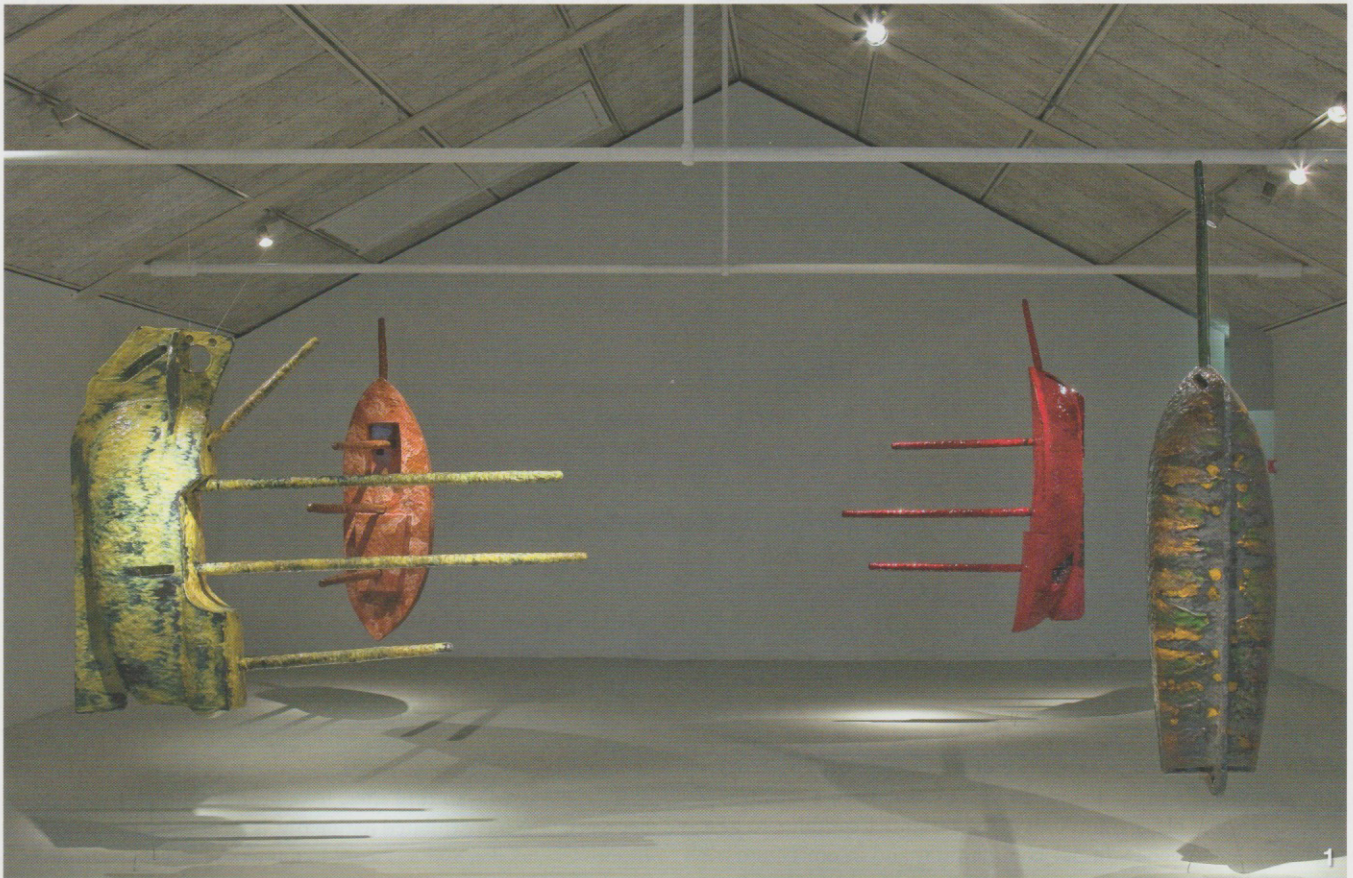


Discussion: The Modelled City

Neil Forrest, Drew Ippoliti, Charlie O'Geen, Dr. Petra Gruber



NEIL FORREST 1 *Hard Transits* (16'x16'x6') stoneware & lead glazes, drawings, 2013, photo by Øystein Thorvaldsen DREW IPPOLITI 2 *Verisimilitude* (422"x84"x156") cast porcelain with over glaze decals, 2016, photo by the artist CHARLIE O'GEEN 3 *House Fired Housewares* (dimensions variable) abandoned residence, 2013, photo by the artist

