

LYNN RICHARDSON

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*INTER-GLACIAL FREE TRADE AGENCY*

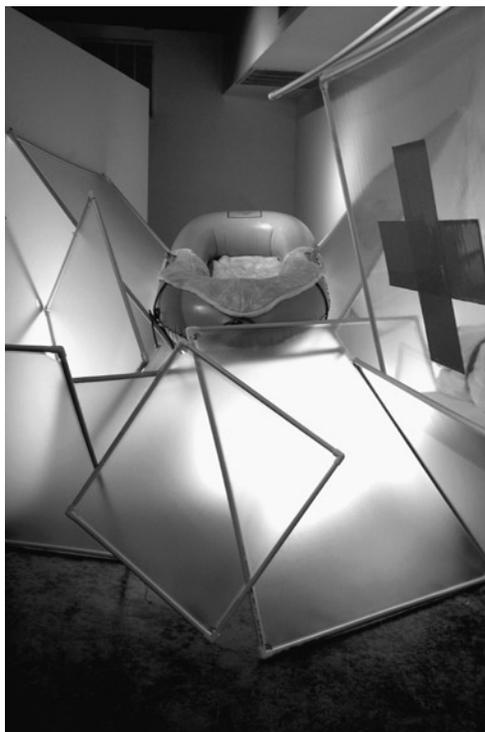


WOMEN & THEIR WORK

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OCTOBER 8 - NOVEMBER 12, 2005

AUSTIN, TEXAS



*Inflatable Fur-lined Star Gazing Lifeboat.*  
2005. Plastic and fur. 11' x 9' x 8'.

## LYNN RICHARDSON

We all see things differently, viewing the world from different angles and embarking on varying flights of discovery. What we see, how we see it, and how we communicate our vision – however fantastical or seemingly far-fetched – is what keeps us meaningfully engaged with one another. For example: I might travel to the edge of town and see a vast sky over a windswept landscape, a beautifully colored patchwork of fields and tiny farms dotting the terrain. Given the same vantage point, Lynn Richardson will see an ominously-imposed grid: an endlessly repeating sequence of telephone poles and wires strung as far as the eye can see, weaving each little farm into the larger whole. She sees these stitches that thread the landscape together, and how they mar the fabric, ultimately destroying as surely as connecting. Her eye does not overlook or edit – she does not shrink from grim realities.

Richardson's art deals largely with environmental harm. Her early work (produced in her home town of Winnipeg, Canada) is cheeky in its commentary, involving cultural referents infused with a folk artist's love of craft and materials. Kinetic wooden antelopes are stationed before easels, producing a relentless stream of paintings at the command of the viewer, issued by the turn of a crank; herds of buffalo stampede through a maze of telephone poles, in a sardonic twist on the arcade/table game format and a jab at the local telephone utility's appropriation of the near-extinct buffalo as their corporate symbol.

A few years at the University of Texas made a considerable visual impact on Richardson's work, but if you look closely, the refrain is not dissimilar. While stripped of its folksy trappings, Richardson's practice continued to focus on environmental devastation, only now the message was getting personal. *Filter Fresh* and *Air Distribution Center* both explore the idea of filtration systems, implicitly suggesting that these theoretical solutions to a polluted planet might have a practical, civic application in the not-too-distant future. The earlier kinetic works went easy on the viewer – the depicted abuses involved animals, not humans (always good for distancing) and although the viewer's participation was required to activate the torturous processes, the effect was largely comical and absurd.

*Filter Fresh* and *Air Distribution Center* are minimal in aesthetic, futuristic in appearance, and sinister in tone. There is nothing funny in these works, and the sense they create is that there's trouble ahead. They instill a vague feeling of fear, toying with the viewer's guilt and anxiety. Cinematic references are apparent, such as Todd Haynes's *Safe*, in which a suburban Los Angeles housewife gradually

becomes allergic to her environment. She develops nosebleeds while having a permanent at the hairdresser; she has a strong reaction to the chemicals used in the production of her new sofa. She seeks refuge from the toxicity of everyday life at a retreat center for people suffering from environmental illness, and begins wheeling around an oxygen tank and sleeping in a specialized pod at night. She exchanges social dependencies for survival aides, another form of dependency. The message? The air we breathe is not safe. We are not safe. We may never be safe again.

