

Laurel Consuelo Broughton / Andrew Kovacs
Anna Neimark / Andrew Atwood

~~Errors, Estrangement, Messses & Fictions~~

Space @All Gallery
January 16th–February 12th, 2016



University of Southern California
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USC Architecture

Curator's Statement

The *Errors, Estrangement, Messes and Fictions* exhibition is the first of an ambitious off-campus exhibition program that is intended to give the USC School of Architecture a more visible presence in the city, engaging a broader disciplinary and popular audience, while framing new relationships between faculty (both former and current) and alumni who are significantly impacting the field of architecture. Beyond the specific relations to USC, the exhibition is intended to mark the rising presence and influence of a small group of designers in Los Angeles.

It is unusual, and seemingly contradictory to look at young practices through a retrospective lens, but it is often in the formative, murky and truly experimental origins that the stuff of the slowly, solidifying practice emerges from. In the case of three of these designers, the USC School of Architecture served as a seminal environment for each to develop their pedagogical positions and to begin testing out formative ideas. This condensed space in time has set the stage for their current and ongoing output of compelling and challenging work.

The early career 'retrospective' exhibition is structured around the work and investigations of the four designers as both individuals and collaborators. First Office combines the deep disciplinary thinking and output of Anna Neimark and Andrew Atwood where errors and estrangement are driving conceptual forces. Laurel Consuelo Broughton reveals the eccentric and 'critical fictions' of Welcome Projects, while the feral yet disciplined excess of her sometimes collaborator, Andrew Kovacs, is a natural inclusion to both pollute and challenge the group. Resisting mere colonization of their objects and drawings, the show reveals a nuanced look into the thinking, methods, experiments and revisions that underlie the physical production. Here, working within the medium specificity of 'Architecture Exhibition', the entirety of the contents and their composition is considered a project unto itself.

—Hadrian Predock

*Curator and Director of Undergraduate Programs
USC School of Architecture*

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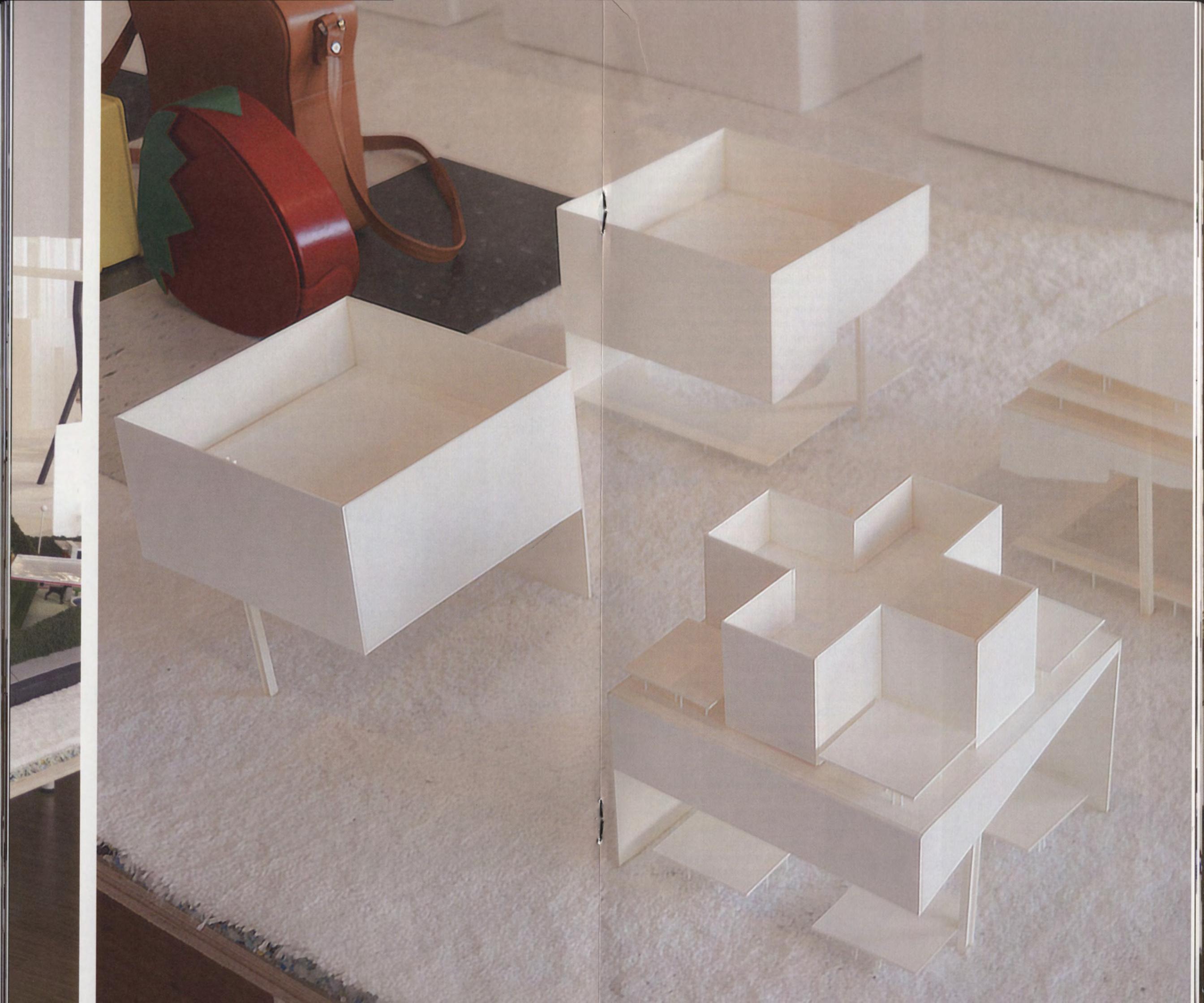
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Post Construction *First Office*

