

GRAHAM FOUNDATION

PRESS RELEASE

For immediate release

Actions: What You Can Do With the City

On view October 16, 2009 through March 13, 2010, the next exhibition at the Graham Foundation challenges visitors to think differently about how to walk, play, recycle, and garden in order to reshape the city.



Football Field 1. Maider López. Sharjah Art Museum, Arab Emirates, 2007. © Maider López.

Action: Paint Grows Soccer Field

Actors: Maider Lopez; soccer enthusiasts

Tools: Two goals, paintbrush, paint

Site: Sharjah, United Arab Emirates, 2007

Chicago, October 13, 2009 — The Graham Foundation for Advanced Studies in the Fine Arts is pleased to present ***Actions: What You Can Do With the City***, an exhibition of 99 actions that instigate positive change in contemporary cities around the world. The exhibition is on view at the Graham Foundation Madlener House from October 16, 2009 through March 13, 2010.

Actions: What You Can Do With the City features seemingly common activities such as walking, playing, recycling, and gardening that are pushed beyond their usual definition by the international architects, artists, and collectives featured in the exhibition. Their experimental interactions with the urban environment show the potential influence personal involvement can have in shaping the city and challenge fellow residents to

participate. It highlights distinct actions including projects related to the production of food and urban agriculture; the planning and creation of public spaces to strengthen community interactions; the recycling of abandoned buildings for new purposes; the appropriation of urban sites into terrain for play, such as soccer, climbing, skateboarding, or parkour; the alternate use of roads for walking or rail lines as park space; the design of clothing to circumvent urban barriers against loitering or resting on benches; and many others.

Actions: What You Can Do With the City was originally devised by the Canadian Centre for Architecture in Montreal – on view from 26 November 2008 to 19 April 2009 – and was curated by Director and Chief Curator Mirko Zardini and CCA Curator of Contemporary Architecture Giovanna Borasi. The exhibition was conceived as an international research project, part of an on-going investigation in topical economic, social and political issues related to architecture and urbanism. It features international contemporary architectural projects, design concepts and research conveyed through a range of materials including architectural drawings, photographs, videos, publications, artifacts and websites. Accompanying the exhibition, the CCA co-published a catalogue in collaboration with SUN Amsterdam and designed a micro-site to inspire actions in the city.

Commenting on the exhibition, Mirko Zardini said “I am delighted to see the exhibition travel to Chicago and especially to the Graham Foundation. The Graham Foundation is deeply committed and passionately involved in sustaining a range of relevant studies in the contemporary debate on the city. Right now Chicago is an interesting place to discuss urbanism in a climate of openness and experimentation. I'm looking forward to seeing how the exhibition will continue to enhance new ways of thinking about how we interact with our cities.”

Actions: What You Can Do With the City is presented in Chicago during a year when the city celebrates the centennial of architect Daniel Burnham’s 1909 Plan of Chicago. “***Actions*** provokes us to consider the exact opposite of the often quoted Burnham charge to ‘Make no little plans.’” says Sarah Herda, Graham Foundation Executive Director and Curator. “In many ways the work brought together in the exhibition could be considered a collection of little plans—all demonstrating that creative thinking and participation at every scale has the potential to shape the urban environment.”

The exhibition along with the publication presents specific projects by a diverse group of activists whose personal involvement has initiated vital transformation in today’s cities. These human motors of change include architects, engineers, university professors, students, children, pastors, artists, skateboarders, cyclists, pedestrians, municipal employees, and many others who address the question of how to improve the urban experience. Their actions push against accepted norms of behavior in cities, at times even challenging legal limitations. The individuals and groups presented in the exhibition employ a range of approaches, from skating and parkour to dumpster diving and urban foraging. Some engage architecture directly by finding new uses for abandoned buildings, while others create tools for guerrilla gardening. In their individual critiques of urban modes of

production and consumption, these actors share a conviction that the traditional processes of top-down civic planning are insufficient, and new approaches and tools must be developed from the ground level upwards.

It places particular emphasis on the activists' tools, which comprise unusual materials ranging from large-scale inflatables and fruit-collecting dresses to seed-bomb rocket launchers. Included are masks disguising children as horses and sneakers customized for sliding along railings.

