Field Guide

MARCH 20-22, HIRSHHORN.SI.EDU

In the mid-1950s, the entrepreneur Joseph Hirshhorn enlisted Philip Johnson to design a utopian "town of culture" in the Canadian wilderness of Ontario, where Hirshhorn owned massive uranium mines. The new city was to achieve a harmonious balance between labor and leisure, providing miners with housing and a museum, sculpture park, theater, concert hall, and library. Unlike other privately funded industry-specific towns, it would have had a unique focus on arts and culture, access to advances in psychological therapies, and a highly aestheticized design throughout. The project never came to fruition, but documentation of Johnson's models and plans remain. Taking this forgotten historical footnote as his subject, New York–based Canadian artist Terence Gower, whose works often focus on detecting shifts in ideology through architecture, presents "Public Spirit—the Hirshhorn Project." The multimedia installation incorporates photographs of the original maquettes, new models of Johnson's design created by Gower, and a digitally animated video projection, which leads visitors through the imagined town. Gower likens the planned town and its likewise utopian predecessors to "little quasi-socialist planets within a capitalist universe."

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An experimental sculptor and architect, Jacques Bedel was drawn to the most primal elements of materials, leading him to create a body of work with mirrors, disks of color, light projections, magnetic fields, movable sculptures, and colored shadows. In the early 1970s, political unrest in his native Argentina led to a series of works in which Bedel used articles of clothing to create a haunting protest against state violence. A few years later, he began to construct books without words, using instead the form of the book as a purely visual experience or as a foundation for sculptural forms, such as architectural ruins. Books ultimately became Bedel's primary medium; he felt they operated as paradoxical objects, closed and withdrawn, or open and constituting a new sculptural plane. This exhibition presents 40 recent works in which Bedel explores new materials and reviews the results of his lifelong dedication to aesthetic rigor, natural materials, Argentinian identity, and cosmological questions.