<u>Polly Gould's *Architecture for an Extinct Planet* at Danielle Arnaud - Rachel Tyler</u>

Polly Gould's exhibition *Architecture for an Extinct Planet* at Danielle Arnaud offers work in three mediums: paper, glass, and sound. Presenting ideas on the topics of climate change and the dispersal of bodies, Gould draws from art, fashion, and architecture, to reinterpret their archives and question how we deal with our present.

As you enter the gallery, you are greeted by a window which leads the eye out to the back garden. As you walk towards the window, you enter a three-walled room. Here, Gould's series *Zoological Garden* is mounted on pale blue walls. Constructed from old glass lantern slides and coloured glass, the three works are framed and back lit. Each piece is made up of nine slides, each slide a photograph of a caged, or captive, animal. These photographic enclosures are echoed by the grid of copper tape and solder binding the slides together, three by three. Gould has worked with these slides before, in the performative lecture *Penguin Pool* (2015) modelled on the Edwardian magic lantern show and tableau vivant. That lecture re-combined an archive of glass lantern slides into a narrative and considered a way to create something new out of something extinct.

Polly Gould, *Zoological Garden: Wolf*, 2020, Coloured glass, magic lantern slides, copper tape and solder, 33 x 33cm, Installation view by Oskar Proctor.

The individual names of these works are taken from the animal represented in the central slide of each piece– *Polar Bear; Antelope; Wolf*. Grouped together by Gould, each is a small map of a fictional zoological-garden. Layered on top of the slides, floating slightly above, is a geometric construction of clear and coloured glass. Clear glass sits next to pale watery-blue, yellow and a muddy-blush glass in *Polar Bear*; a slightly deeper blush, stronger blue and pale green in *Antelope;* and a strong arsenic-green is paired with a vibrant burnt-orange in *Wolf*. On these additional layers, triangles meet quadrilaterals and their soldered seams do not always align with those of the slides, often cutting across– providing echoes of the enclosed architecture within the photographs. This additional surface of colour and shape transgressing the aspect of the lantern images creates a sense of movement, whilst the layering of translucent surfaces produce a depth which expands the space and creates a sense of distance between the viewer and the captive animals.

We find this combination of coloured glass, zoological slides, and copper solder again in the following series *Architecture for an Extinct Planet: Sea Creature*s and *Architecture for an Extinct Planet: Marine Animals.* These geometric, strongly coloured asymmetrical glass sculptures sat on tall plinths bring the work to eye-level, referencing the buildings conceived in Bruno Taut's *Alpine Architecture* - futuristic, glass mountain top refuges, nestled in the peaks of the Alps[i] and the coloured glass architecture of the fictional architect in *The Gray Cloth with Ten Percent White: A Ladies Novel by Paul Scheerbart*.[ii.]

Polly Gould, *Architecture for an Extinct Planet: Sea Creatures* (detail), 2020,
Coloured glass, magic lantern slides, copper tape and solder, 27 x 30 x 33cm,
Installation view by Oskar Proctor.

On the walls surrounding these sculptures is a series of works on paper entitled *Paper Architecture.* Mounted on textured off-white paper, are individual representations of mountains, topped with colourful geometric shapes. This series was also conceived in reference to Taut's alpine, glass, architecture. While at first these pieces seem two-dimensional, one realises that various darts, pinches and panels, are sewn together create a three-dimensional relief in the work. These mountains are created from paper which is inkjet printed, a photographic print of another work created in watercolours.

The strong use of colour throughout the exhibition reminds us that the modern period of architecture was, indeed, colourful. As Mark Wigley has argued, the myth of modern architecture as all white has resulted in part, from its representation in black and white photographs—editorial decisions which have misrepresented the use of colour.[iii]

Polly Gould, *Paper Architecture: Mont Blanc*, 2020, Inkjet print on paper, thread, 30x42cm, Installation view by Oskar Proctor

As well as often concealing what William. W. Braham calls 'in fact a quite vigorous use and discussion of colour' such editorial whitewashing has impacted interpretations of the strong

use of colour found in the work of Taut.[iv] Furthermore my own research has shown the nuanced and craft-led colour used by other architects such as Eileen Gray was almost entirely concealed.[v] Gould's work here reminds us of the role of colour in these lively architectural debates.

