

Hanna Larva

Silently, an observant eye moves over the *white city*. Minimalist shapes, apparently identical, are reminiscent of the shells of apartment buildings. Placed on two white tabletops, three and three, they are like reflections of each other. The video clip, through which I experience the artwork, includes in its frame the peeling walls of the artist's studio. A multifaceted dynamic of interior and exterior space unfolds.

As a scholar of a miniature model-world, I find myself in a position that emphasizes the extensiveness of my vision. Where am I that the *white city* reveals its facades so readily? In any case, I am a spectator, a witness. From a distance the city appears rather simple and orderly. Its structure comprises cubes and the empty space in between them. Is every world constructed similarly, one block at a time? Blocks being choices which, when repeated a sufficient number of times, create self-evident, seemingly inevitable circumstances?

For whom is the *white city*? In close-up, the surfaces of the models are textured, irregular. Details reveal a human touch, approximation, defect. These are forms made as a collaboration between the human hand and time. Peeking through frames, which may be windows, an emptiness, a hollow feeling arises.

Haunting. This is a miniature reference to a world, but which one? Where, what and who is the original whose presence is ungraspable yet inevitable? Does this world already exist, is it due to be built, or are such temporal categories inappropriate? The artist does not offer answers to such questions, but points to the fact that an inter-scale, inter-world creation indeed takes place.

Artist:

Text:

Kaljo

Magdalena

Looking at that white city, I immediately think of *Frozen City* - one of the most depressing movies on the Finnish cinematic landscape. Since I saw that Aku Louhimies masterpiece in my blissful childhood, I still remember only that oppressively depressive mood and the scene where a man in a white and snowy residential district slams his child's guinea pig against the wall, killing it. Finnish cinema at its angsty best.

Jass's city reminds me of Louhimies's Helsinki, crackling with ice and dark, wind wailing between buildings and only routine and despair behind the windows. I wonder whether anyone could live in that miniature residential district? Might there be, among those repetitive buildings and window squares, some singular apartment full of colour and patterns? Someone's personal and individual space, a home with the face of its occupant? I try hard to imagine it, but can't. *Frozen City* has overshadowed any lightness.

In the tens of eye sockets of the nine-storey prefabricated buildings, there is only bleak emptiness. No one lives in this city. It is possible to exist only anonymously and wait for time to pass. Window upon window, storey upon storey, house upon house. The window squares and wall panels forming multi-level geometric landscape and clinical monochrome views for no one.

The triple towers balancing on the boundary of a boring new development and an abandoned bedroom community appear to be hovering on a narrow rectangular island that one can't leave. The straight streets between buildings only lead to the edge of the island. In my thoughts, I walk around the buildings, up and down along the stairwells. Silence. No one home. Heavy mood descends over the city like November snow. Slightly uneven walls make cracking sounds in the icy grip of frost.

Standing at the edge of the island, I notice the same kind of city on the other side of the water. Like a mirror reflection. The same lifeless buildings, the same empty windows and the same repetitions of forms.

Although it seems to be so close, it is not possible to get to the other side. At least not now. The islands on which the cities were built are separated by a deep chasm. In their shared solitude they reflect each other's silent existence. It seems the architect has watched many Finnish films.

Text:

Artist:

Maavik

Vitamiin

Siim Preiman:

What came to my mind in the case of Jass Kaselaan was that he is the perfect artist for this exhibition. That's because he is a mould maker and a replicator. For example, at *Still-life*, an exhibition at Hobusepea Gallery, he showed earth-coloured epoxy bones and gearwheels. At the exhibition *Sheep* at Tartu Art House, he showed one hundred human heads. He is a sculptor, of course, and mould making is a craft that comes with the discipline. He has used this craft to produce several of his important works. I especially liked how he humbly mentioned a work called *The Square of Dolls* that he'd once made. Of course we know the work that he won the Köler Prize for and that is now exhibited in the courtyard of Kumu Art Museum! Anyway, an interesting shift happens here. To create a copy, you need a mould, which is the negative of what you want to produce. In the case of *The Square of Dolls*, the dolls stand in the middle surrounded by photos of prefab houses, but now he creates an ensemble of prefab houses... how many of them were there again? Two? Four?

Lilian Hiob:

More! A whole load.

