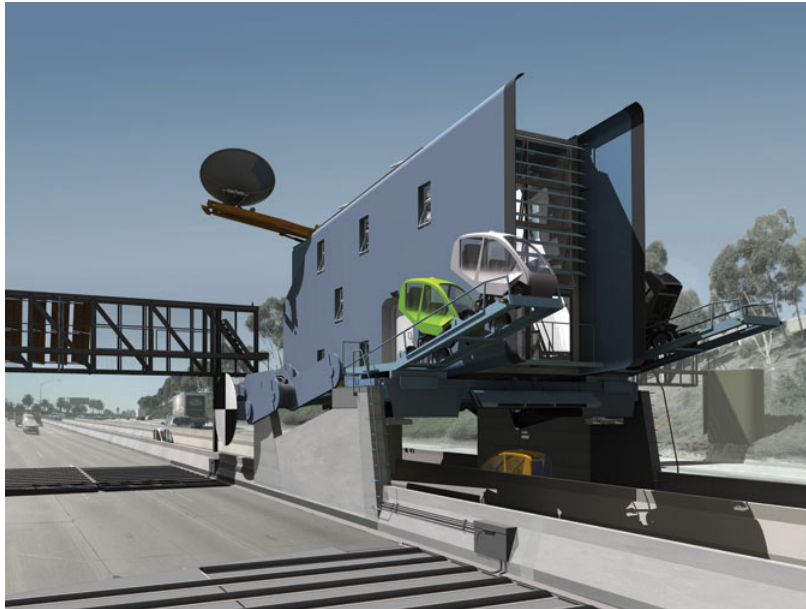


THE
ARCHITECTSNEWSPAPER**Mean and Green***SOUPERgreen* at LA's Architecture + Design Museum

By Greg Goldin

April 6, 2011



JONES' ELOV CARS STACKING UP ON THE HIGHWAY. COURTESY JONES PARTNERS ARCHITECTS

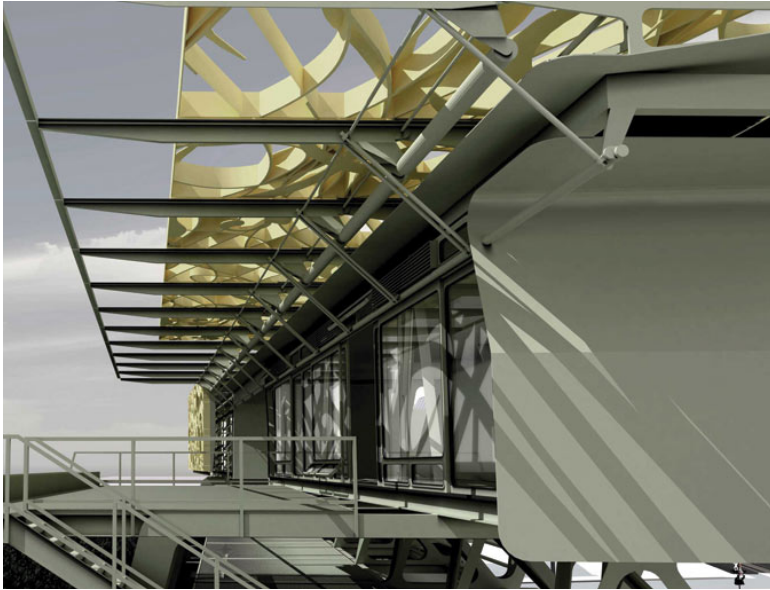
There is a good deal of black humor in *SOUPERgreen*, an exhibition by five Los Angeles designers who ponder how architecture can get beyond environmental bromides and use technology to promote “more exuberant, rad, boss, sick, and totally stoked green experiences.” It’s easy to let the eye skim past the word “sick,” but sick is probably the applicable adjective here. Sick as in a bit jaundiced, a touch twisted. The show, at LA’s Architecture + Design Museum, is by turns angry, philosophical, and didactic, as much manifesto as an assemblage of drawings and models. The five LA architects, Wes Jones, Doug Jackson, Aryan Omar, Steven Purvis, and Randolph Ruiz, recognize that the grim facts of climate change require radical solutions, along with a liberal dollop of irony.



A MODEL OF ELOV BY JONES PARTNERS ARCHITECTS.

