Oh, My Complex
On Unease at Beholding the City
May 17 – July 29, 2012


PRESS RELEASE
Press conference: Wednesday, May 16, 2012, 11 a.m.

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INTRODUCTION

From May 17 to July 29, 2012 the Württembergischer Kunstverein will be showing Oh, My Complex: On Unease at Beholding the City, an exhibition that approaches the imaginaries, representations, and realities of the city from different directions: from the angle of architectural and urban constructions of the nineteen-thirties through today; from Europe, the USA, South America, and Asia; from the perspectives of art, exhibition, pop, and protest cultures starting from the seventies.

Along an open parcouse, which connects exterior and interior space, the exhibition presents the works of over twenty artists who have honed in on the urban-development, social, political, and economic lines of conflict within the city. Their works touch upon historical documents and objects from pop- and sub-culture contexts. Presented are not only existing works, but also those conceptualized especially for this setting.

The exhibition is focused on works that trace the ideological entrenchment of urban visions; that is to say, the visions manifesting in modernist urban utopias, in the models of the neoliberal boomtown, but also in those scenarios of crisis that have been inhabiting our collective imaginary worlds since the nineteen-seventies—not least since the bestseller The Limits to Growth (1972) by Dennis Meadows was published.

Likewise explored is that which is visible within or hiding behind this imaginary: especially in view of the contrasting issues being played out amidst urban planning, architecture, politics, economy, city residents, and city users.

The works of the artists involved—which range from gouaches, silhouettes, photo series, video clips, and multimedia installations to urban interventions—explore both imaginarily constructed and concretely built city space. In exaggerating and thwarting the power structures of modernist and postmodernist planning, they fathom those visions of architecture that are meant to bring forth a new kind of person, as well as the contested spaces of neoliberal (urban) politics.
THE EXHIBITION

The historical contexts addressed in the exhibition, spanning from the nineteen-thirties to the present day, are not negotiated in the form of a chronologically organized spatial setting, but rather from the perspective of the featured contemporary artistic appropriations. These works, in turn, enter into dialogue with elements culled from a comprehensive archive of image, literary, and film material, and also with articulations from pop- and sub-culture, including diverse music clips or even a video, anonymously published on YouTube, documenting a breakneck mountain-bike rally straight on through a favela.

What is more, the show takes recourse to two historical exhibitions or exhibition displays that could not be more different in terms of their contexts and motifs. On the one hand, there is the reconstruction of the legendary exhibition Über die moderne Art zu leben (On the Modern Way of Living) analyzing contemporary issues, which Michael Fehr realized at the Museum Bochum in 1977 in collaboration with Diethelm Koch. On the other, there is Martin Eberle’s photo documentation of fifty panels from the state architecture academy in Pyongyang that gather together countless icons of world architecture, from the druid stones to the Guggenheim Museum in New York—icons that, in the spirit of socialism, purportedly served as fundus and template for the architectural design of the North Korean capital.

A further spatial and contextual shift is experienced by Ludger Gerdes’s neon artwork Angst (Fear), which he developed in 1989 for the town hall façade in the City of Marl, a structure erected wholly in the tradition of Brutalist architecture, and which will now temporarily reside at the Kunstverein façade. The work is comprised of the italicized yellow word “Angst” framed by two pictograms: a red golfer and a blue church.

Also counting among the exterior works in this exhibition is a project by Stuttgart artist Pablo Wendel that takes the form of a walk-in sculpture constructed of recycled materials. The work functions as platform for events and also as a guerilla-tactical project intended to facilitate a redistribution of energy.

The exhibition title has been borrowed from a video performance by South Korean artist Lim Minouk. Here, a camera pursues a singer who, in the company of a drummer, is riding in a pickup truck through various districts of Seoul while bellowing, in punk style, at this city that has been so strongly influenced by Asian turbo-capitalism.

Embodied in this image—portraying a personage laying claim to space and making herself heard against all odds—is essentially the conflict around which the exhibition Oh, My Complex revolves: the controversy about the production, distribution, and utilization of space—and all of the contradictions that go hand in hand with this struggle.
DATES + CREDITS

Oh, My Complex
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With contributions by

Press release + press images

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Press conference
Wednesday, May 16, 2012, 11 a.m.

Opening
Wednesday, May 16, 2012, 7 p.m.

Artists's tour
Thursday, May 17, 2012, 2 p.m.

Curators's tour
Wednesday, June 6, 2012, 7 p.m.
Tuesday, June 19, 2012, 7 p.m.
Wednesday, July 4, 2012, 7 p.m.
Wednesday, July 18, 2012, 7 p.m.
Sunday, July 29, 2012, 4:30 p.m.

Free guided tours
Each sunday, 3 p.m.