Looking past *Paper Architecture*, through an open archway, your eyes meet *The Crystal Chain: habit/refuge,* which surmounts the windows at the front of the gallery, and casts its own shadow on pale yellow walls. These habits as wearable-shelters—or dress-shelters—which together become a human-scaled mountain range, a representation of *Mont Blanc*; *The Matterhorn*; *Dent du Géant*; and *Piz Roseg*– mountains which reach across and intersect the bureaucratic borders of Italy, France, and Switzerland. Gould's mountains, however, are crafted from soft machine-sewn paper, rather than hard granite, and are coloured with gentle washes of watercolour-grays rather than sheets of ice. Wooden mannequins give them their stature, and sitting atop their peaks, so to speak, are strange geometric structures made of soft, bright colours. The colour and the unexpected nature of these structures remind you of the surprising colour you do find atop mountain peaks– the sweet colours of alpine flora– which seem just as precarious and fragile surviving up in the thin mountain air, as do these paper refuges.

The name of the work points to a set of correspondence which was conducted by a group of male, Expressionist architects, led by Bruno Taut, who had been based in Germany.[1] This correspondence is known now as the *The Crystal Chain Letters* (1919). A written exchange of architectural ideas, in text and image, *The Crystal Chain Letters* were born out of both the inability to build due to the collapse of the German industry, and the horrors and physical upheaval of the First World War. The nature of this exchange and its medium (paper), meant that these ideas were often utopian and not conceived to be built, but rather an imagined refuge from the ravages of war on society.

Both, fashion and architecture speak to the basic human need for shelter. Without either we become exposed. They provide a refuge, both from natural hazards and manmade ones. Gould's work reminds us of this by creating shelters out of paper. This creates a translucent, watery feeling to the work. The huge pieces—which do take up most of the physical space in the room— feel delicate and fragile. They give you an inkling to how the exposed shelters presented in *Crystal Chain* would have felt in reality.

Gould took vintage *Simplicity 'Miss'* sewing-patterns as her blocks to create *The Crystal Chain*. Blocks are the patterns that are used as the starting point to develop many garments of different styles. Much like a base map in cartography, these will come annotated with landmarks and navigation points for the clothed body—waist-line, grain-line, centre-front,

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[1] Bruno Taut, Willhelm Brückmnann, Hermann Finsterlin, Paul Gösch, Jakobus Göttel, Walter Gropius, Wenzel Hablick, Hans Hansen, Carl Krayl, Wassili Luckhardt, Hans Luckhardt, Hans, Scharoun, and Max Taut.

bust point…etc— which guide the pattern-cutter; they will have been previously tested and proven as dependable garment patterns. These points are fixed, and must migrate to the new pattern in order for it to make sense and work as a reliable sewing-pattern, or map, of a garment. Patterns are indeed maps, maps of both garments, and the body. They are dependent on the original pattern cutter's idea of the ideal garment and their perception of the ideal body—where breasts are, hip-to-waist ratio…etc. So, it is fitting that Gould's work used this medium to portray both the Mont Blanc massif, whose maps are drawn differently depending on which country they were drawn in, and the utopian ideology, or 'paper architecture,' of these architects.