In his first emails about this show, Hadrian was pretty clear. This was going to be about work we'd already done, no *new stuff*. It sounded great for a second, even easy. All we had to do was collect the work, have a few conversations with the curatorial team, and deliver the goods on the assigned date. No construction schedules to worry about. No fabrication bottlenecks. No headaches. None of the stuff we usually encounter when installing work in a gallery. But there was one big problem. And it's a little embarrassing to admit. We'd thrown away most of that *old stuff*. I'm not one for posterity, and I like to travel light. So when we moved out of our downtown studio last summer, I tossed out all of our models and various other material artifacts. Why keep them!? We already have nice photographs. Anna reluctantly agreed. She wanted to save them, but she didn't want to pay for storage either. So into the dumpster they went. Columns, Tables, Houses, Cities... all made of foam and paper. Now yellow and dusty, they were easy not to miss. To be honest, I enjoyed throwing them away. Emptying shelves of all that clutter. Models do not stack well, and I was never satisfied with how they looked, piled and jumbled together on our shelves. As they say, out with the old...

So as we confronted the empty storage shelves in our new studio space, our initial excitement quickly waned. If we wanted to be part of the show, we'd have to rebuild all that stuff. What had taken years to make (and minutes to throw away) would have to be recreated in a few months. Lucky for us, this exhibition is well-funded, so labor and materials were not a problem. The time constraint was a bit of an issue, but we'd already finished designing all these things. It shouldn't be too difficult, we thought... But it's weird to build a model of something after you've built the real thing. Before building buildings, building models is required as an abstract, in-between step. Models reduce, idealize, and prioritize things to a set of necessary parts—only the things you think are important.

For us, the most important things about our old models are the images we make with them. Regardless of whether we build them in the computer or whether we build them out of paper, it's always about the image. In our work, you have to look hard to distinguish between renderings of models and photographs of models. Not because we are interested in photo-realism, but because they are produced and constructed the same way.

1. Image → Mode → Greyscale
2. Image → Adjustments → Brightness/Contrast → Contrast: -25

3. Edit → Transform → Skew → Skew the image, so all the verticals in the model are vertical in the image
4. Image → Canvas Size → Height: 10", Width: 10"

Over and over again, for every image. We tried to do this to photographs of projects after they were built. Photoshopping out people. Lowering saturation level. Reducing contrast. Sometimes it worked. Usually it didn't. For one, there's a contractual limit to the stuff you can do to a photograph taken by a hired professional, especially if they maintain rights to the image. Moreover, too much was added or changed from the model. Efforts to erase ducts, blend seams, and relocate outlets didn't have the desired effect. Instead of making the built versions look more abstract, more idealized, and more like the model, the images looked messy and smudged. Now, I appreciate these images for what they are: documents of the changes and compromises that are made as an architect loses a degree of authorship and control over the project. Someone else's construction. Someone else's building. Someone else's images.