Further events in the framework of the exhibition
See www.wkv-stuttgart.de

Hours
Tue, Thu–Sun: 11 a.m.–6 p.m.
Wed: 11 a.m.–8 p.m.

Entrance fees
5 Euros / 3 Euros (reduced) / Members of WKV free

An exhibition by
Württembergischer Kunstverein Stuttgart

Curators
Hans D. Christ, Iris Dressler

Supported by
Ministerium für Wissenschaft, Forschung und Kunst des Landes Baden-Württemberg
Kulturamt der Stadt Stuttgart
Angst, 1989
Neon sculpture on the façade of Marl town hall, 1.80 x 7 metres
Courtesy: Skulpturenmuseum Glaskasten Marl

Ludger Gerdes’s neon sculpture Angst was created in 1989 on the occasion of the exhibition Architectuur en Verbeelding (Architecture and Imagination) at KunstFort Asperen (Netherlands). Skulpturenmuseum Glaskasten in Marl purchased it in 1991, installing it on the façade of Marl town hall. This complex of buildings built by the Dutch architects Johannes Hendrik van den Broek and Jacob Berend Bakema in 1960, that now houses the Skulpturenmuseum along with other facilities, stands along with its public square design in the tradition of Brutalism and is exemplary of the inhospitable concrete utopias of the 1950s to 1970s.

As part of the exhibition Oh, My Complex, Gerdes’s sculpture – the word “Angst” framed by pictograms of a church and a golf player – is being relocated to the façade of Württembergischer Kunstverein, whose new building was erected according to the ideological canons of the “White Cube” in 1961 (architects: Paul Bonatz and Günter Wilhelm). It will also be visible from Stuttgart’s main shopping area. This temporary displacement thus gives rise to a number of shifts of context between urban, artistic and consumerist planning policies since the 1950s.

Pablo Wendel (1980, DE)
Performance Electrics, 2012
Outdoor installation on glass wing
Co-production: Württembergischer Kunstverein Stuttgart
Sponsors: Stihl, Solera, Fischer, AWR

The Stuttgart-based artist Pablo Wendel has developed an architectural sculpture for the Kunstverein’s “Sculpture Courtyard” for the exhibition Oh, My Complex. It consists of
recycled elements which he found on a demolition site in the city centre. The result is a walk-in sculpture that serves as the starting point for a series of actions on the topic of redistributing energy.

INTERIOR

Daniel Garcia Andújar (1966, ES)
Let’s democratise democracy, since 2011
Installation with photographs, video, poster

Daniel Garcia Andújar carried out the action Democraticemos La Democracia (Let’s democratise democracy) in Barcelona in 2011. An aeroplane trailing a banner with the slogan in the title flew along the city’s coastline. The action was photographed from another aeroplane. Unlike from ground level, here the slogan does not appear against a blue sky, but against the skyline of Barcelona. When the Torre Agbar (Spain’s highest building, designed by Jean Nouvel) appears on the horizon together with the banner, this is a clear comment against trivialising the city with the notion of the Iconic City – and in favour of enhancing its function as a place where communities are articulated and constituted: let’s democratise democracy!

Yvonne P. Doderer (1959, DE) / Ute Meta Bauer (1958, DE)
Raumstruktur (Spatial structure), 1994–1995
Slot-together picture system

The Raumstruktur project was created for the exhibition When Tekkno Turns to Sound of Poetry (Shedhalle Zurich, 1994; Kunstwerke Berlin, 1995). Formally, it goes back to Ray and Charles Eames’s infinitely variable Computer House of Cards, that they had developed as a promotional gift for IBM’s exhibit at the World Expo in Osaka in 1970. Yvonne P. Doderer and Ute Meta Bauer use the Eames slotted card system to rearrange different picture and text materials from the 1970s and, by so doing, to
spotlight the polarity and the relationships between the belief in progress and the various counter-movements of this decade. “The three-dimensional arrangement and the optical connection between fields not usually perceived together enable a reflective view of the 1970s” (Doderer/Bauer).

**Martin Eberle (1966, DE)**
*Pyongyangstudies II*, 2007–2012
Wallpaper of photographs

*Pyongyangstudies II* documents those twenty-five plates exhibited at the state academy of architecture in Pyongyang that bring together countless icons of world architecture: from archaic druid stones (1000BC) to the Guggenheim Museum in New York (1943–59, Frank Lloyd Wright) to Kenzo Tange’s City Hall in Shinjuku/Tokyo (1991). The exhibition initiated by Kim Jong-il, the supreme leader of the People’s Republic of North Korea from 1994 to 2011, spotlights the principles of reconstruction of the North Korean capital in the wake of the Korean War. An illustration also photographed by Martin Eberle, in turn, visualises the underlying urban concept: a rationalist-modernist model of the city comprising a number of “landmarks” from a wide range of historical styles.