These *Simplicity* patterns have key design tropes of 1960s women's fashion. These tropes are bias-roll collars; raglan sleeves; pockets concealed in side-seams; bracelet-length sleeves, and waist-less A-line silhouettes — often referred to as trapeze, or tent dresses. The use of these patterns is pertinent, as it also points to the paper dresses of the 1960s. The craze of paper dresses swept N. American and N. European culture for a very brief period in the 1960s. The dresses were sold as a modern ideal: A design which speculated about a future that was affordable, and therefore accessible to all; easy to alter with little craft knowledge or skill; highly personal; mobile; and thoroughly radical. Much like paper architecture these dresses were often highly political statements and later morphed into Poster Dresses, famously used for both Ronald Regan and J. F. Kennedy's electoral campaigns. Proven to be more utopian than modern, paper dresses were rejected before the end of the 1960s for the less ephemeral, less wasteful alternatives— and a more natural, earthy aesthetic.[vi]

Finally, after climbing two flights of stairs, you open the door to a room with walls of deep teal. Here, Gould's sound installation, *Manifesto for an Architecture of Atmospheres*, asks us to consider that human intervention and dominance is not the way to deal with climate change– to consider the manifesto 'air is no more concrete than concrete' and 'concrete is no more concrete than air.' The sound inside the installation is discombobulating. This collaboration with Pedro Novo artificially augments the acoustics of the space and alters one's perception of what is inside and what is outside– what is concrete and what is air. The manifesto is piped through headphones, which are inside a multicoloured-organdie geodesic dome: It is repeated by the voice of different children and adults, spoken both individually and collectively.

The show presents various representations of manifestos, utopian architectural visions and fantasies. Gould does this using glass, sound and paper. In revisiting modernist Utopias, Gould rejects the rigid, solid and opaque materials associated with this period— concrete and steel— in favour of the pliable, gaseous and translucent— fabric, paper and air. The commonality is the use of glass; however, Gould's use of glass reminds us of the decorative, intricate stained-glass windows, rather than flat swathes of glass often associated with modernist architecture. It points to the coloured glass in the work of Bruno Taut, both in his Glass Pavilion, or his GlassHaus, as well as his utopian *Alpine Architecture*.

Gould reminds us how difficult it is to be certain. The artist is not sitting on the fence, but rather illuminating how complex and unresolved our thoughts and decisions around the planet and its changing climate need to be; that there cannot be a 'fix-all' solution to these problems. Through reactivating utopian ideas from the past and through the use of sewing-patterns as a type of mapping, Gould reminds us that all lives are different, not all have the same viewpoints, nor the same opinion of what problems are, and what they are not. While, to those with a solution-driven mindset this stance can seem too slippery, or pessimistic, I would argue– like Gould's choice of colours– it is a hopeful one. I am thinking of Rebecca Solnit's definition of what hope is *not*:

> …it is not the belief that everything was, is, or will be fine…It's also not a sunny everything-is-getting-better narrative, though it may be a counter to the everything-is-getting-worse narrative. You could call it an account of complexities and uncertainties, with openings.

And what hope *is*:

> It's the belief that what we do matters even though how and when it may matter, who and what it may impact, are not things we can know beforehand.[vii]

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[i] Bruno Taut, *Alpine Architektur*. Essen: Folkwang, 1919

[ii] Paul Scheebart, *The Gray Cloth with Ten Percent White: A Ladies' Novel by Paul Scheerbart*, 1914.

[iii] Mark Wigely, *White Walls and Designer Dresses :The Fashioning of Modern Architecture.* Cambridge Mass: MIT Press, 1996, passim.

[iv] W. W. Braham, Modern Colour/Modern Architecture: Amedee Ozenfant's Academy of Fine Art, Aldershot: Ashgate, 2002, 3.

[v] Rachel. S. Tyler, 'Fugitive Colour: Revealing the hidden colour in representations of Eileen Gray's Modern Architecture'. *Journal of Design History*, 2020. [Forthcoming]

[vi] See https://www.vam.ac.uk/articles/paper-dresses. [accessed 9 March 2020]

[vii] Solnit, Rebecca. 'Grounds For Hope.' *Tikkun* 32, no. 1 (2017): 30-39.