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## Shantytown redux: Karine Giboulo's "Democracy Village"

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Montreal-based sculptor Karine Giboulo knows that both God and the Devil are in the details. Her most recent installation, a three-part reconstruction of a shantytown in Haiti called Democracy Village, is a world of detail, variously delightful and depressing. The depressing part recognizes the downside of the global economy; the delightful side is contained in the careful attention she pays to the 200 polymer clay figures who inhabit her village. The population is a diverse mix: Haitians live in the shantytown, while above them on a glass skyscraper (modelled on the China Central Television Headquarters building in Beijing) the wealthy play golf and overweight groundhogs bask in the sun. The animals embody our tendency to "live underground" when it comes to viewing the world. "They represent the way we are," Giboulo says, "they are selfish, comfortable, they love eating and are always on golf

courses. They are my humorous way of talking about us.” The humour is not without a political edge. As viewers move around the piece, they inescapably see themselves reflected in the surface of the skyscraper. We, too, play our part in the creation of the village.

Giboulo arrived at the diorama after utilizing everything from floating bubbles to dollhouses and factory complexes as spaces for displaying her miniature scenes of social interaction. But in the diorama she found her ideal form; it gives her the scale she needs to stretch her visual narrative, as well as the focus through which she can work her sense of detail. In one part of the village, a fashionably dressed blonde ecotourist is wearing a zebra-striped safari hat and blouse. She is taking a photograph of a zebra and we see the animal in the viewfinder of her camera. Four Haitians stand around observing the woman and one of them has a cellphone. On his device we see a picture of the woman. “For the lady, the zebra is an exotic animal,” the artist says, “but for the Haitians, the lady is the exotic animal. The villager is simply capturing his own wildlife picture.”

It was important for Giboulo to duplicate a way of making used by Haitians themselves. When she went to Haiti she took a hockey duffle bag full of shoes for children in the village; she filled the bag for the return trip with scraps of metal with which she fashioned her own shantytown huts. The dust on the ground in the model came from floor sweepings in her studio and the framing edges of the diorama tables were put together from wood found in a forested area near Montreal. Her interest is not so

much in truth-to-materials as in the truth of the materials she employs.

The Democracy Village is generated from both photography and memory and, as a result, sits comfortably between the documentary and the imaginary. Giboulo views her work as a way of understanding the social, economic and political forces that determine how people interact. "I am trying to create a reflection of the world we live in. Sometimes I don't really understand it, so the work is a way to talk about these things, so that an audience can understand, and so that I can understand as well."



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