It can be argued that all survival strategies are rooted in fear, resulting in either paralysis or action. Contemporary art has frequently been a channel for the latter; in recent years, artists such as Lucy Orta and Joep van Lieshout have developed entire art practices out of the development of survival techniques and gear. Lucy Orta's portable habitat designs (clothing that transforms into tents) address the basic need for shelter, with the implication that the need to flee could arise at any time; we could all find ourselves as refugees from disaster or strife. (The world is not a safe place.) Atelier van Lieshout – the implementation side of Joep's practice – has developed an entire alternative/subsistence ("autarchic") village called AVL-ville, complete with camper/caravans, stored foodstuffs, a medical facility, pharmaceutical production, and generator. Van Lieshout's community, with its careful considerations and ominous inclusions (defense strategies and weapons) seems more a response to unspecified but palpable danger.<sup>1</sup>

*Inter-Glacial Free Trade Agency* (IGFTA) is Richardson's contribution to the ongoing global obsession with "survival." Her installation is a tongue-in-cheek exploration of an eventual consequence

to our ceaseless abuse of the environment: a new ice age. The Inter-Glacial Free Trade Agency is established to deliver specialized goods and services to deal with the new reality; the installation is essentially a showroom for these goods. Tucked into elegant abstracted iceberg showcases, the items project a sort of retro '60s sci-fi appearance: big, loungey aquamarine-colored inflatable rafts, *Barbarella*-esque lifejackets trimmed with fur, day-glo eye-shadow and frosted lip gloss. So far, it's looking alarmingly like fashion over function – this is a matter of life and death, after all. Things get a little more serious in the displays of household wares: there are matches and light-torches, syringes and cooking items. Everything has been tailored to the new set of conditions, is waterproof and portable. And everything bears the agency's logo, in a distinct reminder that this is a monopoly. If you don't buy it here, you likely won't be the final survivor.

It's all kind of fun and exciting at first, like visiting some sort of futuristic variation on Urban Outfitters, but there is an underlying sense of warning here too – a little like hearing the insistent bleating of an alarm behind the over-animated early morning radio chatter on your daily wake-up device. In fact, the longer you keep pressing that snooze button, the shriller that alarm seems to sound. Richardson's work conjures the ghost that lurks behind the desire to build and design all this stuff in the first place: a vague, persistent fear. We're all afraid for the future at various times; considering our track record on environmental matters, we should all be quaking in our boots pretty much constantly. Looking at works like *Air Distribution Center*, *Filter Fresh* and *Inter-Glacial Free Trade Agency* is akin to watching the artist's mind run away with itself: what will we *do* when that time finally comes, when we have depleted

the resources and forced the vengeance of the gods to rain upon us? How will we survive? It's a way of working through fear: presenting a potential outcome and letting others decide if that outcome is acceptable or desirable.

Richardson walks a fine line in many of her works, where her fears remain unspoken but apparent. IGFTA marks a return to her earlier work in a crucial way: she once again deploys humor to deliver a weighty message. An ironically promotional, market-savvy voice proclaims the virtue of the products on display; a kind of jittery, artificial trade-show hype contrasts sharply with the high design/high art conceit of the purely sculptural elements. She lures the viewer on a humorous pretext, endowing the work with a sense of safety in the initial encounter and undercutting the guilt and blame implicit in the content. It can sometimes appear that the artist is also laughing it off, shrugging away the implications of the subject and allowing the audience to do the same. But that niggling fear keeps creeping in long after the visual aspect of the work has been digested, and is the beating heart of Richardson's work. It's only funny for so long, and then all that remains is the bitter, scary truth. It's a circuitous strategy, to be sure, but one that has the potential to be greatly effective. It's up to us whether to acknowledge that truth, and strive for change. Once we begin puzzling out solutions, the ghost of fear is suddenly banished; we have hope.

