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A compendium of news, views and issues from across the nation



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SOCIETY

Projected Changes

RESIDENTS OF TORONTO know there are few places in that city where art and urban planning come together. This month, Heather Haynes, founder of the Toronto Free Gallery, seeks to change that with the gallery's opening exhibition, Project Toronto.

Project Toronto brings together disparate proposals from artists and academics alike, offering creative solutions to dreary issues that plague city-dwellers: mundane architecture, clogged roadways, rundown neighbourhoods. The exhibit—less an art installation than a “laboratory for new ideas and an initiator of discourse,” according to Haynes—features an assortment of 3-D models, photography, painting, written proposals and architectural plans.

It's the needs of the urban—or rather, suburban—dweller that visual artist and photographer Susan Dobson documents for the exhibit. Based in Guelph, Ontario, Dobson's obsession with her subject matter comes honestly: she's the granddaughter of a famed builder of assembly-line homes, as well as a seasoned resident

of them. During her suburban tenure, she documented the houses of friends and neighbours with astonishing diligence. Through her photo series, *Paint Palettes*, Dobson examines how home-owners attempt to forge an identity from mass-produced items. She shot a digital image of a generic garage door, then imposed actual exterior paint colours on it. The names of the individual shades, specified below each photo, strain to reach beyond the generic nature of the garages they adorn: Pearly Gates and Orange You Happy are two. Although Dobson addresses some heady issues, she says, “I just want people to look at themselves.”

Urban sprawl provides a source of uneasy beauty for Dobson, but Luc Bouliane, who recently earned a master's degree in architecture from the University of Waterloo, has set his sights on eliminating it. The vast *Junction City Project* comprises more than 20 square metres of models, photos, collages, vignettes and plans. Favouring urban density over its meandering alternative, Bouliane's plan focuses

“Romance Collection,” a detail from Dobson's Paint Palettes

on the Junction, a now-underused area located in west-central Toronto.

The locale was originally a bustling intersection where three railway lines converged. However, its distance from the city's core ensured that it never became a desirable destination in its own right. Instead, it was used to accommodate the vast slaughterhouses that gave the city its nickname, Hogtown. Now there is little commercial activity outside its epicentre—a jumble of mom-and-pop stores, big-box outlets, railway yards and aging factories.

Bouliane's contribution to Project Toronto, the culmination of the research for his master's thesis, idealistically aims to change the desolate nature of the Junction by transforming it into a densely populated site that criss-crosses cultures, zones and economic strata. At the heart of the thesis beats a series of what Bouliane calls “programmatically collisions.” “I can't make a law where you can't drive from the suburbs to downtown,” says Bouliane, “but I can make a downtown where you wouldn't want to live in the suburbs at all.”

Meanwhile, it is exactly that commute that graduate architect Chris Hardwicke had on his mind when he conceived of *Velo-city*. His proposal calls for a system of elevated tubes that would provide unobstructed avenues for cyclists to commute, hamster-like (think of Habitrail pet houses), across the city. “The first thing I did for this project was research all the crazy ideas,” says Hardwicke. “I always thought things like this were left way back in the '50s.” As retro-futuristic as the concept (or at least the style) might seem, however, it is also surprisingly low-tech.

Using a simple fluid-dynamics system to create a tailwind in each direction, Hardwicke's design would significantly reduce wind resistance, allowing bicycles, along with other small vehicles, to reach speeds of 40 kilometres per hour with relative ease. Continuous traffic flow (there are no intersections in his plan) and easy parking would allow the tube users to meet or beat the travel times of earth-bound commuters.

While even Hardwicke himself is

skeptical about the likelihood of “Jetsons tubes” streaking across the skyline, his goal—just like that of Project Toronto's other contributors—is not so much to provide definitive solutions as it is to get people thinking about their own. — *Geoff Givritz*

TECH

Sophisticated Barter

SEAN MICHAELS, a recent McGill grad, wanted the iPod. The challenge, posted on a private online community discussion board: create a meme, a self-propagating unit of cultural evolution (or, put simply, the stuff that friends forward to your e-mail inbox). Specifically: “make something, anything that achieves the [same] level of cultural impact as the dancing baby, the Star Wars Kid, Mahir or even the Buddy Lee campaign.” The most contagious meme (as measured by citations in newspapers, magazines, Web sites, etc.) would win a new iPod Mini MP3 player.

After promptly dashing his first idea, Subservient Iraqi, a pointedly sarcastic fusion of Abu Ghraib and Subservient Chicken (a Burger King promotional Web site that allows visitors to give orders to a man in a chicken suit), Michaels, 22, tuned into the collective Internet consciousness.

A minor case of irrational exuberance had swept through the Net on April 1, when Google announced Gmail, its new Hotmail-killer e-mail service. Within weeks, eager have-nots were paying from \$80 to \$160 (U.S.) on eBay for the privilege of signing up for an account—on a service that would eventually be available for free.

Google had done a smart thing: it selectively meted out “test” accounts to online movers and shakers who in turn were periodically granted a few “invitations” to bestow on friends (or sell, as the case may be). With, at that time, 500 times more storage space than a free Microsoft Hotmail account, Gmail accounts easily developed cachet; it was savvy viral marketing in the guise of a beta test.

“So many of my friends had been just chattering away about Gmail. It seemed to be the only thing on their minds,” Michaels remembers. “But