**Michael Fehr / Diethelm Koch (DE)**
*Über die moderne Art zu leben oder: Rationalisierung des Lebens in der modernen Stadt* (On the Modern Way of Living, Or: Rationalization of Living in the Modern City), 1977 / 2012
Reconstruction of the exhibition display
Photos: Michael Wolf
Courtesy: Michael Fehr, Diethelm Koch, Michael Wolf

The reconstruction sets out to take a fresh look at the exhibition *Über die moderne Art zu leben oder: Rationalisierung des Lebens in der modernen Stadt* created by Michael Fehr and Diethelm Koch for the Bochum Museum in 1977. This was a follow-up project of the exhibition *Umbau der Stadt: Beispiel Bochum* (Reconstructing the City: The
Example of Bochum) also presented by Fehr and Koch with great success at the same museum in 1975. Taking Bochum as an example, they had critically examined the consequences of “segregation” of urban land uses – work, housing, shopping and leisure – while Über die moderne Stadt transcended the context of Bochum. The aim of both exhibitions was to establish a theoretically founded platform for the numerous local citizens’ initiatives running at the time and to turn the museum into a venue for current social discourse. Politically, however, the second exhibition was held at the worst possible time: two days after the opening, the abduction of Hanns-Martin Schleyer marked the beginning of what was to go down in the annals as the “German Autumn”.

**Kirill Golovchenko (1974, UA and DE)**
7km – Field of Wonders, 2007
20 photographs (selection), carbon print on fine art paper

The series of photographs documents what is currently Europe’s largest shopping centre, situated on a seventy-hectare field seven kilometres outside of Odessa, with perhaps one of the most concentrated accumulations of informal, precarious forms of business. Consisting largely of sixteen thousand shipping containers, a two-storey shopping city has evolved that sells cheap goods alongside fake brands, all stored on the first floor.

**Eiko Grimberg (1971, DE)**
Future History, 2009–2012
Installation with slide projection, video projection, text and photographs

In this multi-part installation, Eiko Grimberg examines the architecture of Italian Rationalism from the 1930s, its formal vocabulary influenced in equal measure by the avant-garde and the ideologies of fascism. The video Rest included in the installation cites excerpts from Pier Paolo Pasolini’s film The Hawks and the Sparrows (1966): the documentary footage of the funeral of communist leader Palmiro Togliatti that appears abruptly towards the end of the film.

**Justin Hibbs (1971, UK)**
Secondary Modern, 2009, Acrylic on archival paper, 55.5 x 43.5 x 4cm
Neu Alphabet (Secondary Modern II), 2010, Acrylic on archival paper, 40.5 x 35cm
Justin Hibbs’s series of paper works refers to one of the biggest school reform projects in the recent history of Great Britain, in the course of which hundreds of school buildings were built in the style of “New Brutalism”. This new style of architecture, characterised by exposed concrete and open structures, did not stand up to the British climate, and the buildings corroded. The reform project, too, soon failed. The series is based on copies of a photograph depicting a boy on the stairs of a drab school building built in the new style. Hibbs painted different variations of abstract geometric shapes over the copies.

Yeondoo JUNG (1969, KR)
*Evergreen Tower*, 2001
Slide installation

Yeondoo JUNG takes portraits of thirty-two families in their apartments, all situated in the same residential block in Seoul and all with the same floor plan. For all the differences in furnishings, the space framing the individuals appears to be an intransigent standard.
Minouk LIM (1968, KR)
*New Town Ghost*, 2005
Video documentation of a performance, 10:45 min.

A singer and a drummer drive through the streets of Seoul on the back of a pickup. They pass by very different urban structures, some characterised by traditional markets, street life, or small factories. The others are dominated by the glassy towers of the New Economy: those latter-day enclaves that are growing up all over the globe out of the spirit of neoliberalism. The singer on the pickup bawls her chorus at the city, “Oh, My Complex! New Town Ghost!” – making space for herself with her shouting and the action itself. The body appears here as a kind of final refuge of self-assertion and as a place in which (and through which) social, political, economic, mental and psychological relationships are located.

Suntag NOH (1971, KR)
*Yongsan Eviction*, 2009–2012
Series of 9 photographs, carbon print on fine art paper

Five squatters and a policeman burned to death on 20 January 2009 during the eviction from the Namil-dang building in Seoul’s Yongsan district, that is scheduled for large-scale redevelopment. In South Korea, an alliance of politicians and major business conglomerates (called chaebols) such as Hyundai or Samsung is behind the redevelopment of such expansive urban areas. The twenty-billion-dollar investment in Yongsan is being carried through by means of compulsory purchase, without adequately compensating the local population. Their only options are to be driven away to the outskirts, losing their means of subsistence and becoming homeless, or to fight an uneven battle. Suntag NOH’s photographs document the resistance to this destruction of living space.
Alfons Pressnitz (1982, AT/DE)
*Story of a Building*, 2010 and *Story of a Building 2*, 2010
Papercuts, 150 x 120cm

The exhibition begins with these two large-format papercuts created by the artist Alfons Pressnitz. One depicts a deserted archive table covered with floor plans, the other, a destroyed interior. You might say that, at the start of the exhibition, the engineer and his work meet in the theme of dissolution: for no trace of the producer or his product will survive save for the reduced contour in the black-and-white papercut.