While villages were merely an efficient urban system for groups of people that live together, the foundation of a city entails the institution of a very concrete idea of society, a commitment between individuals to organize the world based on shared criteria.¹

Manuel Saga

The Modelled City

Imagined or concrete, even the smallest cities are complex in scale and nuance. Add in the factors of history, location, politics, population demographics, and the necessity to grow and the only result is a hive of dramatic interactions. The Modelled City is a sixteen-week case study located in the city of Akron, Ohio: well known for its iconic connection to industrial rubber and the automotive industry. Designed as a living charrette, the project has the express goal of assisting participants as they envision and narrate the city through objects. The Modelled City was designed to investigate region and structure of the city of Akron and offer artistic solutions to the challenges of a distinct urban world during a period of redevelopment.

At the core, The Modelled City is an aggregated group of urban images assembled as modelled forms. The project represents ideas about the city, and the reflections, manipulations, questions, or speculations that grow from looking. Through a methodology of analysis, discussion, and physical manipulation of various art media the project is both material embodiment and an experiment in communication. The Modelled City is a collaboration between

a group of students, an American architect, an Austrian architect, and two ceramicists: one Canadian and one American. Rarely are students assembled with such a rich ratio of makers and planners to both answer and assist them in developing a serious slate of questions. The format of The Modelled City is both humanities-based and artistic.

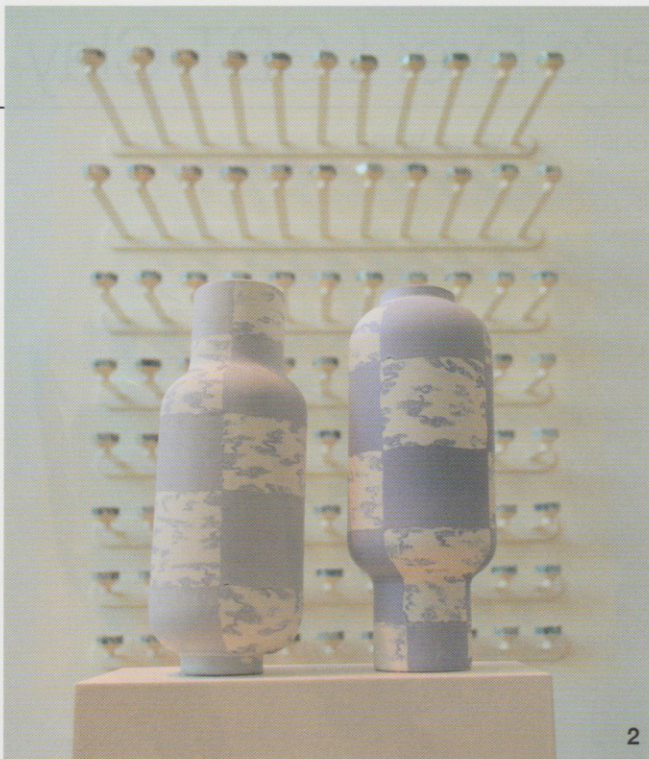
Background Concept

The Modelled City's strategy is based on the breakthrough concept of the "plug-in," which allows participants to test theories through modular technology and experimentation. Channeling the Neofuturistic group Archigram, this process draws inspiration from technology and ideas expressed through hypothetical projects. The technique allows for agitation with the aim of preventing stale, sterile, and safe orthodoxy. The group has opted to experiment with mobility through the environment, space capsules, and mass-consumer imagery that provide a new agenda.