SP:

He then also said there might be drawings on the walls too. I'm not sure it is essential for viewing the work as the mould or as the negative for *The Square of Dolls*, with the symbols having been swapped.

LH:

An interesting thing about sculpture is that even though it is production based on copying, then unlike in printmaking, where you could be replicating a lithography in hundreds, in sculpture you don't exercise the full potential of copying. The aim is still to create unique objects.

SP:

Yes, well replicating bronze for example...

LH: .

..must require a lot of resource! But the interesting thing is that we can tell from Jass' models that human hand is not capable of creating exact copies. People seem to aspire to the perfect copy - it has an otherwordly character. But there will always be human mistakes involved.

Artist:

Kaselaan

Text:

Wetnik

IRONY OF FATE

Attention, attention, Black Coffin on Wheels has left the grave.

A pause, classical music on the radio, Kusti playing with his cars on the floor and doesn't take notice of anything else.

Attention, attention, Black Coffin on Wheels is driving down the main cemetery path to the main gate.

A pause, classical music on the radio, Kusti playing with his cars on the floor and doesn't take notice of anything else.

Attention, attention, Black Coffin on Wheels has exited the cemetery gate and moving to the bus stop.

A pause, classical music on the radio, Kusti still playing with his cars on the floor and doesn't take notice of anything else.

Attention, attention, Black Coffin on Wheels is on its way to the bus stop to catch bus no. 35, and the bus is already coming! [The voiceover is getting more and more excited.]

A pause, classical music on the radio, Kusti playing with his cars on the floor and doesn't take notice of anything else; he's a pretty dense kid.

Attention, attention, the Black Coffin on Wheels has dismantled the bus and is driving at full speed toward Kusti's house at Vikerlase Street 16, apt. 79!!! [The voiceover tries to get Kusti's attention, Kusti keeps on playing with the cars and doesn't know that by turning on grandmother's radio he awakened an ancient curse.]

The coffin picks up speed. It trembles with excitement. For the first time in over a thousand years it is close to its goal - destruction of a young, innocent and foolish child and transporting the child's soul straight to the underworld. The coffin approaches a grey nine-storey prefab building where the victim lives. "Fortunately, the house has a ramp," says the Coffin. "Otherwise, boy would that would be a hassle." From inside the coffin, a feeler emerges, touches the door. It's locked. The feeler gropes around the door, finds the intercom buzzer, dials 79. Waits. Someone answers, loud noises, music and a buzz emanate from the intercom, indicating that the Coffin can head right on up and do what it was designed to do. Bloarggghh, there is an ominous hungry sound from the depths of the Coffin.

It is hard for the Coffin to get into the elevator, but just like the ramp, the lift is more convenient than the stairs. Just try to climb up to the eighth floor if you were a coffin on wheels. But this time it workes out.

The lift arrives at the eighth floor. The Coffin puts down all four wheels, looks around and finds apartment 79. Comes closer to the door, and strikes as frightening a pose as possible. The coffin has been waiting for this moment for 1000 years, he wants it to be perfect. The feeler presses the doorbell. Nothing happens. It does it again. The door opens. Blaring noise and the smell of alcohol and tobacco spill into the hallway, two miniskirt-clad chicks pull the Coffin into the room. A pink gin and tonic is pushed into its feeler and he is pulled to the main room to look at. The Coffin is taken aback. It must be some Google Maps screw-up. In the morning, the Coffin has a hangover and inside the Coffin one of the miniskirt-clad girls awakes. Her lipstick is smeared and remnants of carbon-coloured dreams float in her head.

Text:

Wetnik

Artist:

Wetnik

For this year's Artishok, Jass Kaselaan has made a bunch of similar-looking sculptures using a 9-storey prefab panel building as prototype. As he didn't use a mould to make the sculptures and that the objects are hand made, each model, even though following the same project principles, ends up being unique in its inaccuracies.

In architecture, prefabricated housing is like a synonym for copies. Although the same could be said for many recent housing developments. A universal standard is created that ought to fulfill the needs of an average person. But only in form and on the surface. What takes place internally within these buildings is a whole other world and there is nothing universal in that. Quite the contrary, the content of each box is unique.

