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INDUSTRIAL FOREST

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Project Details

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Title
Industrial Forest

Output
Installation and Publication

Location
Hong Kong

Venue
Spring Workshop

Dates of installation
2013-18
View from above with the elevated highway
Summary of the Work and its Significance, Originality, and Rigor

Industrial Forest is an installation, publication, and set of instructions that examines the transformation of a postindustrial urban site, charting the relationship between nature and spaces of manufacturing within an evolving economy. Recording the growth of nature and the eventual decay of the installation, the study provides a unique idea of continuation after the installation has been dismantled. The work is conceptualized as a reproducible set of instructions that could be duplicated by others, not only in the tangible physical aspects of the work, but the ephemeral qualities of the context of the site and the
documentation process. Currently being collected by M+, a museum designed by Herzog & de Meuron under construction in Hong Kong, Industrial Forest does not depict a fixed result, but describes a process of becoming and undoing.

Industrial Forest was one of two enduring works on display at Spring Workshop, which was bestowed the Prudential, Parallel Contemporary Art, and Saatchi Gallery’s ‘Prudential Eye Award’ for ‘The Best Asian Contemporary Art Institution’. Spring is a Hong Kong entity with an international presence due to its prestigious residency and arts programme with visitors received from around the globe.

Spring Workshop had a predetermined finite duration of five years and that limitation contributed to the idea of
Industrial Forest, since the project would not be a permanent entity. Therefore, the permanency of the project is positioned as a process, a natural progression reflecting the natural cycles found within constructing and documenting an artificial forest – evidenced in the evolution of building codes, seasonal cycles, political cycles, economic and entropic cycles.
New growth within the artificial landscape
A view of the mirror parapet and elevated highway beyond
The transforming context, with new offices in the background and industrial buildings in the foreground
Originality

In the project there are the idealized conditions depicted within the concepts, drawings, and documentation of the installation – and the actual conditions, which weather, fade, and decay the built work. Traces on the surface of the filaments map the pollution over time, registering the changes in atmospheric conditions that serve as a type of ice core sample taken from the sky. Pollution altered the installation, arriving from afar, from coal burned in China, and from the extreme proximity of traffic on the elevated highway a few meters away. The corroded filaments provide evidence of the work our lungs do every day to purify the nearly unbreathable air.
Research Questions

- What is the role of permanence and the conceptualization of architecture as an idealized state unmarked by time?
- What is the role of entropy and weathering, of creating a physical register of wind and storms?
- How to define a project, not through drawing, construction, and final result, but through film, conversations, and time?
- Can something temporary have a lasting presence?
- Does each copy need to be the same or is it an iteration in dialogue with the prior and future versions?
Framework for Making an Industrial Forest

Bamboo–like filaments at least 4 meters in height (aluminum)
The idea of grass (real or artificial)
Grid of filaments with a minimum spacing of 100mm and a maximum spacing of 800mm
Inclusion of cultural/government/official policy of the site (city) as a critical part of design
Urban setting undergoing transformation with a preference for a post-industrial site
Site skewed in planometric terms with a reflective boundary surface
Area of intervention no larger than 1,000 square feet
Social condenser function with events of diverse natures
Not-for-profit organization as host/curatorial partner
Documentation every 3 months and during extreme conditions (nature or constructed)
Installation duration of at least 9 months
Hospitality toward unexpected natural visitors (plant or animal)
Openness and flexibility to audiences without discrimination (public access)
Lifespan to include all 4 seasons and a minimum humidity of 89%
Generation of a musical score
Mapping of the heritage and transformation of the neighborhood
Charting of the weather
Maintenance by an attentive and dedicated artisan
Firefly lights at evening events
Freedom to create in dialogue with — or to dispense with — the above guidelines as you wish

1 Damage to Industrial Forest immediately after the strongest typhoon in Hong Kong since records began
2 The conceptual framework for others to create their own Industrial Forest
3 Mushrooms appearing and disappearing, representing one of the various influxes of nature that materialized, alongside spiders weaving webs, beetles, and small trees which started to sprout
Rigor

Rigor is demonstrated in the precision in which the installation was conceived, constructed, and will be remade. Architecture is often conceptualized as having permanence and a timeless quality and the rigor of this project aligns with developing a methodology which questions this.

An example is through the selection of the materiality of the project. Designed to withstand extreme outdoor conditions, the stainless-steel mirror hardly shows signs of aging, providing a datum to read the project’s transformation by. The grass on the ground is artificial, but it is manufactured to show subtle imperfections, as it was designed in Australia to emulate the result of a long-term regional drought brought about
by global warming. Natural Australian grass is no longer perfectly green and so neither is the fake grass. The yellowing grass showed signs of weathering as it was being laid new and this continued in the way the sun inscribed itself on the grass after years of exposure. Compressed under thousands of footsteps, the grass demarcated areas where visitors walked, with traces on the surface of the grass creating an intricate drawing made by nature over time.

The set of instructions further this, asking others to consider the political landscape, construction process, activation policy, and to document their own version. It is a release of control over the work, to nature, to people, and to the disparate contexts that the work might be reconceived within.
Significance

M+ Museum of Visual Culture in Hong Kong is in the process of acquiring the Industrial Forest for their permanent collection. The significance of the work might be best described by those who have written about the work. Lars Nittve, the founding director of Tate Modern in London; Defne Ayas, director of the Witte de With Center for Contemporary Art in the Netherlands; and Doryun Chong, chief curator of the M+ Museum of Visual Culture, and many other prominent art and design critics have written about the installation.

Artist William Kentridge; curator Hans-Ulrich Obrist; diplomat and art collector Uli Sigg; Obie-award winning composer Michael Friedman; Chair of the Department of Art at Cornell University,
Iftikhar Dadi; artists Elmgreen & Dragset; composer Ari Benjamin Meyers; and Yana Peel, CEO of the Serpentine Galleries in London, were among the visitors to the Industrial Forest.

A new Industrial Forest is currently being built on a former industrial site, in dialogue with the prior iteration. Other iterations are in discussion as well, for a site in California, among others, indicating that the idea of the project may have the future potential of reaching a wider audience.
Dissemination and Evidence of Peer Review

The project was featured in the ‘Design Vanguard’ issue of Architectural Record magazine, Princeton Alumni Weekly, wallpaper*, designboom, and within the publication Installation Art Now by Sandu Publishing. An image of the installation is held in the Getty Images collection.

Reviewed locally in Manifesto Magazine, South China Morning Post, City Magazine, Prestige, and Ming Pao Weekly.

I have spoken about the project at Cambridge University, at an American Institute of Architects, Hong Kong forum, a American Academy in China Symposium, at Macau Design Centre, and at a Venice Biennale symposium at
the Palazzo Trevisan degli Ulivi organized by the University of Liechtenstein. Marisa Yiu has spoken about the project at Design Shanghai.

\[1\] The project viewed from the elevated highway
The Department of Architecture educates students in an active culture of service, scholarship and invention. Uniquely situated at the crossroads of China and global influence, the Department takes the approach that design is best explored from a sophisticated understanding of both. With a multidisciplinary curriculum emphasizing technology, history and culture, students gain broad knowledge and skills in the management of the environmental, social, and aesthetic challenges of contemporary architectural practice. With opportunities for design workshops, international exchanges, and study travel, graduates of the Department of Architecture are well prepared for contribution to both international and local communities of architects and designers.