



## The City and The City: Kendall Buster's 'dis-assembling utopia'

**Kendall Buster**

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Architectural models ignite a childlike curiosity in me. Perhaps it's the way a scaled-down world turns me into a god-like colossus, or how a shift in perspective makes daily human activities seem lilliputian. It might be the same intrigue that made 'the SIMS' such a popular video game despite it being a depressing low-fi simulation of the most boring life imaginable. Nevertheless, *model city (constraint)*, the largest work in the exhibition 'dis-assembling utopia' by American artist, Kendal Buster, causes a similar thrill.

It is an elaborate three-dimensional colony that inhabits the ground floor of Commune1. The artwork is built using cardboard and foamcore in the style of an architectural model. This miniature, multi-tiered city-scape references the landscapes of science-fiction by melding elements of modern and Brutalistic styles with those of more primitive dwellings. Tiny windows rim the city's geometric underbelly, Panopticon-esque stadiums and air control towers protrude on stalks, and portions of the city mimic plant cells or the hypogeum of the colosseum.



The entire structure is perfectly white and thus relies on the track lighting and the sunshine filtering into the gallery to define its whorls and chambers; a city entirely defined by shadows. The retro-futuristic look it achieves is simultaneously nostalgic and forward-looking: a pristine diagramme whose design is unconstrained by the struggles of a garish, begrimed reality.

Although the city is unpopulated, I cannot help but imagine tiny people being funnelled and routed through Buster's chambers and channels. Any potential population would be absolutely at the mercy of these structures that are eerily reminiscent of institutions such as prisons, airports and industrial plants. The landscape contains within it a catch 22:

Kendall Buster *model-city (constraint)*, 2014-2016. Foam core, cardboard, glue, paper

a statement about the way in which systems created for and by humans – ultimately control them. In this work Buster dwarfs that which is ordinarily enormous, indicating her incredulity towards dogmatic architectural tradition. Her

exhibition is a rejection of that which we aspire to as being Modern and ideal; as is forewarned by the exhibition title 'dis-assembling utopia'.

*Model city (constraint)*, by being a city within a city, invokes the philosophical quandaries of recursion. I realise that it is this that draws me to architectural models. It is their ability to catalyse the same strange wonderment caused by standing between two mirrors and seeing them self-reflect ad-infinitum. Standing in Commune1 I have that brief tingling suspicion that our own city may too be a Matryoshka city, inside a Matryoshka city, inside a Matryoshka city, inside a Matryoshka city ...

The remainder of the exhibition is made up of two-dimensional collages that adhere to the upstairs walls with the use of sheet magnets and magnetic paint. These works are titled *fragments and mutations 1 – 19*. Their metallic composition is apt given that their splintery shapes resemble satellites tumbling through outer space.

The fragments and mutations series is composed using digitally rendered cut-outs of buildings from national geographic magazines. Each work has a somewhat uniform colour-scheme and is made of buildings from a distinctive era, with skyscrapers, country piles and opera houses grouped neatly into their own montages. Buster has reassembled these dissected filaments to create jagged shapes with spindly arms and blockish appendages. The result is a collection of inhospitable space stations that dance at robotic arms length of one another.

Buster's previous work is recognisable by themes of enlarged microscopic or diatomic forms which float in the gallery or public art space. Although her work had a gauzy, permeable feeling which is absent in 'dis-assembling utopias', there remains a dynamic interplay between organic and man-made shapes and a reimagining of scale. Where previously she may have filled a city with shade-cloth amoebas, in this show her modus operandi is inverted. She treats the city as an organism, which is reduced in scale and scrutinised.

The result is both a cynical take on an architectural paradise lost and an excited glance into a yawning space-age future. The mood of the exhibition makes the show an appropriate swan-song for Commune1 as this is the last show before the gallery vacates its premises on Wale Street.



Kendall Buster *fragments and mutations 19*, 2015-2016. Digital print from National Geographic Magazine images 1970-1980



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