Bringing the World into the World

Jun 15 2014

Oct 12 2014
Bringing the World into the World is an exhibition of international contemporary art inspired by the largest object in the Queens Museum’s collection, The Panorama of the City of New York. This legendary architectural model of New York City’s five boroughs was commissioned by controversial master builder Robert Moses for the 1964/65 New York World’s Fair, and today, the 9,335 square foot Panorama is still the world’s largest model of an urban environment. While it provides a comprehensive bird’s eye view of the metropolis, the Panorama does not surround its viewers in a circular, 360-degree fashion, the way historical panoramas do. It was English painter Robert Barker (1739–1806) who coined the word “panorama” (from the Greek “pan”[all] and “horama” [view] when he invented the format of presenting his own large landscape paintings on a circular surface. These panoramas were an instant crowd-pleasing spectacle, a commercially successful form of mass entertainment, and one of the most significant breakthroughs in 18th and 19th century visual culture, stimulating a great many incarnations thereafter—dioramas, moving panoramas, and cycloramas—each aimed to more perfectly commemorate an event (famous battles, the Crucifixion) or represent worlds near and faraway (cities, nature landscapes).

Both the Queens Museum’s enormous scale model and the concept of the historical panorama have inspired artistic practices that deal with urbanism, cinema, memory, surveillance, history, cartography, mass media, scale, and spectacle. Adopting its title from a series of works by Italian artist Alighiero Boetti (1940–1994), Mettere al mondo il mondo (Put the World Into the World), the exhibition echoes his fundamental vision that art and the world contain and are contained by each other. For Boetti, the artistic process consisted of focusing attention on mundane objects and experiences from daily life, which, re-arranged or re-contextualized, could be seen anew. The role of the artist is thus to bring forth that which already exists but has become invisible. To this end, the diverse body of works in Bringing the World into the World explores the physical experience of the acts of seeing, seeking, and searching for the world.

Playing with Scale

Several related works are located in or around The Panorama of the City of New York itself. Chris Burden’s Scale Model of the Solar System (1983) starts here, but goes beyond the Museum’s walls into the Park and even into the local community. A 13-inch-diameter model of the Sun has been placed above the Bronx on the Panorama, and stainless steel models of all of the planets in the solar system have been located true to scale in relation to it—with Pluto situated in an Italian eatery, Leo’s Latticini, about a mile away from the Museum, in Corona, Queens. Charles and Ray Eames’ Powers of Ten (1977), visible through the glass floor of the Panorama walkway is a 9-minute round-trip voyage from Earth to the edge of our universe and back to Earth, entering humankind on a subatomic cellular level. Commissioned by the computer giant IBM, the film’s extraordinary two-way vertical zoom seems to anticipate much of today’s aerially-infused visual culture and encompasses the development of both the microscope and surveillance satellite. Beyond the range of a microscopic lies Jessica Rylan’s NanoQMA (2010), which is virtually invisible. NanoQMA is a 1.4 million: 1 scale model of the Queens Museum made in a German nanofabrication lab using a technique called two-photon polymerization. Rylan’s goal was to create a model of the Museum scaled to fit on an imaginary Panorama situated within the model of the Queens Museum that exists on the Panorama. Originally commissioned for the exhibition Curse of Bigness in 2010, NanoQMA has resided since then inside the 2”x4”x1” model of the Queens Museum building on The Panorama—as well as in the imagination of those who know of its existence there. The grand illusion of the miniature metropolis is, however, broken by a departing bird high up in a corner of the Panorama’s 45-foot-high wall. Yumi Kori’s Flight (2014) discreetly inserts a taxidermied Canadian goose within the gallery’s wall, suggesting that the Panorama is as much of a construct as it is a confinement, just like the city itself. The other half of the goose exists on the other side of the “confinement.” Lawrence Weiner’s As Far As the Eye Can See (1988) is placed prominently on the soaring 45-foot-tall exterior wall of the Panorama, overlooking the vast expanse of the Museum’s central atrium, and echoes the undying human aspiration to see, both across time and space. It refers to the origin of the traditional panoramas while also praising—if not without irony—the scale model’s persistent power even in the age of Google Earth.