Having grown up in Mustamäe, I've spent a large part of my life in an apartment in a prefab building, as well as visited friends, acquaintances and relatives there. The most varied personalities, lives and life styles can fit into these universally shaped boxes. One neighbour might be dirty and antisocial, but on the other side of the party wall is the fine elegant milieu of a refined elderly lady furnished in the style of the early 20th century.

I've visited a hoarder's cluttered apartment, where the kitty litter was never changed, or heard a neighbour battering his wife. But I've also seen artists' stylish homes, messy bachelor pads, single moms' simple but well kept refuges, young families' toy-ridden stopovers, the last anchorages for the retired...

The stories concealed in these apartments are special, personal and as unique as handicraft. In that sense, prefab buildings are indeed universal copies, because they offer space that can fit almost everything. They're like Kinder Surprise: one can never be sure of what they'll find when knocking on one of the doors.

Artist:

Text:

Bogie

duplicate *adj* 1 copied exactly from an original: *he had a duplicate key to the front door* > n 2 an exact copy 3 **in duplicate** in two exact copies: *submit the draft in duplicate, please* > *vb* -cating, -cated 4 to make an exact copy of 5 to do again (something that has already been done) > **duplication** n > **duplicator** n

duplicate *adj* = identical, matched, matching, twin, corresponding, twofold > n 2 = copy, facsimile > *vb* 4 = copy 5 = repeat, reproduce, copy, clone, replicate

duplicity *n* deceitful behaviour: *he is a man of duplicity, who turns things to his advantage*

** Entries from the Collins English Dictionary and Thesaurus Essential Edition, Glasgow: Collins, 2020.*

Artist:

Text:

Dracastel

It is statistically likely that if you're Estonian, you have lived in a Soviet-era prefabricated concrete building. Myself, I grew up in a five-storey prefab in Tartu. The most typical kind. A normal building, from the mid-1980s. Hundreds of other people lived there besides me, like sports reporter Anu Säärits, if I wanted to drop a name to make my childhood more special than it was. The neighbouring buildings were of the same type. Tartu had and has a population of about 100,000 people, and most of the inhabitants lived in similar kinds of prefabricated panel buildings. But tourist brochures usually use a photo of the Old Town.

In the evenings, I watch the news. I still have that habit. In the news, I see prefabs pictured very rarely. I usually see them if there's a segment on unresolved problems with insulation or someone has built a bomb in the basement or fallen off a balcony. When I see homes in the news, they are usually detached private homes. Or if they're apartment buildings, they are timber ones, smaller in size with a few dozen people, not built of prefab panels. Whereupon I always remember the statistics that most of the Estonian population lives in prefabs. Soviet-era prefabricated buildings, which aren't seen on the news. What does non-reproduction of prefabs reproduce?

The prototype for Kaselaan's work is a nine-storey prefabricated building. He has made it abstract, reduced its form, removed references to people's existence and so we see space in its pure form. "Here we can accommodate hundreds, thousands, hundreds of thousands of people," Soviet-era urban planners thought, and so do current ones and so will future ones, probably. Prefabricated panel buildings have come to stay. It's also said that it is much less polluting to live in a panel building than a private house. Economy of scale, or something like that, Lasnamäe and Annelinn districts are the future of humankind.

Of course, Soviet panel buildings are nothing original, but copies of a global trend. Go away from the old towns, stray to places where tourists don't go, and you will see the true Paris, Rome and Florence, the panelled version of those cities. You'll see what doesn't fit on to the picture. Soviet construction quality left something to be desired, of course, but Kaselaan, too, who brings the form of prefabricated panel buildings to the centre of attention of the art audiences, the avant-garde of visual perception, appears to be conceptually interested by human error.

Text:

Artist:

Let's start with the facts. The work exhibited at the Artishok Biennale, *White City*, consists of architectural models of a standardized project that are situated on two custom-made tables. Both tabletops measure 89 × 209 cm, and the tables are situated on 77 cm high sawhorse legs. Painted wood was used to prepare the six models. A total of 1404 squares were cut from 404 plywood strips. The number of pieces will be equal to the number of windows in the six models. The prototype for the building is a nine-storey prefabricated building that could be seen on Kaselaan's photographs that lined concrete doll heads in the installation *Square of the Dolls* (2014). *White City* is the reference system used for *Square of the Dolls* and a further variation on that work.