As we confronted the task of rebuilding new versions of old models, it seemed impossible to go back. Building the models after the lies of our early images were either constructed or exposed. After the projects were subjected to additional drawings, documentation, and contractual obligations of built work. These new models would have to respond to that stuff. They would have to be different.

If what comes before the building are lies, what do we call it after the lie is fully constructed? Of course, there's a name for forms of documentation produced after the thing has been built: *Post Construction Documents*. Under this umbrella term, we find various types of documentation such as: As Built Drawings, Record Drawings, and Measured Drawings.¹ All three types of post construction documentation differ with respect to authorship and contractual responsibility but share a similar distance from the design process and represent an ambition to document something as it is, and nothing else. These drawings operate outside of the boundaries of early schematic design visualizations, which must function as rhetorical devices used to convince clients or other project stakeholders. They differ from forms of representation produced in the middle stages of a project's development that are subjected to the needs of various building systems and details and must be used to convince various officials of the building's safety, code compliance, and constructability. And while they are often made on top of a set of construction drawings, they do not represent the architect's conflicts and struggles with the contractor,

client, and other end users in the way a set of construction documents would. As such, more than any other form of architectural representation, post construction documents are meant to represent a project without bias. I do not mean to suggest that they are neutral. They are bound to certain conventions, expectations, and contractual obligations that make neutrality impossible. Even so, of all the forms of representation we encounter in architecture, these documents get closest to a suggestion of objectivity. In other words, these drawings aren't without bias or judgment, but they are produced to look that way.

In 1969, after her trips to the Nevada desert, but before she published a book about it, Denise Scott Brown, in her essay *On Pop Art, Permissiveness and Planning*, referred to forms of non-judgmental documentation as "deadpan" when writing about the work of Ed Ruscha. We don't have to look far to see the impact that his photographs had on *Learning From Las Vegas* when it was published a few years later. *Every Building on The Sunset Strip* is directly referenced in the caption of similar series of images of the Las Vegas Strip, titled "An 'Ed Ruscha' Elevation of the Strip." Several other photographs in the book take additional cues from other works by Ruscha, notably *Thirty-four Parking Lots* and *Twenty Six Gasoline Stations*. Both of which are mentioned in the same article.² Like the architectural examples mentioned above, "deadpan" isn't the lack of emotion or bias but its appearance, its look. Unlike drawings produced before the building, which are overloaded with the combined rhetoric and politics of various members of the design and construction process, post construction documents must do the opposite. As documents of a survey, they must possess what others have called a "rhetoric of objectivity," which has been described as an "oscillation between aestheticization and documentary survey"³. For this exhibition, we take this one small step further. Instead of an oscillation, these models are a combination of the documentary survey and its aestheticization. They aren't lies anymore, but they don't represent the truth either. They exist as Post-constructed (lies) or Post-fact representations of the real thing.

Thinking in this way allowed us to move quickly. Our new models had tiny fake electrical outlets, light switches, and vents. Little doors with brass doorknobs and hinges. Shelves and shelving brackets. Against the blank white backdrops of our built projects, these things stuck out in the high-res, high-contrast world of a professionally produced photograph. It was impossible not to notice them in these images and impossible not to include them in the new models. In a few weeks, we rebuilt most of the old models and wanted to keep going. Keeping with the spirit of the show and Hadrian's mandate of 'no new work,' we began to build models of other projects; projects that were not thought of as projects when we made them. I am referring to a series of other exhibitions we were part of;

exhibitions that displayed models but had never been modeled before, at least not by us. These new models are blander than the others. Because we were not responsible for the exhibition design of the projects, we had less information. Less documentation of the project before it was built. And because we'd never thought of them as our projects, we'd never documented them after they were installed. We emailed curators and other exhibitors and compiled a few things, but most people ignored our requests for information. For the most part, we relied on Google image searches and other people's websites. Low-res and blurry, these images are insufficient as a complete documentation of a project but give new purpose to the deadpan look of the other new models. Those new models are blank, because we want them to look that way. These new models are blank, because they have to be. No more doorknobs or little hinges. Molding that was modeled in previous models with scale lumber is replaced with white paper. Outlets are small rectangles of card stock, if they are included at all. Some parts are left out all together. Details lost in the jpeg's compression algorithm. With the other models, we achieve distance through irony, but with these models, we achieve distance through the low-resolution, small file-size requirement of highly circulated images.⁴

