



BUILDERING
MISBEHAVING THE CITY



In the 21st century, the city is, for the majority of the modern world, the default environment for work, life and leisure. For this generation, the urban has become indigenous, producing a paradigm shift where the historically organic growth of villages is sharpened into a streamlined urban machine seeking ever-greater efficiency. Yet in the very pursuit of optimal performance, the same metropolis that ushered in tantalizing new amenities now works against the messy, beautiful unpredictability that is mankind. This dichotomy of city and citizenry has in turn produced alienation, cynicism and a numbness among people that obscures the body's fullest capacity to move, and create. Lost in the geometric language of grids, parking lots and regulation, our spectrum of activity is squeezed into a narrow range of acceptable behaviors. And while there is undeniable comfort in the norms, codes and conventions that the city provides, these same elements are the ingredients for a circumscribed life – one where the round peg of humanity is forced through the square hole of civic engineering. Our urban existence is thus flawed and imperfect, but it is not without the possibility of redemption, for it is of us, and of our making. The body is the instrument with which the city is both perpetuated and performed, and it is here where so-called *misbehavior* can break the line.

"Buildering" fuses the word "building" and the rock-climbing term "bouldering" into a movement that transforms the performance of urban structures into an increasingly political act. In his 2003 travelogue *L.A. Climbs: Alternative Uses for Architecture*, artist Alex Hartley slyly disclaims (with tongue in cheek, and probable legal prodding), "Bouldering is climbing without a rope, and buildering is climbing on buildings,

generally without a rope and often without permission. This sounds dangerous and illegal, and it is. Do not do it." He then goes on to trace the bloodlines of said behavior, beginning with what is considered its first official guide – *The Roof Climbers Guide to Trinity* (1899) – anonymously published by the renowned Alpinist Geoffrey Winthrop Young. A golden age of urban acrobatics followed in the 1920s and 30s, gathering membership and momentum until the fatal fall of an intrepid climber led the U.S. government to criminalize "urban assent." The subculture was forced into the shadows until the 1980s, when a group of Parisian free-runners drew a straight line on a map and endeavored to go from point A to point B – *directly* – turning the French word for "the course" into the global phenomenon known as "le parkour." With the aid of online video sharing and underground websites, *parkour* has quickly spread worldwide: turning the cityscape into a readymade obstacle course. But like the sister subcultures of graffiti, skateboarding and hip hop, this popularity has also spurred the interest of corporations and commodification. What

was borne as a rebellious outdoor act without rules or reason, is now bought and sold in private gyms, designer apparel, teacher certification courses, custom insurance policies, Hollywood movies, video games and contests sponsored by *Red Bull*. The outsider's escape has undoubtedly been brought inside, but like the Trojan Horse before it, the explosive anatomy of buildering can storm the gates... from the inside.

In an attempt to salvage "authenticity" and rebel credibility, there have been numerous critical philosophies applied to subcultures like



Antal Lakner, *Elevator Stretching*, 2006

skateboarding and building. The most common model theorizes such acts of urban misuse as manifestations of the Situationist International: a radical, anti-authoritarian movement that translated avant-garde practices into the everyday. Active from 1957-1972, "Situationism" left an indelible imprint upon the dreams of dissidents – renouncing a society they believed was tainted by the pervasive presence of commodity, spectacle and capital. And while there is a level of validity in this theoretical interpretation, the militant, often nihilistic attitude of Situationism fails to reflect the sensuous, delightful, ultimately *humanistic* nature of building. Hope is easily lost in a pervasive, perpetually corrupt system without an outside from which to initiate change. The more realistic scenario acknowledges one's place in the network, the raw materials of resistance there within, and the cathartic promise of making oneself a stranger.

In this light, Palestinian theorist, literary critic and professor Edward Said's (1927-2003) post-

colonial writings on the exile are especially illuminating. Seeing place as both the bedrock and prison of identity, he found strength in exile as a "condition of the mind," – repeatedly citing German theorist Theodor Adorno's (1903-69) maxim, "it is part of morality not be at home within one's home." Said found increasing hopefulness in this premise as both he and his thinking matured, moving from an isolationist model detached from all belonging and love of place, to one that extolled virtues of "generosity, vision, and overcoming barriers." As such, he opposed exclusionary, dystopian philosophy in favor of "a knowing and unafraid attitude towards exploring the world we live in." Rather than the Situationist view of society as a straitjacket, Said argued that the exile bears within his/herself, "a recollection of what you've left behind and what you can remember, and you play it against the current experience." By unsettling and opposing singular orthodoxies "to offer alternative routes for the mind to travel," the experience of being an alien in



Carey Young, *Body Techniques* (after *Encirclement*, Valie Export, 1976) 2007. Courtesy of the Artist and Paula Cooper Gallery, New York.



Ivan Argote, *Altruisme*, 2011. Courtesy of the Artist and Galerie Emmanuel Perrotin.

one's own land can be translated into "a valuable type of estrangement," from the city and the self.

Buildering: Misbehaving the City is about the invigorating paradox of being an outsider on the inside – finding richness, inspiration and renewed optimism in surroundings made surreal. And while none of the artists in this exhibition are formal practitioners of parkour, their work embodies the spirit of this movement



Alex Hartley, *Outpost*, 2011. Courtesy of the Artist and Victoria Miro, London.

as they perform its expansive political capacity. In this way, *Buildering* is not about anarchism or overthrow, but a romantic activism that re-asserts the strange, unwieldy, thoroughly *inefficient* presence of the human body (back) into built space. The artists in this exhibition find new signs of life in the aging shells of modernism and industry. As cases in point, Wiebke Grösch and Frank Metzger survey an urban re-identification effort led by skateboarders, while Egle Budvytyte follows the trail of Dutch



Los Carpinteros, *El Barrio*, 2007. Courtesy of the Artists and Sean Kelly Gallery, New York.



