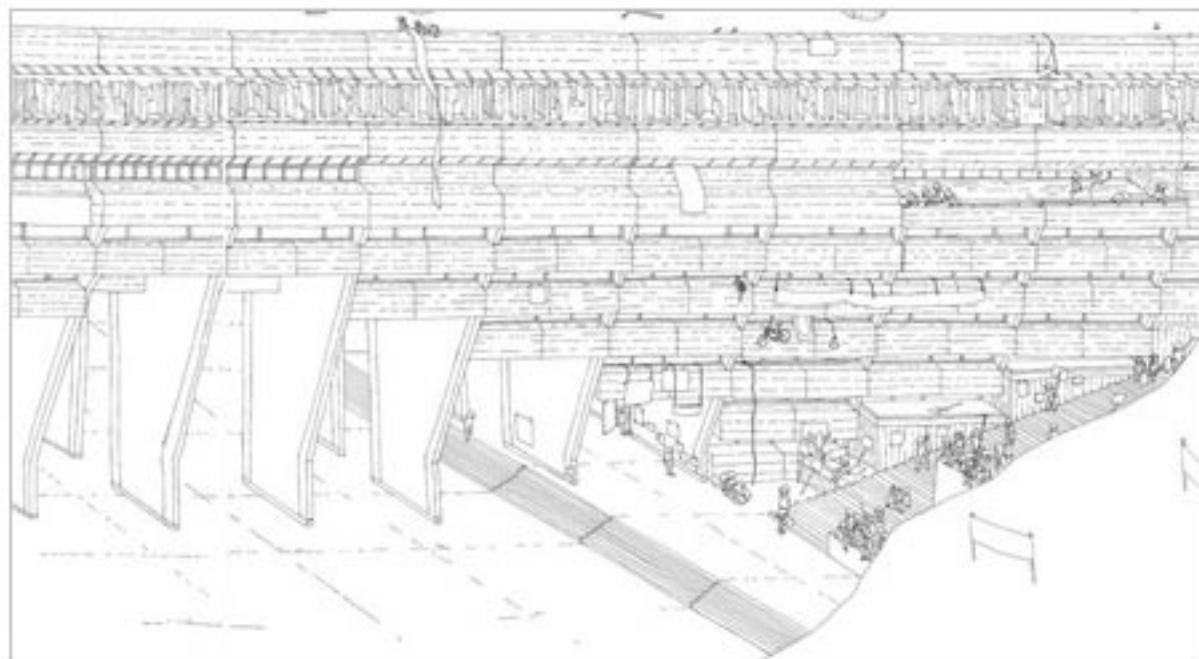


Habitaptation: Future Shocks

MENDEL ART GALLERY, SASKATOON APR 15 TO JUN 12 2011

by BART GAZZOLA



Olia Mishchenko *Untitled* (from the *remote university* series) 2011 Detail

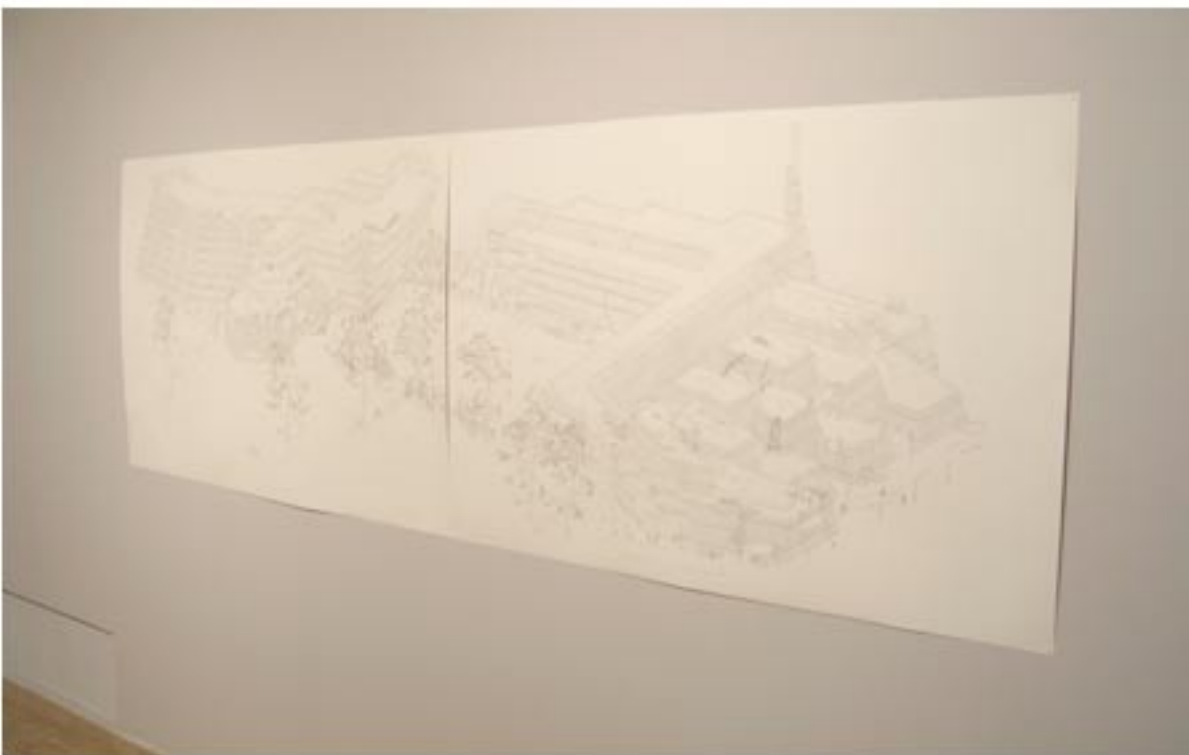
The [Mendel Art Gallery](#)'s current show, "Habitaptation," has two faces: the first is seen when one's alone with its assortment of works by [Olia Mishchenko](#) and [Karine Giboulo](#), and the second appears when the gallery is overrun with families (especially children) visiting the Mendel's concurrent annual student-art exhibition. Differing—yet unified—facets of Mishchenko and Giboulo's works show themselves in each context.

Giboulo's installation *Village Démocratie* comprises the dominant half of this show: whether this is due to its visually engaging nature or to the use of superficially playful aspects in its tableaux, it is "louder" than Mishchenko's *remote university* drawings. This works, in a way, as Mishchenko's pieces are about the submission of the individual; they show tiny figures—sometimes identical, sometimes subtly different—arrayed about massive brutalist and modernist architectural spaces.



Karine Giboulo *Village Démocratie (Phase 1)* 2010 Detail

Exhibition curator Sandra Fraser's accompanying notes for the show point us toward this interpretation. In discussing Mishchenko's work, Fraser writes, "All encompassing architectural schemes can confuse and alienate visitors and campus regulars alike. Despite plans to be both inclusive and efficient, Mishchenko's tiny figures disrupt the rigid lines of the building with their undefined activities." Also referencing *remote university*, Fraser postulates that "the figures seem to be readying themselves for revolt and protest, against what or whom, we do not know."