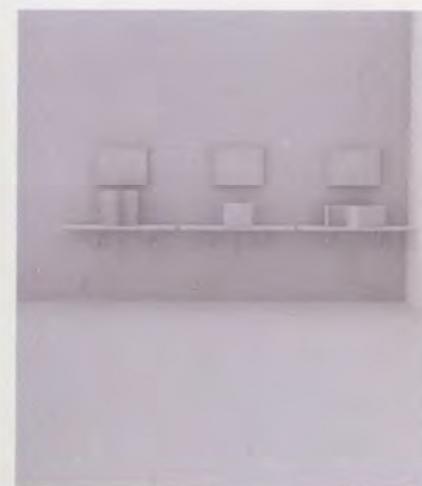
When I explained to a friend what we were doing, he claimed we were "leaning on Latour." He mentioned "constructions" and "quasi-objects" when looking at the models and then laughed. "They look the same as all the other stuff you guys do. I do not see how they are different?" He has a point. Not about Latour but about the look of the models. These new models are white and blank like the old ones. But if you look closely, there are important differences; differences that require us to acknowledge the growing importance of images when considering models. From the highly constructed, Photoshopped images of our earlier physical and digital models, to the contractual boundaries and cluttered nature of the professional photographs of our built work, to the low-res jpegs of the internet; the differences in our models can be better understood only when also looking at the images the models are pointing at and understanding how those images point back.

1—For an in-depth explanation, please see "Terminology: As-Built Drawings, Record Drawings, Measured Drawings," *AIA Best Practices* (June 2007): 1-2.

2—Denise Scott Brown, "On Pop Art, Permissiveness and Planning," *Journal of the American Institute of Planners*, Volume 35 Issue 3 (1969): 184-186.

3—Martino Stierli, *Las Vegas in the Rearview Mirror* (Los Angeles: Getty, 2013): 135.

4—I got this idea from Hito Steyerl, "In Defense of the Poor Image," *E-Flux* #10 (2009).



The Architectural League of New York *Authenticity* Exhibition As Built Model, Parsons School of Design, 2015. 14" x 17" x 9" White Mat Board



Duchamp Doors Model Video, Prepared for the *Authenticity* Exhibition, 2015. 24" x 20" x 6" MDF Painted White and Monitor with Cord



Murphy House Model Video, Prepared for the *Authenticity* Exhibition, 2015. 24" x 20" x 6" MDF Painted White and Monitor with Cord



Paranormal Panorama Model Video, Prepared for the *Authenticity* Exhibition, 2015. 24" x 20" x 6" MDF Painted White and Monitor with Cord



Duchamp Doors for Shotgun House Model, 2014. 18" x 18" x 18" Basswood and White 2-ply Mat Board



Murphy House Model, Echo Park, CA, 2015. 12" x 12" x 12" Basswood and White 2-ply Mat Board



Paranormal Panorama Screening Room Model, Mackey Gallery, MAK Center for Art and Architecture, 2015. 12" x 12" x 18" Basswood and White 2-ply Mat Board



...And Pedestals Installation Model, SCI-Arc Gallery, 2013. 12" x 12" x 4" White 2-ply Mat Board



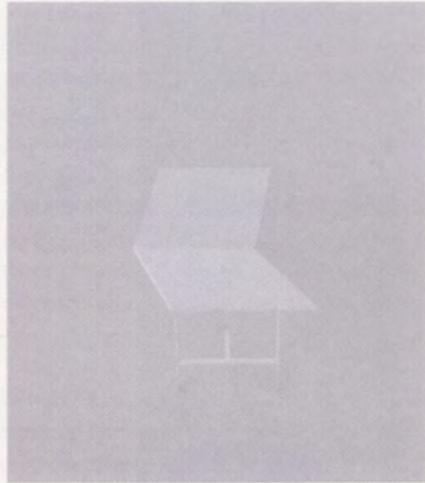
Graham Foundation
Treatise
Exhibition As
Built Model,
Chicago, IL,
2015.
8" x 28" x 12"
White Mat
Board



