

Mary Mattingly

Robert Mann Gallery
By Colby Chamberlain



Mary Mattingly, *Flock*, 2012, C-print, 30 x 30".

Flock, 2012, the first of fifteen photographs in Mary Mattingly's exhibition "House and Universe," shows two geodesic domes set atop a raft adrift in the ocean. Like Mattingly's *Waterpod Project*, 2009, and her current *Triple Island*, 2013, these domes, part of *Flock House Project*, 2012, have functioned as temporary, self-sufficient shelters in New York's parks and plazas. Variously outfitted with hydroponic gardens, water-filtration systems, and buoys, they are public-art prototypes for the small-scale floating communities that Mattingly predicts will become our collective dystopian norm should global warming and corporate privatization continue unabated. Thus, the photograph



Cover: Amateur Architecture Studio (Wang Shu and Lu Wenyu), Ningbo History Museum, 2008, Zhejiang, China. Photo: Clément Guillaume.

NOVEMBER 2013

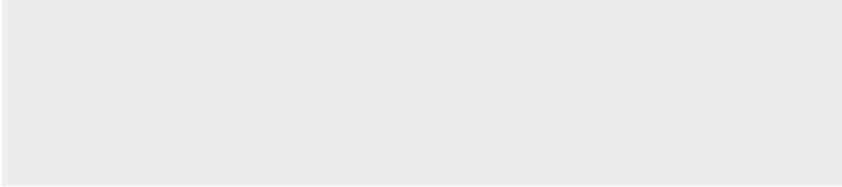
VOL. 52, NO. 3

ARCHIVE

doesn't chronicle the *Flock House* domes' past installations, but instead stitches them into a projected, distinctly Ballardian future.

As art historian (and *Artforum* contributor) Eva Díaz has noted, Mattingly is one of several artists who have recently resuscitated the geodesic domes patented and popularized by Buckminster Fuller. This new turn in "dome culture," however, jettisons Fuller's oracular ebullience. The aims of Mattingly's shelters instead come closer to those of Krzysztof Wodiczko's *Homeless Vehicle*, 1988. Wodiczko's souped-up shopping cart was purportedly purely practical, equipped to satisfy the stated needs of New York's homeless population—a bin for collected aluminum cans, an enclosure for secure sleeping, etc.—though the resemblance it bore to a missile on wheels was hardly accidental. Like *Homeless Vehicle*, Mattingly's prototypes are seductive warnings: charming as single units, but foreboding when their proliferation is earnestly contemplated. Whereas Fuller's domes radiated technocratic confidence, Mattingly's betray skepticism toward design solutions that accommodate a deleterious status quo without addressing root causes.

MOST READ



In "House and Universe," Mattingly acted convinced that her imagined future and the present day were converging. Can you blame her? In the context of New York alone, consider the ongoing recovery from Hurricane Sandy; the encampment-as-protest of Occupy Wall Street; or even the trendy ubiquity of sustainable living measures, such as home gardens, solar panels, and dry compost. As if to prepare for imminent catastrophe, Mattingly has been divesting herself of personal possessions by bundling her books, clothes, keepsakes, and electronics into boulder-like clumps bound together by twine. Two such overstuffed amalgams, *Terrene*, 2012, and *Gyre*, 2013, were presented here as discrete sculptures; in photographs, others appeared in less pristine settings, such as an unidentified shantytown, suggesting a connection between Mattingly's haphazard constructions and the improvised architectures at the outskirts of cities worldwide.

Before parting with her personal items, Mattingly systematically documented them in photographs and 3-D scans, though this component of her project was nowhere in evidence. Overall, "House and Universe" raised anew the question of how the gallery context condenses and filters practices as holistic as Mattingly's (or, say, Andrea Zittel's). Almost to a fault, the photographs bristle with art-historical references: Their square format and centered compositions loosely follow the conventions of Bernd and Hilla Becher's deadpan typologies; titles allude to Robert Smithson and Titian; one photograph was taken in Nevada from the bottom of Michael Heizer's *Double Negative*, 1969, and another, of an overburdened rowboat disappearing into mist, borrows wholesale from Caspar David Friedrich. The elegant, elegiac tone of Mattingly's "art" photography seems at odds with the scrappy, madcap mood of her urban interventions. Then again, there is a grim site specificity to Mattingly's exhibiting work in Chelsea, a district badly damaged by Sandy. Furthermore, *Gyre* points out how even art's discursive apparatus contributes to a culture of

overproduction and waste. Tucked behind its twine netting are several bulky periodicals bearing on their back covers the Swiss pastorals and red lettering of Bruno Bischofberger advertisements—unmistakably, old issues of *Artforum*.

—Colby Chamberlain

ARTFORUM INBOX

Register to receive our full menu of newsletters—*From the Archive*, *Must See*, *Video*, *In Print*, *Dispatch*, and *ArtforumEDU*—as well as special offers from *Artforum*.

•