversed in 1900 by the Sanitary District of Chicago due to the massive amounts of sewage and pollution that were poured into the river from industrial sources. While the pollution remains a constant to this day, Long's photographs document the awkward proximity of leisure and commerce in this environment.

Seen from the air, **David Maisel's** (American, b. 1961) *The Lake Project* photographs of the Owens Valley in southeastern California appear otherworldly. The history of this region is the stuff of California legend: a story of engineers, politicians, and big land owners working together to divert water to the rapidly growing desert city of Los Angeles, generating a thriving agricultural industry and an environmental disaster in the process. Serving as a coda to *The Lake Project*, Maisel's *Oblivion* series records Los Angeles from overhead as a self-generating, self-replicating force that exists outside nature.

Simon Menner's (German, b. 1978) project *Metacity* records the informal structures of the homeless in the cities of Bombay, Chicago, and Paris while asking whether or not there exists connecting elements to this kind of poverty in different cities around the globe. Menner isn't as interested in documenting the homeless existing in the classic slums of third world countries, but more in the single homeless person and how they inhabit the modern city.

Danielle Roney's (American, 1968) three-channel video installation *eGoli* imagines a fantastical landscape in a mythical "city of gold" (once a sobriquet for Johannesburg, South Africa). The Atlanta- and Beijing-based artist conducts extensive research on urban centers to create her multimedia projects. In *eGoli*, Roney utilizes imagery from the real African countryside and Johannesburg's environs to craft a hyperreal, digitized cyber-city that evokes the city's struggles and its place in a growing global community.

Christina Seely's (American, b. 1976) series *Lux* examines the disconnect between the immense beauty created by man-made light through satellite maps of the world at night and the carbon emissions that are created by the world's wealthiest countries which show up as the brightest areas on the map. The three regions most visible in the series from NASA images are the United States, Western Europe and Japan. The

inclusion of Seely's work in the exhibition explores the realities faced when dealing with the infrastructure of these urban environments and the consequences resulting from the excessive energy requirements.

Eric Smith's (American, b. 1947) photographs record the Michigan Central Train Station in Detroit, once a vibrant hub of transportation, but now an abandoned, neglected and graffiti-strewn monument to Detroit's past. Built in 1913 in the Beaux Arts Style and closed in 1988, the building's marble walls and Doric columns are solidly intact and the space retains its majestic scale. Smith uses digital techniques to depict the setting with a sensuous, intensified luminosity, giving resemblance to meticulously painted illustrations. On a cursory view his photographs can easily be taken for inventive depictions of a mythical setting.

Over the past few years, artist **Joel Sternfeld** (American, b. 1944) has documented the degraded landscape of Manhattan's High Line — the abandoned elevated tracks that run between the West Village and 34th Street. Originally built in 1934, the existence of the derelict tracks has caused great debate in a city trying to balance a high demand for real estate development and the need for open space. Its beauty is in part generated by the marks left on it from the fractured social history of its surroundings, here the long history of New York as a point of departure and arrival for goods and people.

MoCP SPONSORS

The exhibitions, presentations, and related programs of the MoCP are sponsored in part by the Institute of Museum and Library Services; After School Matters; the Lannan Foundation; the Lloyd A. Fry Foundation; the Illinois Arts Council, a state agency; the National Endowment for the Arts; the Lange Burk Fund; the Palmer Foundation; U.S. Bank; The Mayer and Morris Kaplan Family Foundation; American Airlines, the official airline of the MoCP; and our members. *The Edge of Intent* is co-presented by the Goethe Institut-Chicago.

ABOUT MOCP

The Museum of Contemporary Photography (MoCP), a resident organization of Columbia College Chicago, is the only museum in the Midwest with an exclusive commitment to the medium of photography. By presenting projects and exhibitions that embrace a wide range of contemporary aesthetics and technologies, the Museum strives to communicate the value and significance of photographic images as expressions of human thought, imagination, and creativity.

ABOUT THE CURATOR

Natasha Egan, the museum's Associate Director and Curator has organized dozens of international and national exhibitions and has contributed essays to numerous publications and magazines. In addition, she teaches in the photography department at Columbia College Chicago and juries local and national exhibitions.

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IMAGE:

Liset Castillo, *Pain Is Universal but So Is Hope* (White), 2007, museum purchase