

Strategies of Engagement

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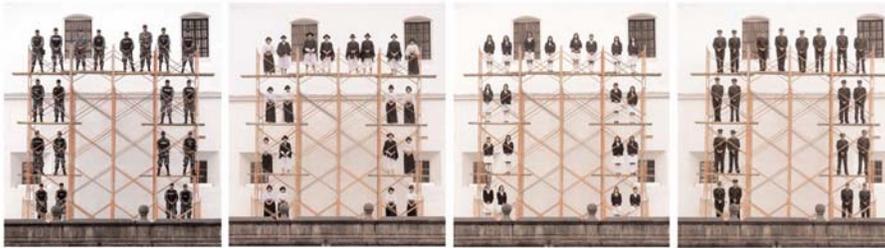
The spectacle is not a collection of images, but a social relation among people, mediated by images.

Guy Debord, Society of the Spectacle, 1967

The contemporary city rises vertically with vast speed and volume, and in extensive horizontal agglomerations. Entities, which are neither traditionally urban nor rural, expand beyond corporate limits with commercial strips and highways extending beyond the vacant periphery connecting shopping malls while older cities fade, having lost their economic reason for being. Recalling Situationist writings and projects of the 50's and 60's, artists and architects have chosen sites amidst this complex urban field, operating within architecture that to varying degrees can be understood as impermanent.

Architecture and constructed space have always created a theatre for social life and a participated in the narrative, both backdrop and performer. Temporary architectural interventions draw upon this inherent quality and promote their own spectacle. They seek to address the city as it is found as well as it's themed, glossy past. Working within spaces variously designated as heroic, public or marginal, temporary structures propose ways to reclaim and redefine them. By altering the fixed view, they suggest a changed reception of the city and other forms of civic engagement.

Architecture and art practice can function critically in reflecting social and physical aspects of the city. This is evident in the following site-specific installations in the Miami Art Project in Florida, the Adelaide Festival in Australia and the Quito, Biennial in Ecuador as well as in recent photographic work on domestic space from the publication, Households, 2006. These projects situate the viewer in a different relationship to architecture, if only in temporary ways and document more multiple and complex readings of contemporary urban life.



