

**Jerónimo Voss**  
**In Dependent Gravity**

September 5 - November 23, 2013

Opening on Thursday, September 5, 2013  
7 p.m. - 9:30 p.m.

Out with the old, in with the... older. When it comes to current urban development projects, an international trend has crystallized. Buildings and social housing projects constructed in the 1950s and 60s, often associated with modernist ideas of habitation and the architectural style of Brutalism, are now being rendered undesirable or even unfit for living. Many of these buildings are undergoing drastic refurbishing into condominiums, like London's Robin Hood Gardens, or are simply being demolished, like the AfE Tower in Frankfurt am Main, which was once the city's tallest building. Often, ambitious reconstructions of romanticized styles are being envisaged to replace them, such as the planned new Berlin City Palace, or a new "Old City" for Frankfurt am Main. Nostalgia for pre-war ornamentation is mobilizing citizen initiatives and public campaigns for a return to less universal and more "native" styles of architecture.

Voss constructs a phantasmagoric assemblage about city habitation in his new work. What are the specters of the past and projections of the present that shape and inform perceptions of urban living environments? Using the technique of montage, both in terms of the installation's format and its layered content, Voss explores the social and architectural ideas that lead British architects Alison and Peter Smithson to coin the term "Brutalism". He collects traces of these ideas, which lead to an international adoption of the "Streets in the Sky" style of housing projects to rise from the rumbles of WWII. Voss then weaves these fragments into a narrative by Peter Weiss, a central figure in post-war Germany's literary world. In his novel "Die Besiegten", from 1948, Weiss describes his personal impressions of urban destruction in Germany after the end of the war.

The project of rebuilding German cities after the war took on ethical dimensions in regards to dealing with the past. Architect Otto Bartning epitomized it, writing in 1946: "Reconstructions: The more true to the original, the worse" (*"Rekonstruktionen - je echter, desto schlimmer"*). Today, the reversed trend toward romantic reconstructions is raising similar questions, along with some new ones. Only made to look "old", these buildings are mere facades. Why then does even the mere illusion of a "native" style appeal to their proponents? An "Altstadt" might be the physical manifestations of escapist dreams, neutralizing the grind of the day-to-day. But this trend could also indicate developments less quaint in nature. The German "Heimat" is an elusive notion. It connotes the innocent, female counterpart to the violent, male "fatherland" state, and at the same time calls for the military need of safeguarding the allegedly natural native homeland and property.

Voss' allusion to the phantoscope - for example in the visually deceptive slide projections and other means of staging illusory images - is therefore suggestive. Phantasmagorical projections are no longer a "special attraction" like they were in earlier centuries; they are part of our everyday life. His constructed montages and the sculptured glass works installed in the space open up questions about habitation beyond the elusive appeal of "native" building styles, but also beyond Brutalism's hopeful projections of architecture's ability to transform society.

Text: Hili Perlson