

# The City

## Contemporary Views of the Built Environment

For the last 30 years Yvonne Jacquette has depicted the city from on high—viewing the city from tall buildings and aircraft. Her view *Herald Square Composite II*, 1993, visually describes the saturated colors and lights of midtown at the intersection of Broadway, Sixth Avenue and 34th Street and the glitter of the city at night. Named for the now defunct New York newspaper, the small park in the square, is only partially visible in the painting. Street traffic, the garish façade of the Manhattan Mall, and the glowing logo of Toys R Us dominate the scene. Escalators with decorative lights are visible from inside the Mall and the traffic reflects on its exterior, along with line drawings of cars and buses in this composite view.

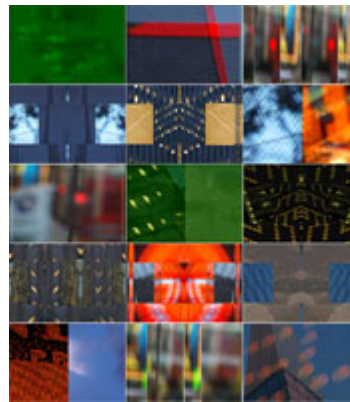
Just a few blocks away the lights, buildings, and bustle of 42nd Street provide the elements of Monika Bravo's video projection *Wind-Eye*, 2001. Kaleidoscopic geometry of fragmented skyscrapers contrasts with the eerie green images of people walking along sidewalks captured in an infrared night shot. Music accompanying the video is allegro and the images, faceted and jewel-like, are sequenced to move like the wind.

The complexity of the city is visually apparent in Michael Najjar's multi-layered photographic prints. Like Fritz Lang whose 1926 film *Metropolis* envisioned the futuristic city, Najjar's *Netropolis* series carries the notion a step further, positing the city as a locus of computer networks and digital information. In *Netropolis/Shanghai*, 2003, he photographed from the tallest building in the city of Shanghai. Using a conventional camera, Najjar shot to the north, south, east and west. These images were converted to digital files and combined into a single image that was manipulated on the computer. In the final stage the work is converted back and produced as a traditional silver gelatin print. The resulting image gives the viewer a sense of seeing through time.

Whether it be Germans dressing as Native Americans or the London Bridge replicated in Arizona, the irony of "transported" places and hybrid cultures provides a subtext running throughout the work of Andrea Robbins and Max Becher. In the series *St. Pierre & Miquelon* they have chosen to photograph a French village that is 20 miles off the coast of Newfoundland, Canada and 3000 miles from France. Settled in the 17th century, the quaint village depicted in *St. Pierre & Miquelon: View South*,



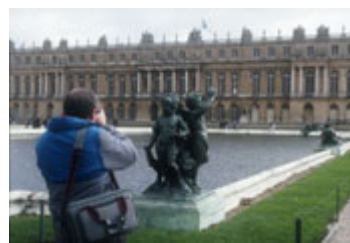
**Yvonne Jacquette**  
*Herald Square Composite II, 1993*



**Monika Bravo**  
*Wind-Eye, 2001*



**Michael Najjar**  
*Netropolis/Shanghai, 2003*



**Terry Towery**  
*Kodaculturalismo and The Transnational Tourist's eye AKA Pictures from a Trip, 1984-2005*



**Andrea Robbins and Max Becher**  
*St. Pierre & Miquelon: View South, 2003*

2003, is French territory that uses European electrical standards, video formats, cars, and the Euro, despite its North American location.

From the Duomo in Florence to the Eiffel Tower in Paris and the Elephant House at the Bronx Zoo, cities and their monuments are tourist destinations in Terry Towery's *Kodaculturalism and The Transnational Tourist's Eye AKA Pictures from a Trip, 1984-2005*. For over twenty years Towery has documented the rituals "vernacular amateur photography," specifically the tourist snapshot, throughout the world. These images record the visit and proclaim the person was actually there. This computer-based project juxtaposes two photographs, snapshot size, on the screen in an ever changing, random sequence and offers an interesting study of what people do in front of and behind the camera.

