

## LAND GRAB

What does it mean to occupy a piece of land today? As real estate prices skyrocket throughout many of the world's metropolises, it is increasingly difficult to sustain a space. Whether concerning ownership and real estate acquisitions or the more parasitical practices of squatting on private or public property, the artworks in LAND GRAB explicitly concern the claiming and naming of space. The artists in the exhibition relate to a long history of artistic practices where the site of placement is intrinsic to the piece itself. However, in opposition, or precisely as a response to, much work of the sixties and seventies, these pieces do not consider 'unused' or 'abandoned' territories as a 'blank slate' where the artwork can properly come into its own. Moreover, every piece acknowledges that no relationship to land is apolitical, thereby paying specific attention to socioeconomic, historical and political contexts that are always bound up with the specificities of topography. These works are more than just site specific. Often the work demonstrates how the possession, habitation or designation of a site alters the place itself.

The claiming of land is commonly a tale of the small individual battling a larger system and often suffering grave defeats. Lars Vilks declared a small section of the Swedish coastline to be the independent state of *Ladonia* in a formal letter to the Swedish prime minister and king. During its ten years of existence local landowners, the municipality, the police and high and supreme courts have combated the country that was initiated as an art project. Ladonia currently has 12,000 citizens from over 100 countries. Several works in the show directly address citizenship and nationhood in relation to territorial demarcations. In his 1992 performance, *The Appropriation (of Land Committee)*, Dan Perjovschi 'sold' one square meter of his country in the form of fifty small packages of soil and used two slogans 'We want land' and 'We don't sell our country' to underscore how xenophobic nationalism often became imbedded in discourses of the privatization of land in Romania after the fall of communism. Sejla Kamerić has questioned 'How is a space occupied and is it possible to occupy it?' Using bold red lettering on a large white banner, the artist mounted the words 'ZAUZETO' (Occupied) on the surface of a public building in Sarajevo. For LAND GRAB, Kamerić will be invited to create a similar intervention at Apex Art.

Other works in the show examine the politics of occupying land or real estate. Matthew Buckingham's film installation, *Muhheakantuck – Everything has a Name*, examines the brief but disastrous European colonization of the Hudson Valley. The projection addresses the 'writing' of space in an aerial voyage up the Hudson River and returning to Manhattan. Michael Smith and Joshua White's video *Open House* is a narrative about the artist 'Mike' who is selling the loft where he has lived for the past two decades as a sculptor, video artist and freelance entrepreneur. Since he is unavailable to show his loft, the piece presents itself as videotape made to greet prospective buyers. Mike's personal story intersects with the history of the loft movement in Soho during the 1970s and the hype of these converted spaces in the inflated real estate market of Manhattan.

Several works in the show address the impulse to belong and dwell in a particular place. In their piece *Skurvognsmorfologier*, Pernille Skou & Søren Holm Hvilsby have created an idiosyncratic system for studying the form and structure of converted trailers in Christiania (an area of Copenhagen that was declared a 'free state' by squatters in 1971). In some cases the mobile starting point is very visible, while in other cases, the structures have become sedimented and nearly transformed into standardized homes. Valerie Hegarty 'unworks' pristine white spaces in order to reflect the realities of urban transformation, thus reinserting a vanishing air of decay into spaces that have often themselves undergone dramatic renovations and gentrification. While in transit, Katrin Sigurdadottir created a suitcase-like box entitled *Green Grass of Home*. Each compartment, when unfolded, reveals a model of a park or a nature reserve close to the artist's previous homes (Reykjavik, New York, San Francisco) – as if she were trying to lay claim to something essentially unpossessable.

LAND GRAB finally aims to question what the place of art is in an increasingly global world where artists, like many others, are more and more on the move? Perhaps in this context, the works in the show contrast this tendency, as if out of an unfashionable impulse or urgent need to linger, to settle and to stay put.