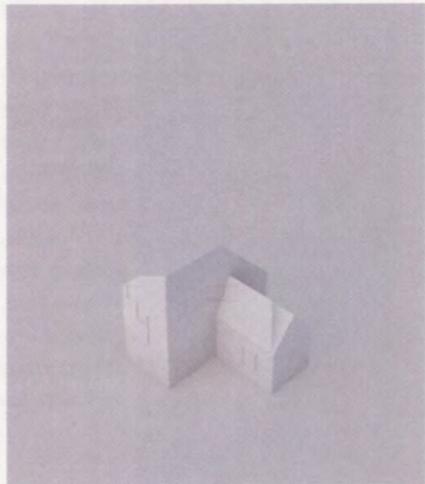
Shotgun
House Model,
Lexington,
KY, 2014.
8" x 30" x 4"
White 2-ply
Mat Board



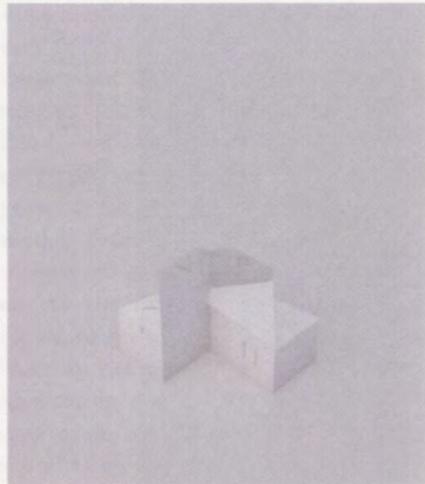
Possible
Table Model,
Possible
Mediums
Exhibition,
Ann Arbor,
MI, 2014.
8" x 4" x 4"
White 2-ply
Mat Board



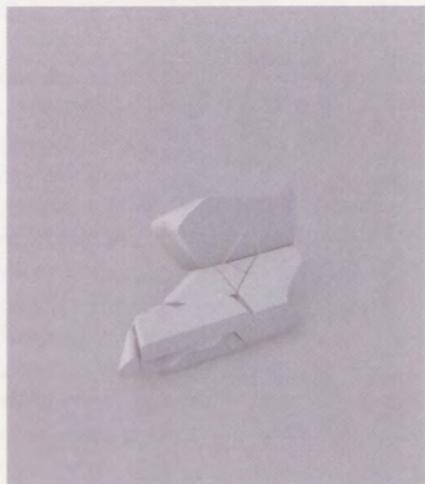
Possible Table,
1:1 Size, Built
for the *Treatise*
Exhibition,
2015.
59" x 29 1/2" x
29 1/4"
MDF Painted
White and
Grey IKEA
Lerberg
Trestles



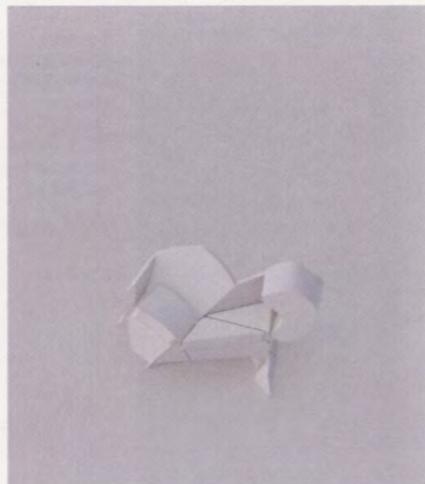
House on
House Model
1, 2015.
12" x 12" x 12"
White 2-ply
Mat Board



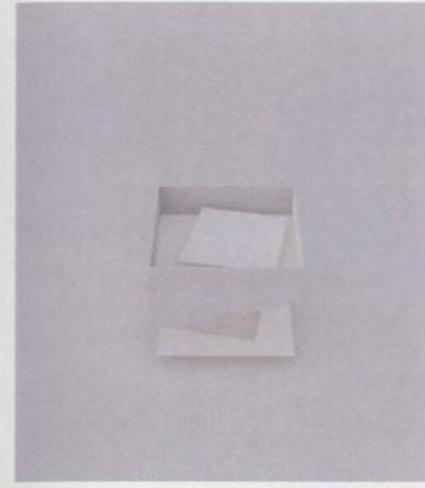
House on
House Model
2, 2015.
12" x 12" x 12"
White 2-ply
Mat Board



