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Q+A: WESTON TERUYA'S FRAGILE SPACES

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by *Michelle Carlson*

In the Downey suburb of Los Angeles, the Los Padrinos Juvenile Hall is surrounded on three sides by a public golf course. It is these kinds of unlikely juxtapositions-and the ways in which communities and individuals navigate them-that motivated artist, writer and curator Weston Teruya in creating the work for his current solo show, part of the "2x2 solos" series at Pro Arts in Oakland, Calif.

The artist re-cast the above situation for *The Gracious City at Its Neighbor's Edge* (2010), a delicate work in paper that resembles both an architectural model and a collage hanging precariously from a yellow sawhorse. From the entropic suspension, we make out familiar iconography of construction and circulation-a yellow parking bumper, barrier gates-here transformed into artifacts. In Teruya's world, cement cinder blocks, a golf scorecard, sawhorses, and metal folding chairs are rearranged and rescaled, and alternate between design and support.

Art in America sat down with the 33-year-old Teruya in his Berkeley studio. The following is a condensed version of a longer dialogue about art, power, politics and space.

MICHELE CARLSON: *The Gracious City at Its Neighbor's Edge*, from your current show, is the culmination of a long-term investigation of the Los Padrinos Juvenile Hall. What is your relationship to the spatial and social dynamics of this site?

WESTON TERUYA: For the past several years I have been interested in the space because it is engulfed by the Los Amigos public golf course and the bordering

neighborhood of South Gate. This situation so illogical, yet it has existed for so long. My interest . . . began as a series of drawings, where I appropriated and reconstructed visual markers from the site, attempting to investigate its power dynamics. I began with such specific markers as an orange construction cone, a chain-link fence, a railing, signage. These are ordinary objects, yet they distinctly define and dictate how an individual negotiates the world around them.

CARLSON: The Gracious City (2011), a large installation constructed entirely of paper, is a marked shift from those elaborate collaged drawings.

TERUYA: The nature of sculpture is spatial investigation. I can enact a sort of world-building without being fantastical. There is something about the actual materials, their physicality, that conveys weight and reference—which an image does not quite do.

So this is my version of an architectural model, built from elements that reference space and convey construction and the act of building, but at the same time have the fragility of paper. There is a threat that the entire thing will fall apart. And if you really look closely, some of the parts warp and bend; they could collapse if you brushed against them. Formal construction with paper mimics larger, tenuous systems of history and power that carry so much weight.

CARLSON: The formal and conceptual themes in your work could be read as a world that has just fallen apart or that is teetering on the brink of collapse. Is this notion of collapse postapocalyptic?

TERUYA: I admire and am very influenced by postapocalyptic and dystopian stories but my intention involves the process of building. But in terms of that genre of fiction, my work is more interested in what it takes to reconstruct a world when that world has completely broken down, or what continues to be useful in objects that are no longer put to their original purposes. This speculation affords possibilities for new histories, or community-building, but in a nonnarrative way.

CARLSON: Do you consider the installation to be nonnarrative, or is it contrary to the prevailing narrative?

TERUYA: It is a counter-narrative in the sense that what initially interested me was the

integration of very complex spatial and historical narratives. So many social, political and personal histories are implicated in both a juvenile hall and a golf course-which literally collide in Downey County. The Gracious City plays with the interdependence of these disparate institutions and histories.

CARLSON: Where are the figures in your work? How is human presence accounted for?

TERUYA: The work I make is completely about people, but I am more curious about looking at the spaces people build for themselves and navigate-how these shape broader social and political dynamics, over any specific people who might or might not circulate within. Of course, that is completely intertwined, but my work occupies the circumstances that structure relationships. I build a new one, through my own lens and using my own hand.