Kahn and Selesnick are storytellers. In earlier photographs they have woven tales of great expeditions with themselves and their friends in costume, photographed against expansive, panoramic landscapes. In the *City of Salt* series their narrative is a work in progress. Set somewhere in the East, the fantasy city they have created with its desert locale and exotic buildings is photographed from small terracotta models and digitally combined with the figures that move throughout the city streets—defiant of the rules of perspective.

Benjamin Edward's vision of the contemporary city embodies a type of consumer utopianism, a place where fast food franchises and corporate logos merge seamlessly with townhouses and park benches. The cities in Edward's more recent work, like *The Charms of Dynamism, 2003*, are not specific places. Constructed in a rigidly articulated perspective space and a "cool" pallet of blues and grays, this town's spotless un-peopled streets, and uninterrupted blue sky suggest a digitally idealized version of the American cityscape.

Known for his grand scale architectural murals, Richard Haas transforms city spaces with trompe l'oeil illusions. His work is represented in this exhibition with a print documenting the transformation of the exterior of the Edison Brothers Stores in St. Louis as well as a study for one of its details, the figure of Peace, that is two hundred feet high on the actual building. The print, a triptych, not only depicts the building's rich architectural details including obelisks, pediments, and sculptural elements from three elevations but also provides a guide to the sources for the design's details. The sources range from a sculptural detail taken from the work of Lorado Taft from the 1904 St. Louis World's Fair to a terracotta angel from a Louis Sullivan building in New York. The print also



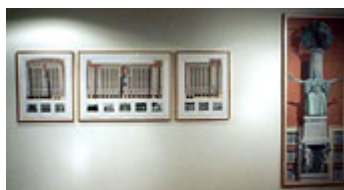
**Kahn and Selesnick**  
*Two Streets from City of Salt Series,*  
2003



**Thomas Lollar**  
*Berlin Marble Map, 2005*



**Benjamin Edwards**  
*The Charms of Dynamism, 2003*



**Richard Haas**  
*The Edison Brothers Stores, St. Louis MO*  
*(Architectural Facades Portfolio), 1989*



**Sze Tsung Leong**  
*Chunshu, Xuanwu District, Beijing,*  
2004

shows the factory-like building before it was transformed.

Thomas Lollar has created a map of Berlin in the style of the Severan Marble Plan of Rome, a colossal (60 x 43 feet) third century diagram detailing the ground plan of every building in the city. Based on the topography of Berlin, as well as the imagination, Lollar's *Berlin Marble Map*, 2005, describes the area around Museum Island, the Rhine River and Unter den Linden Avenue. In a related work *Rotes Berlin*, 2004, Lollar has created small terracotta models of buildings in Berlin—some are based on well known landmarks such as the Brandenburg Gates and the Red Town Hall; others are inventions.

Sze Tsung Leong has documented the dramatic impact of urbanization on the landscapes of China from the cities of Beijing and Shanghai to those villages being removed to create the Three Gorges Dam. *Chunshu, Xuanwu District, Beijing*, 2004, depicts a neighborhood where buildings date from the Qing Dynasty (1644-1912) with some as early as the Yuan Dynasty (1264-1368). Now an area in transition as traditional structures are being cleared to make way for new high rises, it was once a neighborhood where scholars preparing for the official examinations would stay while in Beijing. This photograph captures images of old China and the new, with buildings that could be found anywhere in the world. It is an image of both progress and loss.

Shimon Attie marks the loss of Jewish neighborhoods in WWII Berlin by recreating, in part, the street life of those neighborhoods. Using archival photographs, he projects these images onto the buildings as they exist now. He works at night with generators and high power projectors, allowing the viewer to see through time from the present to the past. *Joachimstrasse 11a, Berlin*, 2003, depicts a café with its patrons and a bird shop. He conceives of this process as a short-term performance event that is documented in photographs. In 1998 he worked on New York's Lower East Side, using projected texts based on historical materials and interviews with neighborhood residents to focus on past immigrations.