A doll is usually a reduced copy of a person, but Kaselaan's dolls are larger than life and the models of the prefabricated buildings have been reduced to dollhouse size. Copy, casting in a mould, and manipulation of sizes are an important part of being a sculptor. Kaselaan himself claims the work process is not important here, yet he describes the routine nature of cutting pieces of wood as a monotonous and alienating assembly line work. Manually producing the models for the standardized houses attempts to bring the human dimension into mass production - the idea of a flaw and imperfection being something unavoidable and essential for life.

What is left of humanity when it is forced into a box with windows? Kaselaan is interested in the human soul vs. technical progress, finishing vs. a suitable degree of robustness. Drawing inspiration from Nikolai Baturin's novel *Apocalypse*, where a soulless person is no better than an unfeeling robot who acts cold-blooded and for whom art no longer exists. Technology co-opted to serve the powers that be - a drone flying through a manually copied white city and its emptiness - conveys well the sense of a person's alienation from the environment they themselves have created.

Artist:

Kaselaan

Text:

Säide

Maria

There are green fields here. Tall, lush grass that undulates in the wind. Once, water undulated here. But the water ran out and now there is grass. Light has never run out here. Bluish light. As if it didn't want to accept that undulating grass has replaced water. Light and water probably got along well. Or so it seems to me. In any case, there are no trees or shrubs or anything else here. Besides those odd houses rising in the middle of the field. Washed clean by the waving grass. White all over, empty and full of holes. As if the contents had flowed out of them and now there are waves all around.

The holes are square-shaped. Exactly alike. Like windows. Only, there's nothing to look at through them, neither in nor out. But light must like playing with them. Weaving itself among them. Sometimes I catch how the rays unfurl themselves there, with total lack of inhibition. It is a tickling feeling. Titillating and also a little sad.

Actually, everyone here feels a little lonely. Lonely or bored. No rain falls here, either. There's only light and grass and six houses. Usually with one thousand four hundred and four windows. Although it sometimes seems to me there might be more or less of them. But I guess it just seems that way out of boredom. Out of longing.

I don't know how these houses got here. Did the water bring them here? Perhaps they were once great ships and ran aground here. Dried up. Or some ancient city was situated here in its dusky glory. But now only these six houses are left. Usually with one thousand four hundred and four windows. Without any doors or a living soul. One endless day. A lasting repetition. Six times one. One times six. There are no storeys, of course. Truly, nothing else. Complete aloneness. Emptiness. Grass waving in unison. And windows.

Artist:

Text:

Luiga

Naviten

Jass Kaselaan
White City

Please read this text carefully before you start your experience. If you have any questions or are not sure about anything, ask someone.

Keep this text in a safe place, you may want to read it again.

What constitutes *White City*?

404 bigger pieces and 1404 smaller pieces form 6 buildings. One building has 234 windows. There's no point in going into more detail, though the amount of windows is equal to the overall amount of smaller pieces. Doors are absent. Indistinguishability almost as well. It is white. Something is drawn, something not exactly superficial. Streets are empty. Landscaping is undone. No signs of life yet.

What is the recommended dose?

- Would you like a poetic or a concrete answer?
- Ehm, we would like to know how long it will take?
- Well, that now depends on how fast you will be... Start from the beginning, forget time.
- One at a time?
- Yes. One at a time. For example. As a start. Later you can do more. I guess.

When should you be extra careful while experiencing *White City*?

If you think you are up a hill. If you have grown up or are currently living in a prefabricated panel housing estate. If you have read *Autumn Ball* by Mati Unt or have seen Veiko Õunpuu's adaption of it. If you are currently making plans to erect a monument, or are dealing with questions of public space and urban planning. If you have an issue with repetition or routine.

What happens if I forget my dose?

Something had to happen.

What are the possible side effects of *White City*?

Subconscious urge to only notice the regularities, even though peculiarities are more often derived from irregularities. You can't bare repetition. You can't stand repetition. You can't digest repetition. You don't enjoy repetition. You don't enjoy repetition. You don't sense repetition. Or peculiarities. Or routine.

If you are concerned about these or any other side effects, talk to someone.

Text:

Artist:

Esko