Olia Mishchenko *Untitled* (from the *remote university* series) 2011 Installation view / photo Donald Roach, Mendel Art Gallery

All of this together—context and content—results in Mishchenko's figures contrasting sharply with Giboulo's. Mishchenko's figures are restless, but active, and seem to have some possibility of moving upwards socially and financially if they "submit" to the monolithic structures in their midst. Giboulo's figures, however, don't seem to have even a small opportunity (illusory or otherwise) for social or economic mobility. (The implication of higher education, of a literate class, is not even one of the "levels" of Giboulo's *Village Démocratique*. Here, the shadow of [Alger Hiss](#) gives way to that of [Ayn Rand](#).)

Perhaps it's fitting that Giboulo's works resonate more with the children who come to visit, as this may be the future of many of the world's youth, theirs included. The toy-like nature of Giboulo's installation makes it seem playful, masking the fact that the name of this work references a site in Haiti, which in turn reminds me of shots of post-Katrina New Orleans—or any other site where [Naomi Klein's disaster capitalism](#) is "at play."



Karine Giboulo *Village Démocratique (Phase 1)* 2010 Installation view / photo Donald Roach, Mendel Art Gallery

To this point, Fraser also offers some descriptive insight on Giboulo's work: "Inadequate, crudely made shelters visually collide with the opulent, mirrored surfaces of Modernist architecture. The towers,

complete with digital stock market updates, a rooftop golf course and a swimming pool, exemplify the wealth and extravagance of the leisure class. The artist uses the T-shirts of the slum dwellers to draw attention to consumer items that are out of reach."



Karine Giboulo *Village Démocratie (Phase 1)* 2010 Detail