Carlos Vega's *The Cross Bronx Expressway*, 2002, depicts one of the most infamous stretches of highway in New York City. Perennially an item in the traffic reports on the local news, it is also the Robert Moses road that created a gash through the Bronx, bisecting neighborhoods and disrupting community life. Vega works on top of a ground of collaged papers—letters, notes, or ledger pages—found in flea markets or through friends. For Vega these fragments suggest people's lives



**Shimon Attie**  
*Joachimstrasse 11a, Berlin, 2003*



**Carlos Vega**  
*The Cross Bronx Expressway, 2002*



**Bob Knox**  
*Harbor Freeway, 2003*



**Jane Dickson**  
*Green Tunnel, 2004*

and histories and now, for him, they are also associated with the memory of papers blown across Brooklyn following the attacks on the World Trade Center. In *The Cross Bronx Expressway* the pages are from a school composition book. His Bronx view, seen from a high perspective, is surprisingly rendered in pastels.



**Red Grooms**  
*Loop the Loop*, 2004

Harbor Freeway in Los Angeles County, California is the perfect West Coast counterpart to the Cross Bronx Expressway, slicing through neighborhoods and heavily congested. Bob Knox's *Harbor Freeway*, 2003, painted in grisaille is a cacophony of activities. At the distance it is a thoroughly convincing photo-based rendering of a densely populated microcosm. On close inspection quirky details begin to emerge—eyes and smiling faces, whimsical curlicues, and phantom highway lanes that begin and end at will. Knox began his career as an illustrator and his work has regularly been seen on the covers of *The New Yorker*.

Jane Dickson's *Green Tunnel* is from a series that features highways, roadside motels, bridges, and tunnels—New York's entrances and exits—the Manhattan Bridge, the Lincoln Tunnel, among them. Dickson often uses non-traditional materials such as sandpaper, carpet or vinyl, for the surface of her paintings, providing unusual textural possibilities as well as real world references. In this instance the surface is Astroturf and its interaction with the paint loaded brush produces a pixilated effect. The shiny plastic of the Astroturf lends an eerie green glow that seems to perfectly capture the florescent lighting and exhaust filled atmosphere of tunnels. Cars and vans arch around a curve, traveling deeper into the claustrophobic tube with their taillights glowing.

Anyone who has ever been stuck on a traffic-snarled highway can easily relate to the frenetic city scene in Red Grooms' fiberglass bas-relief *Loop the Loop*. As always Grooms' imagery is colorful and vivacious. Cars, trucks, and taxis—bumper to bumper—arc and curl on a roadway that looks like a carnival ride while pedestrians move along the sidewalks nearby. The scene lends comic relief to the jammed New York City streets.

The Empire State Building is one of the familiar architectural icons that John Kirchner examines in a recent series. Once the tallest building in the world, it has taken on a mythical stature. Dramatic foreshortening exaggerates the scale and grandeur of the building in *Empire+110*, 2004, but so do the additional floors in this manipulated photograph. It's hard not to see this image as a need to restore the building to its former place in the pantheon of world architecture and in some way,



**John Kirchner**  
*Empire+110*, 2004

compensate for the loss of the twin towers.

Known for his long-exposures that can sometimes take hours, Hiroshi Sugimoto's photographs offer a conceptual recording of an essence rather than a fleeting moment in time. In *United Nations - W.K. Harrison*, 1997, Sugimoto has depicted the UN building in New York as an abstraction in a series of photographs featuring modernist architectural icons. The UN's cropped tower reads as patterns in a range of grays and its blurred, out of focus forms, wash away the details of the structure. The remaining image is like those found in dreams or memories.



**Hiroshi Sugimoto**  
*UNITE NATIONS-W.K. HARRISON*,  
1997

Gina Fuentes Walker's photograph *Untitled, Open Windows*, frames city buildings, rooftops and water towers as if there were elements of an abstract collage. Approached from an eye-level perspective, the warehouse casement windows segment and isolate details of the vista. This understated black and white image offers a description of the inherent geometry of the urban landscape.