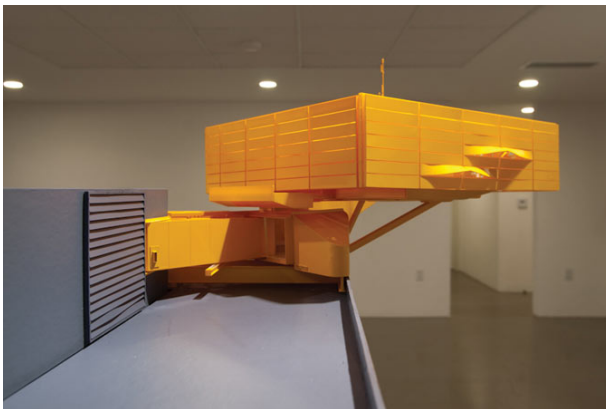
Start with the use of “SOUPER” in the show’s title. The architects have created an especially literal connotation: an automobile that has been pushed past its natural limits. And, here, buildings are pushed past those limits, too. Randolph Ruiz offers *‘Stead*, the “Sustainable Technology Experimental Agricultural Dwelling,” a farm and farmhouse built on the roof of a 292,000 square-foot warehouse in the San Fernando Valley. It’s the ultimate combination of live-work and factory farming—ingenious yet wildly impractical. *Eat Me!* is Steven Purvis’ “Aquaponic House,” a three-story kinetic greenhouse and dwelling with a self-contained fish run, leeching pond, and chicken coop. This souped-up shed, which propels itself along steel rails, looks like a hybrid of a threshing machine and an outhouse; it’s certainly not for your average backyard farmer who wants to till some soil. But, given the crisis that’s underway, such an apparatus might become a necessity.

Wes Jones, who is the driving force behind the exhibit, offers something that on the surface seems more practical and realizable. Known for his fascination with the hardware of technology and for his acerbic cartoons, Jones now introduces the ELOV (pronounced “E-LOVE,” I suspect), the “electric low-occupancy vehicle.” In this action-packed comic strip, Jones ingeniously turns the dreams of highway engineers inside out. Forget high-occupancy vehicles. A shrunken car half the width of a smart car is the way to go. The skinny vehicle accepts two stubborn facts about Los Angeles’ congested freeways: there is no room for more capacity, and drivers doggedly prefer to drive alone. So, the ELOV squeezes a solo driver into half an existing lane. Re-stripe the lanes and you can double the volume of traffic. And, the midget (in a design reminiscent of MIT’s “Stackable” concept car) jacks itself up to stand on its head in order to park perpendicular to the curb. No need for more parking lots which, as Jones points out, consume thirty percent of downtown real estate. Less is more.



DETAIL OF RUIZ'S ROOFTOP PROJECT *STEAD*, THE SUSTAINABLE TECHNOLOGY EXPERIMENTAL AGRICULTURAL DWELLING. COURTESY RANDOLPH RUIZ

Plainly, much of this is offered with a wink both hopeful and desperate. Wouldn't motorcycles, for instance, be just as good as ELOVs? Isn't one of the lynchpins of deep ecology a faith in sound rural practices that eschew factory farming? The exhibitors know the answers to these, and other more abiding questions. Aryan Omar, in eight hyper-realistic movie posters for a film series called *I'll Huff and I'll Puff and I'll Blow Your House Down* (the saga of a self-sufficient wind-gathering house in the Antelope Valley, "the ugliest house on the prairie," done up in bubble-gum pink in the model), tattoos his renderings with a running commentary. Aphorisms abound: "Madness is badness of spirit, when one seeks profit from all sources," (David Hume) or "The use of solar energy has not been opened up because the oil industry does not own the sun" (Ralph Nader). Counterpoised against these *bons mots* are reviewers' blurbs: "This house is a job killer," says one; "Half of what you'd expect," says another. "Horrible" shouts a third. Omar is clearly in touch with the prevailing dialectic in which the ideals of change are swallowed by the machinations of corporate greed.



JACKSON'S DEMONSTRATION HOUSE, *UNEASY GREEN*, CANTILEVERED FROM A ROOF ON WILSHIRE BOULEVARD. COURTESY DOUG JACKSON

Likewise, Doug Jackson's entry, *Uneasy Green*, an environmentally-themed demonstration house fatally cantilevered from the roof of a Wilshire Boulevard office building. Pure folly, of course, but the house is designed to continually change its skin to produce energy from prevailing winds and sunlight. It too is a deliberate inversion: the occupants must live according to the whims of nature, rather than as masters of it. A cartoon, which is laid over the architectural drawings, offers a running dialog by a pair of white doves who flutter about the rooftop perch. They advise, "Even while you have attempted to solve the environmental crisis through the use of technology, this very assumption of the ability to control and master the environment through technological means underscores a crucial perceptual problem that has underwritten degradation of the environment."

That's certainly a mouthful. But it's also the point. What's splendid about this small show is its wit. Even if all you do is gloss over the renderings and models and cartoons—themselves worth the tour—you'll get a fairly high-wattage jolt. It's not easy to blot out these wild ideas, part Buckminster Fuller, part Lebbeus Woods. There is just enough realism here that, as with the best science fiction, things like a self-perpetuating hydroponic shed and a unabashedly ugly "wind" house feel close to the next, best, new thing.

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<http://archpaper.com/news/articles.asp?id=5273#.U7XeRfldWHB>