View of the Panorama of the City of New York, Queens Museum

The City and Knowledge

The Panorama of the City of New York is a static representation of a certain moment in time, but is also a trigger for an ever-changing and growing treasury of personal memory and knowledge in its viewers. Liu Wei’s ongoing Library series evokes the chaos of his native Beijing. Made out of massive piles of school books found in secondhand markets, his sculptures depict eroded cityscapes in a state of metamorphosis. While the destruction of books signals censorship and oppression, the skyscrapers’ oddly organic appearance of growth serves as a powerful metaphor for an urban landscape that is no longer legible. Encircling Liu Wei’s work in the museum’s main atrium, Reanimation Library | Corona Branch (2014) is the 13th iteration of an ongoing project by Andrew Beccone in which custom libraries are created from a collection of second-hand books. Installed in a single 214-foot-long, the nearly 300-volume Corona Branch is augmented with new acquisitions from Corona and Flushing, Queens. While the books’ arrangement resonates visually with an urban skyline, it is also a functioning reference library for museum visitors. Corona Branch enters into a dialogue with the exhibition’s forthcoming publication, the encyclopedic An Incomplete User’s Guide to Bringing the World into the World and features books related to cartography, illusion, and mass media among other topics. Much of the library’s collection hails from the height of Modernity—a time when belief in technological progress was taken for granted.

Making it Whole Again

Some artists repurpose various traditional and new means in order to restore shattered worlds—be they a physical body, a domestic space, or the urban fabric. Wong Kit Yi employs the Chinese metaphysical system of Feng Shui in her project Too Much Water, Too Much Wood, Lacking Fire (2014) to help balance the invisible structure—both architectural and psychic—of the exhibition and the Museum itself. Consultation with legendary local Feng Shui master Mr. Ye resulted in a variety of objects, videos, and insertions of color in unexpected corners of the Museum, each representing elements of water, wood, and fire. The works make the invisible realities of qi perceptible through the material presence of these balancing elements. Addressing the contemporary urban psyche, Heaven’s Corners (2014) is a project developed and realized by L+, a Hong Kong-based temporary collective including Pak Sheung Chuen, Wo Man Yee and Lee Soen Long. The title plays on the fact that the words for “corner” and “nation” are homonyms in Cantonese. Heaven’s Corners recruits people living in the corner apartment on the highest floor of their apartment building, closest to the sky, to come together around activities about the idea of height, most symbolically by painting their ceilings. The project picks up on the lack of relationships in alienated urban populations and facilitates new communities though attention to an unexpected new territory and concept.

PROGRAM

June 14, 4:30–6:00pm
Solar System Walk, Vol. 1
Meet at Pluto (at Leo’s Latticini, 46-02 104th St. Corona/718-898-6069) for a guided 1.5-hour tour of Chris Burden’s Scale Model of the Solar System by artist Nate Carey, and arrivie at the Sun in the QM Panorama. All three tours are organized by Emmy Catedral and the Amateur Astronomers Society of Voorhees (AASV).

6:30–7:00pm
City-rama: Looking In/Looking Out
A guided tour of the Panorama of the City of New York, the largest object in the exhibition, by Blagovesta Momchedjkova, Ph.D. a veteran QM Panorama tour extraordinaire.

June 22, 1:00–3:00pm
Workshop: Unmapping the World at QM Atrium
Clarissa Tossin leads a physically dynamic and intellectually stimulating hands-on art-making experience. Unmap and remap the world collectively.

September 21, 3:30–5:00pm
Solar System Walk, Vol. 2
Family friendly planet hunting tour by educator PJ Guatina Policarpio departing from the Sun at QM and ends at Pluto located at Leo’s Latticini (46-02 104th St., Corona).

CLOSING CELEBRATION!

October 12, 3:30–5:00pm
Visualizing Tactics: Mahjong Beginner Workshop
The traditional Chinese game of Mahjong is, in part, a form of imaginative seeing. Wong Kit Yi’s workshop for beginners with a touch of Feng Shui.

4:00–5:50pm
Solar System Walk, Vol. 3
Astrophysicist Dr. Emily L. Rice, and friends of Astronomy on Tap, guide you from Pluto at QM and ends at Pluto located at Leo’s Latticini (46-02 104th St., Corona).