Malwine Rafalski (1982, PL / DE)
*Holon*, 2009
Series of photographs

In this series of photos, Malwine Rafalski has taken portraits of various people who have opted out of society and their alternative living spaces.

The RSA
*David Harvey. Crises of Capitalism*, 2010
Video animation
Animation of a lecture by US human geographer and social theorist David Harvey, examining the current financial crisis in terms of its political, theoretical, cultural and psychological implications.

**John Smith (1952, UK)**
16mm transferred to DVD, 14 min. (in collaboration with composer Jocelyn Pook)

*Blight* was made in collaboration with the composer Jocelyn Pook. It revolves around the building of the M11 Link Road in East London, which provoked a long and bitter campaign by local residents to protect their homes from demolition. The images in the film record some of the changes which occurred in the area over a two-year period, from the demolition of houses through to the start of motorway building work. The soundtrack incorporates natural sounds associated with these events together with speech fragments taken from recorded conversations with local people. Although it is entirely constructed from records of real events, Blight is not a straightforward documentary. The film exploits the ambiguities of its material to produce new meanings and metaphors, frequently fictionalizing reality through framing and editing strategies. The emotive power of music is used in the film to overtly aid this invention. (Source: http://www.johnsmithfilms.com)

**Klaus Staeck (*1938, DE)**
*Eigentum verpflichtet zur Ausbeutung* (Property Entails Exploitation), 1973
*For Wider Streets Vote Conservative*, 1974
*Und der Haißch der hat Zähne* (Oh the Shark Has Pretty Teeth), 1975
*Zur Erinnerung an die Vereidigung der neuen Weltregierung* (To Commemorate the Swearing-in of The New World Government), 1981
All: Poster, offset print, A1, printed by: Steidl Göttingen
Courtesy: The artist and Edition Staeck, Heidelberg
In these posters, Klaus Staeck exaggerates the political upheavals of the 1970s and early 1980s both ironically and critically. His allusions to conditions in Britain – “For Wider Streets Vote Conservative” – already herald the advent of Thatcherism and the social turmoil that it engendered.

In the poster *Zur Erinnerung an die Vereidigung der neuen Weltregierung* – which depicts a group of suits, their heads concealed by oil company logos – Staeck spotlights those deregulation policies which began in the 1970s and, as we know, continue to have an effect today.

Tuomas Toivonen (1975, FI), Nene Tsuboi (1976, JP/Fl), (NOW)
*More = Less*, video, 2009

Video

The video is based on the rap-style lecture performance by the architects and founders of Praxis NOW Architecture and Urbanism in Helsinki, Tuomas Toivonen and Nene Tsuboi. In verbal “fast motion”, they sum up the various urban utopias since modernism – finally describing their failure with the formula “More = Less”.

Brian Ulrich (1971, USA)
*Copia Dark Stores*, 2001–2012
10 photographs (selection), carbon print on fine art paper

When the USA declared “War on Terror” in 2001, the aim was to finance it, among other things, by means of increased consumption on the part of the US population. Consumption was declared a patriotic duty. This system of credit-funded “home front” collapsed in 2008. The *Copia Dark Stores* series illustrates the consequences of this failure. What we see are the façades and interiors of closed shopping malls reclaimed by nature.
Michael Vahrenwald (USA)

*The People’s Trust*, 2011–2012
7 photographs from a series of 14, carbon print on fine art paper

The series consists of photos of re-purposed defunct bank buildings. Most are apparently financial institutions built before the Great Depression of 1929 – at a time, that is, when banks were still founded on the people’s trust. The various “signatures” to be seen on the façades are indicative of both the erstwhile splendour and of the current use by cheap stores.

Carbon print on fine art paper

Among the few “dwellings” visible from space are those vegetable and fruit plantations covered by a uniform grid of plastic that extend from the Sierra Nevada in Spain to the Mediterranean.

Matthias Zielfeld (1976, DE)

*Das Heft Deutschland 4*, 2001–2011, Series of photographs

Zielfeld took night-time photos of various suburbs of Kassel, all stereotypes of the genteel, insular and interchangeable domestic culture. The deserted, sparsely illuminated scenes are places that seem to be dystopian and utopian in equal measure.