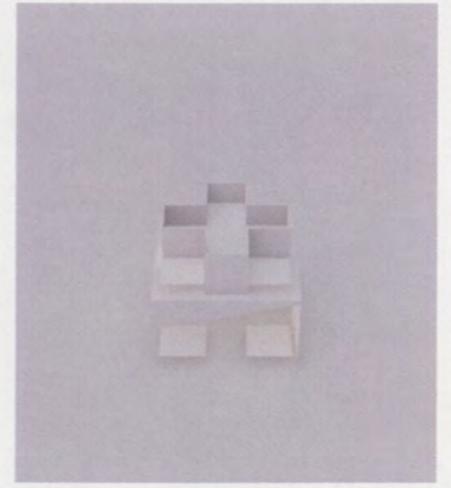
Couch on
Couch Model
1, 2015.
12" x 12" x 12"
Paper with
Print



Couch on
Couch Model
2, 2015.
12" x 12" x 12"
Paper with
Print



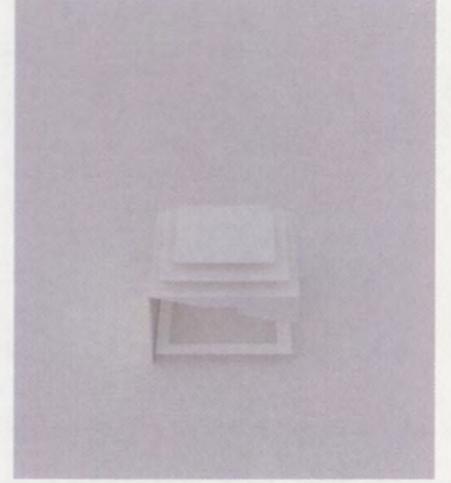
Collaboration
with All of
the Above,
White on White
House Model,
Pinterest
Headquarters,
San Francisco,
CA, 2013.
8" x 8" x 8"
White 4-ply
Mat Board



Black Cross
House Model,
Pinterest
Headquarters,
San Francisco,
CA, 2013
8" x 8" x 8"
White 4-ply
Mat Board



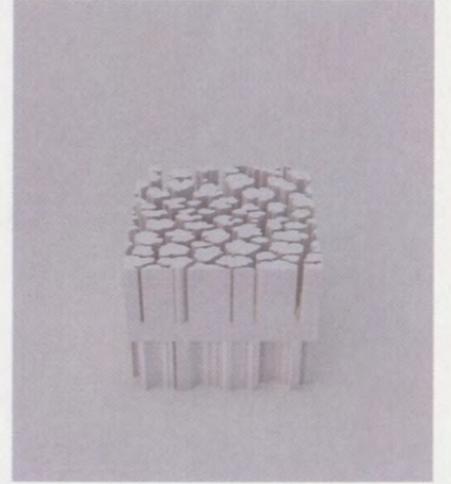
Black Circle
House Model,
Pinterest
Headquarters,
San Francisco,
CA, 2013.
8" x 8" x 8"
White 4-ply
Mat Board



Black Square
House Model,
Pinterest
Headquarters,
San Francisco,
CA, 2013.
8" x 8" x 8"
White 4-ply
Mat Board



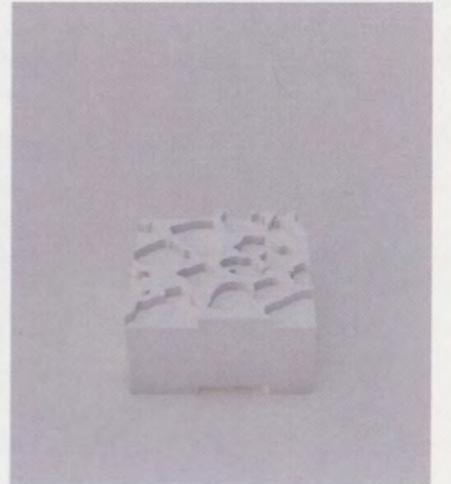
Ama Dablam
Mountain
Model, 2013.
40" x 40" x 40"
White Foam



Zoopol:
Leopard
City Model,
Think Space
Competition,
2011.
40" x 40" x 40"
White Foam



Zoopol: Zebra
City Model,
Think Space
Competition,
2011.
40" x 40" x 40"
White Foam



Zoopol:
Giraffe City
Model, Think
Space Compe-
tition, 2011.
40" x 40" x 40"
White Foam