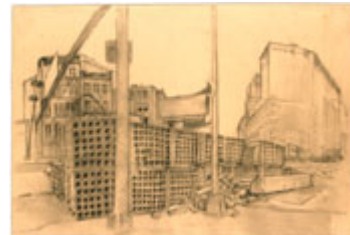
**Gina Fuentes Walker**  
*Untitled, open windows*, 2001

For many years Danny Hauben has been a painter of Bronx street scenes. In *View from the Bronx River Parkway II*, he captures the convergence of the #2 and the #5 train lines at 180th Street. Several Bronx neighborhoods can be seen surrounding the platform and the train yard. Manhattan lies in the distance like a dramatically lighted Oz. The twin towers of the World Trade Center are barely visible as two simple strokes of paint.



**Daniel Hauben**  
*View from the Bronx River Parkway II*,  
1997

Rackstraw Downes' *Canal Street Water-Main Project*, 2000, a graphite drawing, depicts construction materials deposited at a Canal Street intersection. Concrete barricades and terracotta tiles, stacked and scattered, fill the foreground. Glimpses of the surrounding neighborhood can be seen behind. It is a lyrical drawing recording the construction and maintenance of the city's infrastructure, simple and essential. Its realism is unsentimental yet there is an extraordinary beauty in the inherent geometry of the drawing.



**Rackstraw Downes**  
*Canal Street Water-Main Project*, 2000

Marked by the feeling of peace and quiet that only comes to a city early on a Sunday morning, Stefan Kurten's *Golf*, 2002, depicts a street scene that seems familiar and at the same time oddly strange. The composition is simple: three buildings with shuttered windows and drawn curtains, the sidewalk in front, and a Volkswagen parked at the curb. There are no people. Painted on a ground of reflective gold paint, there is a warm glow to the surface and the work seems to generate its own light source. The colorful wares in a shop window on the



**Stefan Kurten**

lower right are the only disruption of the subtle pallet.

A profound sense of quiet is found in Elger Esser's large-scale photograph *Paris*, 1998. The sky, the buildings and the Seine are captured in a long-exposure and are suffused with golden tones suggesting the light and atmosphere of early morning. The streets are empty. A lone streetlight remains lighted. The historic city appears to be suspended in time in this monochromatic study. It is a moment of complete stillness.

Nancy Davenport's manipulated photographs offer views of city buildings under siege. Like Kahn and Selesnick, Davenport creates narratives with staged elements. The imagery in this series of photographs recalls, and in some instances, reenacts events ranging from the 1972 Munich Olympics attacks to the work of 1970s performance artists. Davenport's models, dressed as terrorists, are photographed in the studio and combined with shots of buildings to create composite images. In *Revolutionary (day)*, 2001, men lower themselves from the rooftop. A lone figure hoists a flag on a balcony. This series predates the September 11 attacks and, in the aftermath of that event, Davenport's imagery seems prescient. These faux documentaries posit the city as a "soft" target.

The events of September 11 are subtle subtext of Jaime Davidovich's, *Fog*, 2000, a video that captures a view of lower Manhattan and the Brooklyn Bridge from his studio on the 92nd floor of the World Trade Center. Cars move along the FDR Drive and boats travel up and down the East River. Rarely throughout the video is the vista seen in its entirety. As the video progresses, droplets condense on the studio window and the fog moves in making the images increasingly abstract. The video runs for twenty-five minutes showing a slice of city life in actual time.

September 11 also plays a role as part of the impetus for Jacobo Borges' study of the Chrysler Building. Lost in the fog one day, Borges' immediate reaction to the building's disappearance was to fear its demise. Shortly after he began a visual diary photographing the building from the same window at different times of day, different seasons, close up and distant, in focus and out. The individual photographs form a monumental tapestry organized by color in *Chrysler Project*, 2004.

Josh Dorman creates both cities and landscapes that are pure flights of fantasy. His stream of consciousness imagery, rendered with drawing, painting, and collage techniques, hovers at the edge of abstraction. Old topographic maps, yellowed with age, provide a base strata and conceptual springboard for an invented

*Golf*, 2002



**Elger Esser**  
*Paris*, 1998



**Nancy Davenport**  
*Revolutionary (day)*, 2001



**Jaime Davidovich**  
*Fog*, 2000



**Jacobo Borges**  
*Chrysler Project*, 2004



**Josh Dorman**  
*Oceana*, 2004

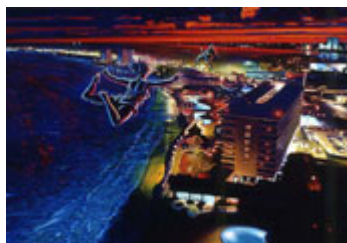
geography. In *Oceana*, 2004, concentric elevations trigger doodle-like “found” images that range from Buddhas to graveyards. Building shapes alternate with blocks of color in a cityscape in the foreground while very tiny cities can be found on shorelines throughout the drawing.