The odd, cubist beauty of Richardson's IGFTA icebergs retain a wistfulness that underscore the sculptor's conflict; a modern ice age would spell disaster, but there is an undeniable allure to experiencing its monumentality, the harsh loveliness of the glacier's massive forms. Richardson was raised in the coldest city on earth,

and she has a Northerner's understanding of the paradox of her homeland: at once a frozen apocalypse and an irresistible winter wonderland. Her work is replete with incongruity, vacillating between humor and terror, past and future, content and form. By examining survival while inadvertently processing her fears, she opens the discussion of the need for change and a better future.

But beware; it is not in the least my intention to present a view of an apocalyptic end of a century, invaded by nihilism, dominated by pessimism and without hope for betterment. On the contrary, to outline the diagnosis is to understand the present in order to imagine the future.

– Jorge Orta

*Return of the Utopias:  
The Aesthetics of Ethics,  
A Draft Manifesto for the  
Third Millennium, 1994*<sup>2</sup>

Christabel Wiebe  
Independent curator, writer and editor  
Winnipeg, Canada

<sup>1</sup>As previously noted in Patricia van Ulzen's article, "Atelier van Lieshout." *Parachute*, 2001: v. 102, p. 51-2.

<sup>2</sup>Orta, Jorge. "Return of the Utopias: The Aesthetics of Ethics, A Draft Manifesto for the Third Millennium, 1994." In *Lucy Orta*. Pinto, Roberto et al. London: Phaidon Press Limited, 2003. p. 102.

The artist wishes to thank  
The Joan Mitchell Foundation.

**LYNN RICHARDSON***Lives in Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada***EDUCATION**

- 2005 M.F.A. Sculpture, University of Texas at Austin, USA  
 1998 B.F.A. Honors, Sculpture, University of Manitoba, Canada

**SOLO EXHIBITIONS**

- 2005 *Inter-Glacial Free Trade Agency* Women & Their Work. Austin, TX  
 2002 *Hoof, Claws and Antlers* SITE Gallery. Winnipeg, MB

**SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS**

- 2005 *Plots and Schemes*. MFA Exhibition. Creative Research Lab & AMLI Downtown Austin, TX  
*Young at Art: Fin, Fur & Feathers*, Winnipeg Art Gallery, Winnipeg, MB  
*Cracks in the Pavement: Gifts in the Urban Landscape*, Site Specific Works. Austin, TX  
 2004 *Red Hot Red Dot*, Women & Their Work, Austin, TX  
*Construction Site*. AMLI Downtown, Austin, TX  
*Cinematexas International Short Film Festival* Terra Cognita. Austin, TX  
 2003-04 *Bare Minimum*, Safulak Art Village, Hsinchu County, Taiwan  
*Biennial SCAM*, Estevan Art Gallery & Museum, Estevan, SK  
 The Little Gallery Prince Albert, Prince Albert, SK  
 Moose Jaw Museum & Art Gallery, Moose Jaw, SK  
 Art Gallery of Swift Current, Swift Current, SK  
 Art Gallery of Southwestern, Brandon, MB  
 Medicine Hat Museum & Art Gallery, Medicine Hat, AB  
*Artspeak*, Gallery Lombardi, Austin, TX  
 2003 *Another other*, Gallery Neubacher, Toronto, ON  
*5x7*, Arthouse, Austin, TX  
*Landlocked*, (Two Artist Exhibition), AKA Gallery, Saskatoon, SK  
*You Gotta Move*, Art Gallery of Southwestern Manitoba, Brandon, MB  
 2002 *Chance Operation*, Gallery 1313, Austin, TX  
 2000 *Hosehead*, Plug-In Institute of Contemporary Arts, Winnipeg, MB

**SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY**

- 2006 Kantor, Barna "Lynn Richardson: Interglacial Free-Trade Agency." *Glasstire*. Texas Visual Art Online. January  
<http://glasstire.com/reviews/austin/>
- 2005 Moore, Nikki "Lynn Richardson's Inter-Glacial Free Trade Agency at Women & Their Work." *Fluent Collaborative*, Issue 5 7, Nov. <http://www.fluentcollab.org/mbg/issue57.htm>
- 2004 Lindenberger, Laura A. "Construction Site." *Artlies* Fall 2004: 90-91.  
 Moniot, Marie-Adele. "Construction Site." *Glasstire*.  
 May, Jacqueline. "Construction Site Visual Arts Review." *The Austin Chronicle*, 24 Sept. Issue: 86.  
 Douberley, Amanda. "Notes on the Grid" (Catalogue essay). *Construction Site AMLI.*, Austin, TX, Sept.  
 Garneau, David. "Moving Beyond Words," *SCAM* (Exhibition Catalogue).  
 2002 Thomas, Meredith, "Chicken Town USA, International." *Daily Texan*, Nov.7, Pg. 13.  
 Enright, Robert. "Permission to dream is granted." *The Globe and Mail: Arts* [Toronto] Nov.2, sec. V: 4.  
 Ward, Karen. "Site Gallery Shows Interactive Sculpture." *Winnipeg Free Press*, Jan. 9, Issue: 9.  
 Enright, Robert. "Spread in Hoof and Claw." *Border Crossings A Magazine of the Arts*, Issue 21, 7-8.  
 Scarth, Todd. "Hose is Where the Art Is." *Border Crossings A Magazine of the Arts*, Issue 76, 11-12.

- 2000 Butvin, Marine. "Beauty, eh?" *Uptown*, July 27, Issue: 5.  
 Corne, Jonah. "Untitled article chronicle no. 118: National Identity, Leaking Fluid" *The Manitoban*, July 8.

**AWARDS**

- 2005 *The Joan Mitchell Foundation MFA Grant*. New York, NY  
*Winnipeg Arts Council Professional Development Grant*, Winnipeg, MB, Canada  
 2004 *Safulak Art Village 4<sup>th</sup> section Artist-In-Residence*. Hsinchu County, Taiwan  
*Lila Acheson Wallace Reader's Digest Scholarship*, University of Manitoba  
*William Mozart McVey Endowed Scholarship in Sculpture*. Austin, TX  
*Lomis Slaughter, Jr. Endowed Scholarship in Sculpture*. Austin, TX  
*Manitoba Arts Council Education Grant*. Winnipeg, MB  
 2003 *Lila Acheson Wallace Reader's Digest Scholarship*. University of Manitoba  
*Charles Umlauf Centennial Endowed Scholarship & Lomis Slaughter, Jr. Endowed Scholarship in Sculpture*. Continuing Scholarships. University of Texas at Austin, TX  
*Manitoba Arts Council Education Grant*, Canada  
*Manitoba Arts Council "B" Grant*. Winnipeg, MB  
 2002 *Winnipeg Arts Advisory Council Grant*. Winnipeg, MB  
*Lila Acheson Wallace Reader's Digest Scholarship*. University of Manitoba  
*Irving and Jeannette Goodfriend Presidential Scholarship in Art & Charles Umlauf Centennial Endowed Scholarship & William Mozart McVey Endowed Scholarship in Sculpture. & Lomis Slaughter, Jr. Endowed Scholarship in Sculpture & Eugenie Kamrath Mygdal Scholarship in Sculpture*, University of Texas at Austin, TX  
 2001 *Canada Council for the Arts Grant*. Ottawa, ON  
 2000 *Manitoba Arts Council "C" Grant*. Winnipeg, MB



*Glacial Red Cross Station and Medical Products*. 2005  
 Iceberg Relocation Travel Kit. 10" x 8" x 3".  
 IGFTA Issued Iceberg First Aid Kit. 12" x 16" x 7". Mixed Media



This Panel: *Icehouse: Artificial Hydroponic Fruit Juice Stand*. 2005, Plastic, pvc pipe, tubing, and artificial fruit. 25' x 18' x 10'.

Cover Panel: *Inter-Glacial Free Trade Agency*, Installation overview. 2005, Mixed Media. 47' x 52'.



*Iceberg Fashion Fur with Floatation Device.* 2005, Fur, Foam, Fabric, 8 jackets. 28" x 24" x 8".

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This project is supported in part by the generous support of the Andy Warhol Foundation. Special thanks to BAH! Design.