Monica Sosnowska, *The Window*, 2013. Courtesy of the Artist and Hauser & Wirth.



Hector Zamora, *Brasil*, 2013. Collection of Laura Lee Brown and Steve Wilson, 21c Museum.

"jump children" as they re-map space through footsteps and leaps. The humble bikes and sheds of those forgotten in the fringes of developing countries become building blocks for Hector Zamora, Alison Moffett and Los Carpinteros to cobble utopian proposals in a state of becoming. Inside this nebulous domestic frontier, Bestué-Vives, Michel de Broin and Pia Rönicke transform household fixtures and popular archives into hallucinatory tapestries. Etienne Boulanger and Alex Hartley push this fantastic model of homesteading one step farther by imagining livable sanctuaries that are as impossible as they are inspiring.

Didier Faustino, Allard van Hoorn and Monika Sosnowska continue this sculptural manipulation of architectural anatomy, bending hard geometries (and harder ideologies) into a lyrical human language. The body is sculpted in an inverse way by Iman Issa and Carey Young, mirroring the city's forms as they measure the affect of urban design in actions and limbs. Few will

travel passively in this expanded view of the city's life as Antal Lakner, Shaun Gladwell and Sebastian Stumpf transform the constraining cabinets of elevators, subway cars and underground garages into theatrical sites of physical exercise. Touch, taste and intimacy are similarly re-engaged by Ivan Argote, Lee Walton and Kamila Szejnoch as they employ playful iconoclasm to pierce the social paranoia that pushes us apart. Communion between body and building is subsequently achieved in the haunting drawings of Adam Putnam, where the contours of desire are quietly and intimately reflected in labyrinth-like structures without beginning or end. In this ecstatic state of limbo we swim in the principles of pleasure and the provisional that Said championed for the next generation of humanist action. Keep on your coat and stay a while. This is the home that is not, and will never be a home, for it will not allow us to remain static, comfortable or staid.

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CONTEMPORARY ARTS CENTER

BUILDING

MISBEHAVING THE CITY

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Cover: Kamila Szejnoch, *Swing*, 2007. Courtesy of the Artist.

Inside Front Cover: Sebastian Stumpf, *Bridges*, 2011. courtesy of the Artist and Galerie Thomas Fischer, Berlin.

Inside Back Cover: Alison Moffett, *Case Study House: No.4*, 2013. Courtesy of the Artist and Schleicher/Lange, Berlin.

contemporaryartscenter.org

Buildering Exhibition Artists

Ivan Argote (b.1983 Bogota, Colombia / Lives: Paris, France)

Bestué-Vives

David Bestué (b.1980 Barcelona, Spain / Lives: Barcelona, Spain)

Marc Vives (b.1978 Barcelona, Spain / Lives: Barcelona, Spain)

Etienne Boulanger (1976-2008 b. Longeville-lès-Metz, France / d. New York, USA)

Egle Budvytyte (b.1981 Kaunas, Lithuania / Lives: Amsterdam, Netherlands)

Michel de Broin (b.1970 Montreal, Canada / Lives: Montreal, Canada)

Didier Faustino (b.1968 Chennevières-sur-Marne, France / Lives: Paris, France)

Shaun Gladwell (b.1972 Sydney, Australia / Lives: Sydney, Australia)

Wiebke Grösch (b.1970 Darmstadt, Germany / Lives: Frankfurt, Germany)

Frank Metzger (b.1969 Gross-Gerau, Germany / Lives: Frankfurt, Germany)

Alex Hartley (b.1963 West Byfleet, UK / Lives: London & Devon, UK)

Iman Issa (b.1979 Cairo, Egypt / Lives: New York, USA & Cairo, Egypt)

Antal Lakner (b.1966 Budapest, Hungary / Lives: Budapest, Hungary)

Los Carpinteros

Marco Antonio Castillo Valdés (b.1971 Cumagüey, Cuba / Lives: Havana, Cuba & Madrid, Spain)

Dagoberto Rodríguez Sánchez (b.1969 Caibarién, Las Villas, Cuba / Lives: Havana, Cuba & Madrid, Spain)

Alison Moffett (b.1979 Knoxville, USA / Lives: London, UK)

Adam Putnam (b.1973 New York, USA / Lives: New York, USA)

Pia Rönnicke (b.1974 Roskilde, Denmark / Lives: Copenhagen, Denmark)

Monika Sosnowska (b.1972 Ryki, Poland / Lives: Warsaw, Poland)

Sebastian Stumpf (b.1980 Würzburg, Germany / Lives: Leipzig, Germany)

Kamila Szejnoch (b.1978 Warsaw, Poland / Lives: Warsaw, Poland)

Allard van Hoorn (b.1968 Leiden, Netherlands / Lives: Abroad)

Lee Walton (b.1974 Walnut Creek, USA / Lives: Greensboro, USA)

Carey Young (b.1970 Lusaka, Zambia / Lives: London, UK)

Hector Zamora (b.1974 Mexico City, Mexico / Lives: Sao Paulo, Brazil)