Two figures, a man and a woman, glide freely through the sky over a tropical city. It is early evening and the last vestiges of a flaming red sunset streak the sky. Known for his unearthly illumination and surrealistic scenarios, Robert Yarber sets a mood that is strictly from a REM state. In *Floating Isolates*, 2003, the location is Cancun. The figures, highlighted in blues and reds, seem irradiated. The lights of the beachfront of hotels and the turquoise glow of swimming pool lights punctuate the vista.

Jonathan Calm’s two minute video *Crib*, 2002, is a collage of imagery that weaves animation, sound, graphic design, and documentary video. Much of it filmed on the streets of Calm’s Brooklyn neighborhood, the city as home reverberates through images of construction and demolition, of homelessness and gentrification. An apartment building rises module by module in a graphic that evolves into an icon of a house then becomes a product code. A man pushing a grocery cart stacked with mattresses walks down the street, the only human face. The parting image is a burning building.

Tomie Arai represents a city neighborhood not only as shops and apartment buildings but also with its people. Developed during an artist residency at the Museum of the Chinese in the Americas, Arai created a suite of prints based on Asian women living in New York. In *Chinatown*, 1990, she worked with Frances Chung, a poet who had lived most of her life in the neighborhood. Working from oral histories, family photographs, and archival images from the museum’s collection, Arai created a composite image. A portrait of Chung’s mother dominates one of the five panels of this silkscreen construction. In a smaller detail, another photo-based image, Chung is seen as a young girl with her mother in front of their apartment building on Grand Street.

Focused on neighborhood transitions and change, Bertrand Ivanoff’s *Open House*, is a conceptual proposal to deconstruct an abandoned building in the South Bronx. The proposed intervention—for a building on Melrose and 160th St.—would offer a temporary, site-specific art installation intended to be a catalyst for neighborhood discussion and a vehicle for interaction with the larger public. The project, will be closely tied to



**Robert Yarber**  
*Floating Isolates*, 2003



**Jonathan Calm**  
*Crib*, 2002



**Tomie Arai**  
*Chinatown*, 1990



**Bertrand Ivanoff**  
*Open House*, 2004

neighborhood associations, companies, and programs at The Point, a community based organization where Ivanoff works with students.

In *Into the Night; Broadway*, 2004, Paul Chojnowski captures the illumination of New York's theatre district that has given it the nickname "the Great White Way." Traffic flow and marquee lights animate the scene. The glowing umber tones of this drawing are created by painting on the paper with water and singeing the surface with a torch.

Photographic strategies are assimilated into the look of Antonio Petracca's soft-focus imagery. In the early 1990s Petracca made photographs from moving cars to study the blurring effects of speed. *Kensington*, 1999, based on a snapshot taken in London, captures the soft flickering lights of evening. The blurring effect here suggests a pointillist fracturing of color. The cropped scene is painted on an angular, three-dimensional structure with moldings that suggest architecture. Drips are visible over the edges of the structure making the process visible.

Olive Ayhens presents a composite view of Manhattan in *Bristlecones on Balcony*. Complex and full of energy Ayhens' city vista is also seen from on high—from the Empire State Building-. The Williamsburg Bridge snakes through rhythmically swaying buildings in Midtown. The Hudson is seen in the background. The scene blends the implausible seamlessly— with parts of the city in daylight and parts seen at night. The bristlecones, arranged on the balcony ledge, are among the oldest living plants on earth. They offer a fanciful touch and maybe a much broader historical perspective on cities.



**Paul Chojnowski**  
*Into the Night; Broadway*, 2004



**Antonio Petracca**  
*Kensington*, 1999



**Olive Ayhens**  
*Bristlecones on Balcony*, 2003