Execution

As the participants involved in the project have an outsider view of the area and their connections are centered on the University of Akron, the project investigation began with two parallel research phases: one theoretical and one tangible.

Theoretical research was based around how to understand the reasons for a city as well as the collective social agreements that exist within any city. Participants played and studied the



2

development of board games to examine the structures of world-building while watching films, which portrayed the largest cities as integral characters. Roman Polanski's *Chinatown* (1974), Michael Mann's *Thief* (1981) and *Heat* (1995), as well as Ridley Scott's *Blade Runner* (1982) were used to investigate Los Angeles. New York was similarly put under a microscope by analyzing Joseph Sargent's *The Taking of Pelham 123* (1974), Woody Allen's *Annie Hall* (1977), as well as Spike Lee's *Crooklyn* (1994) and *Inside Man* (2006). Peter Greenaway's classic *The Cook, The Thief, His Wife & Her Lover* (1989) along with Juzo Itami's *Tampopo* (1985) were used to illustrate scatological framing and utterance as communication. In conjunction with popular culture research, participants dove into academic sources citing place including: *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*², *Idea of a Town*³, and *Beyond Architecture: Imaginative Buildings and Fictional Cities*⁴.

Tangible research took place in historic University archives, the city's Hall of Records, and by speaking with current city planners and local entrepreneurs for a view of what was on the horizon of the Akron region. As the name Akron is derived from a Greek phrase translated as "elevated point," historical investigation began with a focus on the people who immigrated to the area to build the Ohio and Erie Canals, including the many remaining lochs which can be found throughout the area. Participants experienced the lower city on a trolley excursion through the canal redevelopment zone and the sewage treatment area. As a group, everyone examined the Cuyahoga Valley Railway System that made Akron a hub of transportation, and became the cornerstone of early industrial manufacture in the region.

The earliest models that describe the collective human condition are made from clay. Second phase investigation of the project allowed participants to work in groups ideating new works in clay materials that invite consideration on issues discovered in their research. By the mechanism of modelling, problems are confronted in miniaturized iteration, allowing the world to be rendered and discussed. What is not possible in real time, nor in real scale is proposed and dissected here. The Modelled City faces forward in a modern city experience, answering concerns that are known and unknown at the same time. Using ritualized and objectified methods of exploration, the project creates surrogates to unlock, expose,

and propose new visual props that engage feelings and interpretations about an urban locale.

Drew Ippoliti is an artist, researcher, and professor at the University of Akron, Myers School of Art. His work investigates how ceramics can explore regions where culture, decoration, and utility collide. Focusing on East Asia, Ippoliti has worked on major projects in China, Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Korea.

Neil Forrest is an internationally exhibiting ceramic artist and professor at NSCAD University. Forrest is the principal of a multi-year research grant 'Porøs' with The Oslo National Academy of the Arts. His ideas involve the materiality of architecture, place, and historical events of modernity.

Charlie O'Geen's work involves architectural investigations that respond directly to the conditions of a specific site and often utilize found objects as building materials. He received a bachelor of science in architecture and a master of architecture from SUNY Buffalo and then went on to earn a second master of architecture degree from Cranbrook Academy of Art. O'Geen is the construction manager for Powerhouse Productions and currently teaches architecture at Lawrence Technological University. He lives in Detroit, where he works on full-scale architectural and building experiments.

Petra Gruber is an architect with a strong interest in transdisciplinary design. She holds a PhD in biomimetics in architecture from Vienna University of Technology in Austria. As a visiting professor, she set up a master's program in architectural design at Addis Ababa University in Ethiopia.

1 Saga, Manuel. "Game of Thrones: The Politics and Foundations of Fictional Cities." Arch Daily, 20 Jan. 2017, 8:00, www.archdaily.com
 2 Jacobs, Jane. *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*. Random House, 1961
 3 Rykwert, Joseph. *Idea of a Town*. Princeton University Press, 1976
 4 Klanten, Robert. *Beyond Architecture: Imaginative Buildings and Fictional Cities*. Gestalten Press, 2009



3