



BURST*008. Architects: Jeremy Edmiston and Douglas Gauthier. Photo by Richard Barnes.
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Home Delivery: Fabricating the Modern Dwelling

Museum of Modern Art, New York City
July 20–October 20, 2008

Visitors to Home Delivery: Fabricating the Modern Dwelling were supposed to proceed directly to MoMA's sixth floor for a comprehensive examination of the ready-to-assemble shelter phenomenon, an idea that's engaged architecture's greatest — from Gropius to Breuer, Fuller to Wright.

But really: who could resist first examining the performance-art aspect of an empty 18,000-square-foot lot next door that jauntily displays five actual pre-fab homes?

And that is as it should be, for nothing speaks more to the central idea of the exhibition than actually seeing these tiny abodes scattered about like so many Monopoly houses. A light-as-air version of a Philadelphia rowhouse dominates, crafted of polycarbonate and glass and acrylic by the Philadelphia firm Kieran Timberlake. And sitting dead-center, there's the tiniest of the bunch, an aluminum-clad, 76-square-foot cube by

Horden Cherry Lee Architects and Haack & Hopfner Architects of London and Munich. Off to the side, a shotgun house enchants with gingerbread and a wooden porch, courtesy of an MIT team under the direction of associate professor Lawrence Sass. Each home was erected on site, and most (except for the Cube) do a plausible job of convincing us that we could comfortably — if sparingly — live within their confines. Although their estimated costs (\$78,000 to \$400,000) are for the most part not especially cheap, the idea here is more about conservation, energy efficiency, and taking advantage of all that computers can offer the construction process. MoMA has documented this project online with a website — www.momahomedelivery.org — so all can judge for themselves whether the idea has legs.

JoAnn Greco is a freelance journalist in Philadelphia.

Cryptic Providence

North Burial Ground

Providence, Rhode Island
June 13–September 28, 2008

Tender, reverent, sometimes playful, Cryptic Providence's installations and performances — the work of more than 15 visual artists and performers — have a somber elegance somewhere between Frederick Law Olmsted and Edgar Allan Poe.

Tucked among the silent mob of bone-gray obelisks and headstones in the historic North Burial Ground, the pieces surprise even when they are sought out. Disintegrating letters make an introductory statement in Justin Pollmann's "We Live." Skull-like ceramic shells appear nearby on a shaggy hill, remnants of Hannah Verlin's pyrotechnic take on our own momentary lives, "Nest Eggs." Organizer Jay Critchley's mummified 1965 Chevy (photo below) waits beneath in an unused mausoleum, maybe a lighthearted response to a brash era's end. Final messages flutter beneath cedars in "Message Board," by artists Rochelle Martin, Valentine Mancini, and Jay McGuire. The sequence of pieces leads to the serenity of Potter's Field, delicately accentuated by handmade bells in "The Bells Ring for Thee" by Rebecca Siemering. Neither grim nor ghoulish, it's all a reminder that cemeteries can honor the living as much as the dead. (For info: www.jaycritchley.com.)

Conor MacDonald is a writer in Boston.

▼ Photo by Michael Persson.





< *The Manhattan Transcripts* by Bernard Tschumi, 1980. Courtesy The Museum of Modern Art.

Dreamland: Architectural Experiments Since the 1970s

Museum of Modern Art, New York City
July 23–March 2, 2009

Last March, I traveled with my wife to the Mall in Washington, DC, where we were amused and delighted by the curatorial honesty of two exhibitions: *Small Masterpieces: Whistler Paintings from the 1880s* at the Freer Gallery of Art and, at the National Gallery, *Small French Paintings*. In both shows, no matter what else, the paintings' dimensions were as advertised: small.

It must be difficult to organize and title an exhibition and deliver the goods, but

perhaps, taking a cue from the National Gallery and the Freer, one needn't work so hard.

The works on display in *Dreamland: Architectural Experiments Since the 1970s* are an eclectic collection with little relationship as a group, other than as architecture. And that might be fine, except that the viewer suspects that the curator was counting on more cohesion to glue these works together. They are mostly, but not always, inspired by New York. They don't date "since the 1970s," as MoMA admits in signage — some pieces are older. If one goes further into the literature for the show, the earlier pieces are supposed to have influenced later work. Perhaps. But, for example, the connection between the urban fantasies of Koolhaas, Vriesendorp, Holl, and Rudolph and the country/suburban homes by Leeser, SHoP, Roy and Ungers is not forthcoming, despite exhibition notes suggesting that the homes represent an antidote to the city. The connections of *Dreamland* are forced.

Why not focus on the strength of the show: an exhibition of architectural

speculation since 1970 (or whenever)? The drawings by Vriesendorp and Holl are witty and provocative. The life Vriesendorp gives the city in her painting of Manhattan is a unique study in the interaction of structure and urban character, of dweller/building/megalopolis. Holl's *Bridge of Houses, Melbourne/New York, New York* series presents an urban fantasy akin to London Bridge and New York's in-progress High Line Park. Pesce's *Church of Solitude Project, New York, New York* (across the room from a model of *World Trade Center Tower 1*) inspired more than one visitor to wonder aloud why Pesce's church is not being built at "Ground Zero." Eisenman's *Max Reinhardt Haus*, an early 1990s proposal for Berlin resembling a Möbius strip, is satisfyingly familiar, reborn as Koolhaas's new CCTV building in Beijing. Why not show the dreams and let the viewer recognize what has come of them?

Dominic Barth, a former journalist and book editor, is a graduate student at Columbia University School of Architecture, Planning, and Preservation.



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