Internet Money and Post-Industrial Chic on Silicon Beach

by Benjamin Sutton

Dumbo recently earned the appellation "Silicon Beach," which, no less
irritating for its partial accuracy, evokes visions of a post-nature, neon-toned waterfront like something Robert Williams might draw. Two new group exhibitions in the nabe under the bridges imagine something like that, playing on Dumbo's best publicized features: beautiful industrial spaces and the concentration of web startups occupying many of them.

At Smack Mellon, the non-profit's third *Site 92* exhibition—in which artists create installations responding to the former industrial boiler that houses the gallery—bares the subtitle *Work Permit Approved* (through February 20). Though it's not nearly as stacked as its 2006 and 2008 predecessors, there are still some standout pieces. Jin Lee's cut-out landscape of white paper hung on strings deconstructs Dumbo into a tag cloud-like conglomeration of industrial and infrastructural buildings dotted with human silhouettes. The corner installation's preciousness and unstable perspectives vaporize the hulking architecture they portray. Nearby, Rob Swainton's 30-feet-high paper scrolls bearing woodblock abstractions use the brick patterns concealed by the gallery's white drywall as the basis for geometric motifs that activate the space's spectacular verticality. Jo Q. Nelson attempts something similar with her interactive video and pulley system, but the result reveals little. Janelle Iglesias's bridge-like structure made from wood scraps found along the East River waterfront is rigged to a whistling teapot, a domesticated version of the historic boiler overhead. Viviane Rombaldi Seppey's rippling window installations made from bright strips of plastic bags resemble a silicon-textured likeness of the river outside and evoke the garbage processing center around the corner, one of the area's few industrial enterprises functioning amidst internet start-ups.

Plastic bags also figure prominently among the strange sights greeting visitors to *Information Economy* at the Dumbo Arts Center's new space (through March 6), alongside a ritualistic array of toppled and smashed dishes, and clocks of all shapes and sizes grouped in the gallery's corners. Titled "dogpile (please give)," the participatory plastic bag mound by Josh Blackwell is one of several pieces that apply web-style crowd-sourcing systems to art-making. On an adjacent wall, Jenelle Covino's "Calendar Project" shows four wall calendars filled out with events and images by people to whom she sent the blank pages. Chuck Jones's scrapbook-like flickering video montage of every single image he's downloaded over the last ten years offers a Tumblr-style outline of the artist's interests (and substantial porn collection). These works follow the dense exhibition's theme more closely than others, showing ways in which artists—perhaps increasingly in response to our digital streams' ever-accelerating flows of data—create new information systems to exploit. Many point to our compulsive "curation" of the everyday, like Gary Cannone and Charles Irvin's "Ultimate Foreigner Setlist Prototype" taped on the floor in a corner, or Aeron Bergman and Alejandra Salinas' "Archive Tower," a Babel-like stack of media storage devices photographed against a blank background.

The uneven Dumbo Arts Center exhibition's most engaging piece features Julie Lequin performing all the characters in her hilarious four-channel video "True Stories (almost)"—something like Ryan Trecartin and Cindy Sherman collaborating over Chatroulette. Its globe-spanning and amusingly accessorized family dispute conveys both the inherent confusion of instantaneous telepresence, and one of its side-effects: how the ability to be anywhere at any moment places renewed importance on authenticity of place. Silicon Beach, with its historical lofts and internet industries, seems the perfect setting for such a dilemma.

(images courtesy Aeron Bergman and Alejandra Salinas and Dumbo Arts Center; Jin Lee and Smack Mellon)