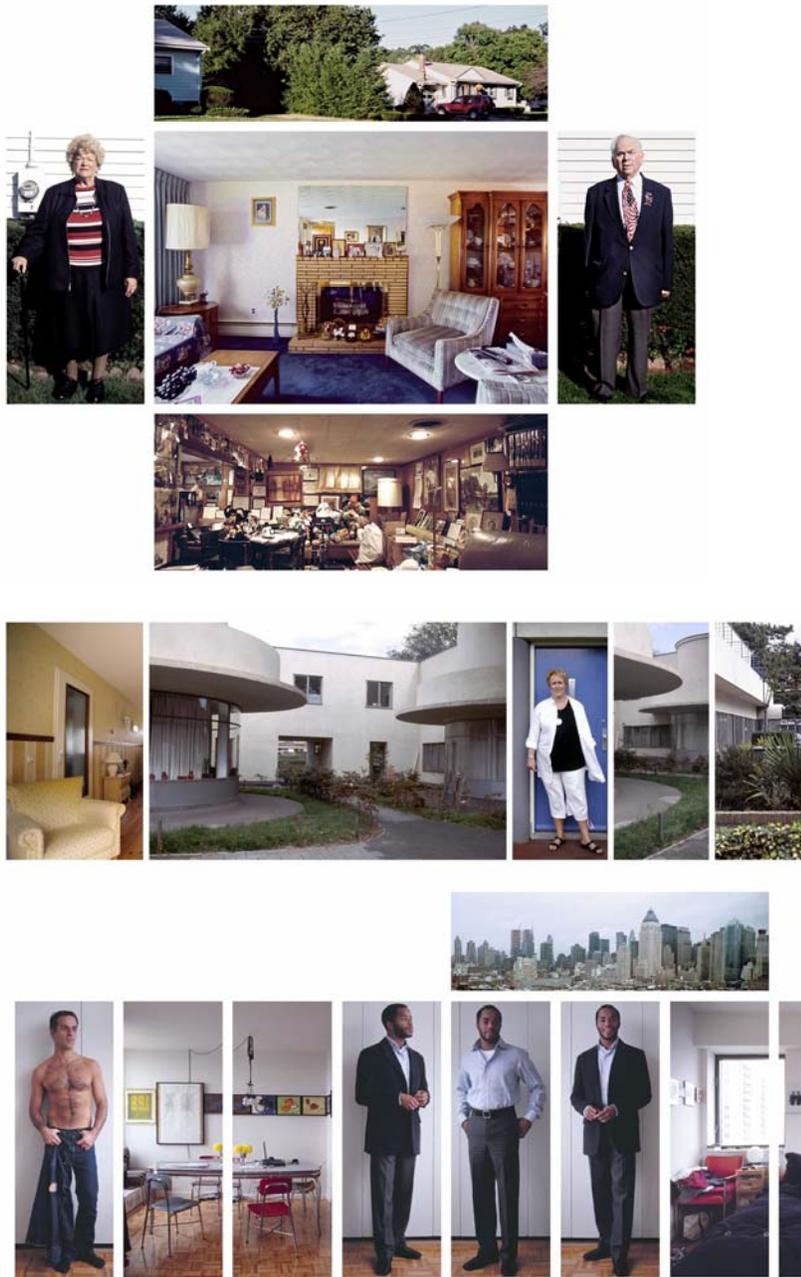
ORDERS, installation, 2006

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Quito Biennial: Visible Cities, 2006, Quito, Ecuador

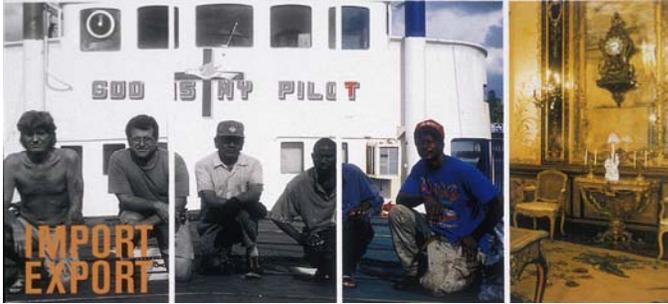
A fixed scaffold with four horizontal levels was erected and placed in front of the blank exterior of the church of San Francisco, the largest of the four monastic complexes around which the Spanish colonial city was built. The project refers to the history of colonization and conversion in the city and parallels with the pervasiveness of contemporary international commerce.

A variety of people who populate the city today were asked to pose in groups of twenty on the standard painted metal construction scaffolding found on the city streets. These included a folkloric dance troupe, school girls in blue and white uniforms, and police, (who are everywhere in the plazas), dressed in black and white camouflage jumpsuits with guns and also green serge formal uniforms with ceremonial sabers. The figures were arranged to suggest archways in the proscenium-like scaffold. The figures were photographed frontally from a second set of scaffolds in the plaza to capture the populated arches. The temporary scaffolding created the space for a series of brief formal tableaux and recalls the historic incorporation of Quechua figures and other aspects of indigenous culture in the art and architecture of the colonial period.



Households
 Mark Robbins
 Monacelli Press, 2006

The homes in Households are apartments, cottages, mansions, log cabins, and even a reused storage tank in the United States and the Netherlands. The inhabitants run the gambit from Architects to landscape architects, curators, doctors, dancers and hairdressers. Some of the spaces are rented, others owned, others borrowed. The houses and apartments mirror in varying degrees the residents' attention to the body, fashion, and decor. In both content and format, these images borrow from glossy fitness and home design magazines, and mass-market clothing catalogues. Taken as a series the images illustrate a complex view of families and domestic space.



IMPORT/EXPORT

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Installation, Miami Art Project 2000-1, Miami FL

A series of billboards were produced in response to the neighborhoods lining the Miami River. Now a more marginal residential and commercial corridor, the site has a rich ethnic history of power, ownership and succession -- from Native American to Spanish to English and back to Spanish -- which mirrors that of the city of Miami.

The Haitian, Dominican, and Salvadoran crews that work on the river's small, shallow-draft port were photographed in the format of class pictures, and these are matched with images of the city of Miami from tourist brochures: the gleaming skyline, a pleasure cruiser in the grand Port of Miami, and a gilded baroque interior from the '20's. The billboards were posted throughout the varied neighborhoods that flank the river, made up of Cuban, African-American and Anglo residents, introducing the newest immigrants into the more established colonies.