ARTISTS AND ARCHITECTS

The exhibition features the work of Chicago-based artist Michael Rakowitz and radical ecologist Nancy Klehm, as well as the work of Graham Foundation grantees: Damon Rich /Center for Urban Pedagogy, Emily Scott, Amy Franceschini, Vikram Bhatt, Tali Hatuka, and Project Projects. Also featured is work by Steve Alba, Atelier Bow-wow, Buggy-Rollin, Coloco, CIRCA, James Graham and Thaddeus Jusczyk, Layla Curtis, Döll, Fergus Drennan, Fallen Fruit, Halfway Home for Wayward plants, Harmen de Hoop, iSee, Muf art / architecture, Office of Unsolicited Architecture, Recetas Urbanas, Sarah Ross, Shared Space, Whitney Stump, Superuse, Three Miles, Topotek, WHAT IF: projects Ltd., and WORK Architecture Company, among others.

ACTIONS PUBLICATION

Actions: What You Can Do With the City is accompanied by a book of the same title, which presents original research and writing that further examines the exhibition's exploration of how the design and experience of contemporary cities can be shaped by human actions. International in scope, the 30 essays are published for the first time and include personal observations by a range of activists alongside scholarly reflections on the positive impact these individual initiatives have on the city. The texts are interspersed with 34 specific actions drawn from the exhibition.

Introductory essays by the editors Mirko Zardini and Giovanna Borasi provide historical perspective and establish the curatorial framework for the exhibition and publication.

Original essays are contributed by Jochen Becker, Vikram Bhatt, Katrin Bohn, Brendan M. Brogan, Coloco, Henk Döll, Fergus the Forager, Omar Freilla, George J. Grella Jr., Fritz Haeg, Tali Hatuka, Dan Hill, Sarah Hill, Ocean Howell, Hans Ibelings, Momoyo Kaijima, David Ker Thomson, Zoe Laughlin, Sonia Lavadinho, Nina-Marie Lister, Alejandra López, Thomas Leo Ogren, Emily Rauhala, Richard Reynolds, Debra Solomon, Yoshiharu Tsukamoto, Jeroen van Nieuwenhuizen, and Andre Viljoen.

Co-published by Canadian Centre for Architecture, Montreal, and SUN, Amsterdam, the catalogue is designed by Novak, Amsterdam. The 240-page, soft-cover book includes 70 color and black and white illustrations, and features a folded poster as cover wrap. The volume is available for purchase at the Graham Foundation.

ACTIONS EXHIBITION DESIGN

As it was the case in Montreal, the exhibition was designed by Andrea Sala, Milan, and the graphic design including display brochures is by Project Projects, New York City.

ACTIONS ONLINE

The exhibition is accompanied by the award-winning website www.cca-actions.org, which presents a toolkit to inspire actions in the city. This databank of individual actions featured in the exhibition can be sorted and browsed in multiple ways, including by the type of tool employed in the action or the curatorial organization of the exhibition. The website features photographs and video resources and challenges users to respond by posting their own thoughts or initiatives on how to improve the city through individual action.

The website is created by Montreal based web design agency Bluesponge, with creative direction by Marian Kolev and concept by Mouna Andraos.

PUBLIC PROGRAMS

The Graham Foundation will host a series of talks during the run of the exhibition that explore the themes of ***Actions: What You Can Do With the City***. Fall events include the following:

October 29, 2009, 6pm
“Make No Medium Sized Plans”
Amale Andraos and Dan Wood, Work ac
www.work.ac

November 4, 2009, 6pm
Markus Miessen, Studio Miessen
www.studiomiessen.com

November 12, 2009, 6pm
Srdjan Jovanovic Weiss, Normal Architecture Office
www.thenao.net

January 25, 2010, 6pm
“Liquidated Architecture: Hope and the Shape of the City”
Damon Rich, Center for Urban Pedagogy
www.damon.anothercupdevelopment.org

March 10, 2010, 6pm
“The Revolution Will Be Cultivated”
Amy Franceschini, Futurefarmers
www.futurefarmers.com

All talks are held at the Graham Foundation’s Madlener House and are free of charge.

Accessibility: Talks are held in the ballroom on the third floor which is only accessible by stairs. The first floor of the Madlener House is accessible via an outdoor lift. Please call 312.787.4071 to make arrangements.

Space is limited, to make reservations email: rsvp@grahamfoundation.org or call 312-787-4071.

CURATORIAL TEAM

Actions: *What You Can Do With the City* is curated by CCA Director and Chief Curator Mirko Zardini and CCA Curator for Contemporary Architecture Giovanna Borasi, with Lev Bratishenko, Meredith Carruthers, Daria Der Kaloustian, and Peter Sealy.

