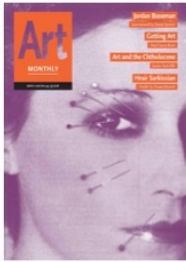


PRESSBOOK

Iván ARGOTE

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REVIEWS | EXHIBITIONS

Iván Argote: An Idea of Progress Space London 22 January to 19 March

Iván Argote
An Idea of Progress
2016

In his essay commissioned in conjunction with Iván Argote's exhibition, David J Madden uses the term 'urban boosterism' to describe recent trends in the presentation of metropolitan living. Rooted in the 19th-century expansion of the American West, boosterism is the precursor to political spin: the motive force employed by individuals to promote a town or city. *An Idea of Progress* reframes this act within the contemporary fixation with urbanism, exposing a burgeoning belief that social improvement and personal happiness are synonymous with a particular



version of London life – one which is wholly reserved for an ultra-wealthy elite.

An Idea of Progress comprises a film, a series of wall sculptures and a large-scale banner covering the facade of Space. Twenty-four metres in length, Argote's banner depicts an architectural fabrication based on personal interviews with Hackney residents concerning the widening disparity in the area. Adopting the conventions of estate agents' renderings, Argote's structure has relentless, undulating walkways which seemingly lead only to one another, and lurid, obtrusive flora which encroaches on every industrial surface. Roads resemble floating race tracks, while grotesque, dystopian elements are counteracted with areas dedicated to tranquillity: vegetable patches, park benches, rooftop gardens, a swimming pool. It is sparsely populated; people are often outnumbered by cows.

The main edifice is grounded in a Georgian townhouse, which plays host to a looming protrusion resembling a periscope. This interaction between the future and its history parallels the fundamental paradox in urban transformation: embracing a city's history while simultaneously demolishing it, accepting a city's inhabitants while at the same time displacing them. Described by the artist as 'an architectural monster', his proposed structure is caught between aspiration and despair, a bastardised allegory of concurrent local optimism and anxiety. Argote's use of scale alongside a subversion of language associated with urban development renders his banner both unmissable and invisible. The progressively extravagant advertising around construction sites in London affords

his vision a feasibility within its absurdity, allowing it to be subsumed into the innumerable hoardings which punctuate the city. Commissioned by Space, the pseudo legitimacy of Argote's banner suggests the progression and/or demolition of the site which houses it, even if the promise of the future is one belonging only to itself: 'The future's future is in construction.'

This slogan is next to the gallery door, so entering the building becomes an act of progress in itself: stepping into the future's future. Once inside, an eight-minute video work sets the precedent for the ubiquity of imagery manipulated in Argote's dreamscape. Against a soundtrack of hypnotic beats and distorted speech, the video centres on development sites around east London, slowly panning over large billboards for new penthouses and office blocks. The framing of these projections obfuscates their scale and context. Certain renderings are so convincing that their inauthenticity is exposed only through the reflection of human traffic in their lustre. Others are cartoonish, their tiny stature revealed by the sudden bisection of ankles and lower legs.

The city is shown in a constant state of incompleteness: image after image of interchangeable building sites and roadworks reveal a pattern of perpetual and blind advancement. Within these simulations of city life, Argote focuses on details – oranges, Japanese vases, geometric paintings and a copy of *Mrs Slocombe's Pussy* by Stuart Jeffries – which disclose how specific and rooted in luxury goods the ideal has become.

Alongside these visual particulars, the disconnected speech reduces the arguments for urban living to its, supposedly, most compelling elements: 'Zone 2', 'transportation', 'thirteen minutes away from the airport', 'monorails'. At points indiscernible, these fragments gradually filter into the territory of the erotic, until they are indistinguishable from dating rhetoric: 'Let's grab a cup of coffee, or beer ... I know a place nearby.' Seduced by its own sheen, the narrative culminates in a sibilant 'bring me to your place, bring me to your bed, bring me to your pillow ... let me sleep'.

Urban boosterism relies on the myth of the city. While it encourages a grand lifestyle for the urbanite, it also assumes a belief in the current ideology of London. This form of introspective advertising necessarily does not extend outside itself; it is fundamentally self-referential. It negates the essence of attraction and migration, of drawing those into the city. Argote's (de)construction of London's projected future reveals its inherent conceit. The aim is solely to gratify the elite, to cultivate a city which can only ever belong to them. ■

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