

## **Experimental Geography**

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Traveling Exhibition Project Description



Francis Alÿs, *The Making of Lima*, 2002, video still

**Curated by Nato Thompson**

**Organized and circulated by iCI (Independent Curators International), New York**

Tour Dates: September 2008 through December 2011

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"Another step in the ongoing quest for social energies not yet recognized as art, Experimental Geography brings together a significant group of artists and collectives looking seriously at land use—urban and rural, local and global. Leaving behind the earthworks of the past, and reviving the line-blurring process that defined art and lived experience in 1960s conceptualism, much of this work is not about geography but exist within geography, exploring the politics and infrastructures that can either change or stall the world."

--Lucy Lippard, author of *The Lure of the Local*

Geography benefits from the study of specific histories, sites, and memories. Every estuary, landfill, and cul-de-sac has a story to tell. The task of the geographer is to alert us to what is directly in front of us, while the task of the experimental geographer—an amalgam of scientist, artist, and explorer—is to do so in a manner that deploys aesthetics, ambiguity, poetry, and a dash of empiricism. This exhibition explores the distinctions between geographical study and artistic experience of the earth, as well as the juncture where the two realms collide (and possibly make a new field altogether).



Ilana Halperin, *Boiling Milk (Solfataras)*, 2000



Trevor Paglen, *Black Site [Kabul, Afghanistan]*, 2006

The manifestations of “experimental geography” (a term coined by geographer Trevor Paglen in 2002) run the gamut of contemporary art practice today: sewn cloth cities that spill out of suitcases, bus tours through water treatment centers, performers climbing up the sides of buildings, and sound art of the breaths exhaled in running the evacuation route of Boston. In the hands of contemporary artists, the study of humanity’s engagement with the earth’s topography becomes a riddle best solved in experimental fashion. The exhibition presents a panoptic view of this new practice, through a wide range of mediums including interactive computer units,

sound and video installations, photography, sculpture, and experimental cartography.

The approaches used by the artists featured in *Experimental Geography* range from a poetic conflation of humanity and the earth to more empirical studies of our planet. In 2002, Francis Alÿs, in collaboration with Rafael Ortega, Cuauhtémoc Medina, and 500 volunteers, created a human comb to move a sand dune outside Lima, Peru. Although the actual displacement was infinitesimal, its metaphorical resonance was colossal.



Yin Xiuzhen, *Portable Cities: Singapore*, 2003

Creating projects that are more empirically minded, the Center for Land Use Interpretation (CLUI), a research organization, explores the nature and extent of human interaction with the earth's surface, embracing a multidisciplinary approach to fulfilling its mission. Using skill sets culled from the toolbox of geography, CLUI forces a reading of the American landscape (which includes man-made islands, submerged cities, traffic in Los Angeles, and the broadcast antennas in the San Gabriel Mountains) that refamiliarizes the viewer with the overlooked details of their everyday experience.



The Center for Land Use Interpretation (CLUI), *Untitled* (image and text panels depicting the programs and projects of CLUI), 2007

**About the guest curator, Nato Thompson:**

Nato Thompson is a curator at Creative Time, New York, as well as a writer and activist. Formerly at MASS MoCA, Thompson has curated numerous exhibitions including *Ahistoric Occasion: Artists Making History*, *Becoming Animal*, and *The Interventionists: Art in the Social Sphere*. Thompson has also written for publications including *Cabinet Magazine*, *Art Journal*, *tema celeste*, and the *Journal of Aesthetics and Protest*.

**Artists in exhibition:**

- Francis Alÿs
- AREA Chicago
- The Center for Land Use Interpretation (CLUI)
- The Center for Urban Pedagogy (CUP)
- kanarinka (Catherine D'Ignazio)
- e-Xplo
- Ilana Halperin
- Julia Meltzer and David Thorne
- Lize Mogel
- Multiplicity
- Trevor Paglen
- Raqs Media Collective
- Ellen Rothenberg
- Spurse
- Deborah Stratman
- Daniel Tucker, project organizer
- Alex Villar
- Yin Xiuzhen

**Basic Facts:**

**Participation fee:** \$14,000 for 10 weeks, plus incoming shipping

**Number of artists or artist teams:** 18

**Number of works:** 24

**Space required:** 4,500-5,000 square feet

**Tour dates:** September 2008 through December 2011

Catalogues, wall texts, press, and education materials will be provided.



**Total Technical Requirements:**

- DVD players.....9  
(at least 1 with S-video connection)
- DVD video projector.....1  
(at least 1200 lumens)
- DVD video projectors.....2  
(3000 lumens)
- Projection screens.....0-1
- Darkened projection rooms.....2
- Flat screen monitors (17-23").....1
- Flat screen monitor (42").....1  
(with S-video connection)
- Audio CD players.....5
- Sets of headphones.....7-8
- Plinths (38" high, for listening stations).....5
- TV monitors (29").....4
- Speakers.....8
- Amplifiers.....3
- Table.....1
- Low pedestal.....0-1

Plus:

- 4 benches and 5 chairs
- Supplies and construction of *Park* booth (Deborah Stratman)