Mirko Zardini is the Director and Chief Curator of the CCA since 2005. Under his direction, the CCA is deepening its commitment to investigating the social, environmental, and political issues facing contemporary architecture through its exhibitions, publications, programs, and internationally acclaimed research center. At the CCA, he curated the exhibitions *1973: Sorry, Out of Gas* (with Giovanna Borasi, 2007), *Sense of the City* (2005), *Out of the Box: Price, Rossi, Stirling + Matta-Clark* (2004), and has initiated a series of exhibitions developed with universities including Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), Princeton University, and Columbia University. Zardini is a practicing architect whose research, writings, and design projects engage contemporary architecture, its transformations, and its relationship with the city and landscape. He has taught at prestigious architectural schools, including the Swiss Federal Polytechnic University in Zurich and Lausanne, Harvard University, and Princeton University, and is a former editor of *Casabella* magazine and *Lotus International*.

Giovanna Borasi is CCA Curator of Contemporary Architecture since 2005. She curated the exhibitions *Some Ideas on Living in London and Tokyo by Stephen Taylor and Ryue Nishizawa* (2008); *1973: Sorry, Out of Gas* (with Mirko Zardini, 2007); and *Environment: Approaches for Tomorrow* on the work of Gilles Clément and Philippe Rahm (2006). Before joining the CCA, she co-curated *House Sweet Home, Different Ways to Live*, Spazio Ventisette, Milan (2000), and collaborated on several exhibitions with Mirko Zardini including *Asphalt, The Character of Cities* at the Milan Triennale (2003). Borasi was an editor and writer for *Lotus International* and *Navigator*. She served as Assistant Editor for the book series *Quaderni di Lotus*, and was a member of the editorial staff of *Lettera*, the graphic design supplement to *Abitare*.

ABOUT THE CCA

The Canadian Centre for Architecture (CCA) is an international research centre and museum founded in 1979 on the conviction that architecture is a public concern. Based on its extensive collections, the CCA is a leading voice in advancing knowledge, promoting public understanding, and widening thought and debate on the art of architecture and its

history, theory, practice and role in society today. The CCA celebrates the 20th anniversary of its public opening throughout 2009 with an ambitious series of programs and initiatives that underscore the achievements of the CCA.

Actions: What You Can Do With the City is part of the CCA's ongoing exploration of key issues in contemporary architecture with a specific focus on urban, social, and environmental concerns. The exhibition follows *Some Ideas on Living in London and Tokyo* by Stephen Taylor and Ryue Nishizawa (2008); *1973: Sorry, Out of Gas* (2007); *Environment: Approaches for Tomorrow*, with Gilles Clément and Philippe Rahm (2006); and *Sense of the City* (2005), the groundbreaking exhibition dedicated to the sensory dimensions of urban life that have traditionally been ignored or repressed.

ABOUT THE GRAHAM FOUNDATION

Founded in 1956, the Graham Foundation for Advanced Studies in the Fine Arts makes project-based grants to individuals and organizations and produces public programs to foster the development and exchange of diverse and challenging ideas about architecture and its role in the arts, culture, and society. The Graham Foundation was created by a bequest from Ernest R. Graham (1866–1936), a prominent Chicago architect who was a protégé of Daniel Burnham.

Since 1963, the Graham Foundation has been located in the Madlener House, a 9,000-square-foot turn of the century Prairie-style mansion, by architect Richard E. Schmidt and designer Hugh M. G. Garden, located in the historic Gold Coast neighborhood of Chicago. In 2007, under the direction of Sarah Herda, the Graham Foundation launched an expanded exhibition program, reconceiving the use of the historic mansion to showcase contemporary work and issues in the world of architecture. **Actions: What You Can Do With the City** is the third exhibition in this new program that has included the work of Bjarke Ingels (Copenhagen) and Cecil Balmond (London).

The Graham Foundation has collaborated with the CCA in the past, providing support for such projects as the **Actions** publication, the oral history research project “Mies and His American Colleagues,” and the forthcoming *Architecture in Uniform* by Jean-Louis Cohen, a publication accompanying the 2011 CCA exhibition of the same name.

EXHIBITION LOCATION & HOURS

Graham Foundation for Advanced Studies in the Fine Arts

Madlener House

4 West Burton Place

Chicago, IL 60610

www.grahamfoundation.org

Gallery Hours: Wednesday to Saturday, 10am to 5pm; every third Thursday of the month, 10am to 9pm. Group tours available.

Accessibility: The first floor of the Madlener House is accessible via an outdoor lift. Please

call 312.787.4071 to make arrangements.

Admission: Free

For more information: 312.787.4071/ info@grahamfoundation.org

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High-resolution digital images, publication excerpts, and additional documents are available. Press tours available by appointment. Contact Sarah Rogers for additional information.

Media Contact: Sarah Rogers, Graham Foundation
srogers@grahamfoundation.org or 312.787.4071

Private Preview: Thursday, October 15, 6 to 8 PM
Mirko Zardini, CCA Director and Chief Curator will be in attendance.