Meet at Pluto (at Leo’s Latticini, 46-02 104th St.) for a guided 1.5-hour tour of Chris Burden’s Scale Model of the Solar System by artist Nate Carey, and arrivie at the Sun in the QM Panorama. All three tours are organized by Emmy Catedral and the Amateur Astronomers Society of Voorhees (AASV).

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Mapping and Re-Mapping

As a way to comment on the perceived objectivity of cartography and other forms of information design, many artists have created their own, idiosyncratic maps and subjective systems of categorization. Such is Dominique Gonzalez-Forester’s ambient, often non-narrative portrayal of eleven notable locations around the globe, from Buenos Aires to Hong Kong, Rio de Janeiro, Kyoto, and Paris, in the video Parc Central (2006). Shot between 1998 and 2003, the footage of this scenic and aural journey—variously resembling home movies, documentaries, or Hollywood film—combines memory and architecture to transform each location into a collective experience. This transformation of space becomes even more radical as Clarissa Tossin “remaps” the world and thus its various systems of power. Her series Unmapping the World (2012) consists of world-map sketches made by balling up blank sheets of tracing paper and drawing on the resulting spherical surface. Some drawings are then flattened back into their original two-dimensional form to render highly fractured, often poignantly reconfigured land formations. Tavares Strachan’s work also gives unexpected physical presence to what is often invisible in both physical and meta-psychological territories. Magnetic (2013) is a 14-part video installation in which screens are installed back to back in a circular formation, creating a near 360-degree panorama to be viewed both from inside and out. It captures the “true” North Pole in footage shot when the artist revisited the 1909 discovery of the central line demarcating the Earth’s polar axis. Hikaru Hayakawa’s work, Panta Rhei; 400 years of human history (2010–2014) is a three-dimensional diagram of world history from 2000 B.C. to 2000 A.D. realized as a fountain made of copper tubes. The intricate pipe structure tracks time using horizontal lines to represent the life-spans of individual nation states, and vertical or diagonal sections to indicate a conflict or contact between two or more states that results in a destruction or merger.

Control and Release

The panoramic view implies a desire to grasp the totality of the world. Harun Farocki and Alighiero Boetti deal with the notion of totality in very different ways. Harun Farocki’s Deep Play (2007) is a monumental multi-channel video installation that brings together twelve different vantage points on the 2006 FIFA World Cup final, which was seen by an estimated 1.5 billion viewers worldwide. Juxtaposing the television networks’ raw footage of long shots and close up with computer-generated diagrams tracking the individual players’ movements, the work makes a panoptic architecture out of mass media’s imaging technologies and broadcasting techniques, reversing the sports stadium structure and having the event surround the viewer instead of vice versa. The work is a reflection on and an exaggeration of the classic culture of spectatorship and its anxiety to see and know everything all at once. On the contrary, Alighiero Boetti’s Ononimo (1973) suggests an experience of infinity—which, by definition, is ungraspable. This work is a set of eleven large sheets of paper, each completely covered in blue ball-point pen except for all-capital white letters spelling out the word “ONONIMO.” Although the panels are ostensibly identical, the ballpoint pen has been deployed differently by eleven different people. Because there are an odd number of individual panels, any presentation that stacks them will have a “missing” tile—visually implying the possible infinite continuation of the work.

Clarissa Tossin, Unmapping the World, 2011. Ink on tracing paper. 5 ½ x 6 x 5 inches. Courtesy the artist.


Hikaru Hayakawa, Panta Rhei (4000 years of human history), 2010–2014. Oil paint, copper, brass and stainless steel. 26 x 26 x 140 inches. Courtesy the artist.
Bringing the World into the World is organized by Hitomi Iwasaki, Director of Exhibitions and Curator at the Queens Museum. Blagovesta Momchedjikova, Ph.D., acts as a consultant for the exhibition and editor and author for the forthcoming publication, An Incomplete User’s Guide to Bringing the World into the World, a mini-encyclopedia of over fifty entries that include key concepts of and historical facts about panoramas and their variations that are relevant to visual representation today. Emmy Catedral is a special researcher for the publication.