

Color Palettes

In his famous tract on the mechanization of modernity, *Building in France, Building in Iron, Building in Ferro-Concrete*, architectural historian Siegfried Gideon wrote, “We are beginning to transform the surface of the earth. We thrust beneath, above, and over the surface. Architecture is only a part of this process, even if a special one. Hence there is no 'style,' no proper building style. Collective design. A fluid transition of things.” Written in 1928, following the structural innovations of modern architecture, and at the dawn of the International style's minimal aesthetics, Gideon calls for a complete rationalization of space. Currently, this rationalization continues to produce rudimentary and repetitive architectural forms in a process we might term suburbanization: an overall bureaucratization of the global landscape under a single, analogic order. Yanai Toister's photographs of recent housing developments in Israel capture the essence of this logic. While Gideon's vision carried a utopian tone, Toister's photographs point to the manner in which the modern rationalization of space produces political discomfort through an amnesiac deployment of infrastructure.

Toister's images are deceptively simple, even de-aestheticized. Each photograph captures repetitive forms in a vacant environment, a conjunction that underlines the austere, denaturalized appearance of the landscape. This aesthetic recalls the saturated, artificial habitats in Dan Graham's *Homes for America* (1966), or Lewis Baltz's *The Tract Houses* (1971), a sequential meditation on stucco homogeneity in Southern California. While Toister's photographs likewise appear to put forth little information about their subject, unlike his predecessors, they turn on a slight of hand. Each photograph is completed with the addition of uncanny, vibrant color to the modular structures pictured, effectively amplifying their stark contrast against a colorless backdrop. The result of this contradistinction is that the vacant architecture appears to arbitrarily conform to a rational logic – the prismatic organization of color.

The logic these photographs suggest goes beyond color alone. Toister's careful selection of these pre-configured housing tracts reveals less an incongruous relationship between home and landscape, than a predetermined coordination. In certain of Toister's images an agglomeration of cement infrastructure – sewer caps, roadways, foundations, rubble – outlay the vivid buildings our eyes are drawn to. This foundational seat indicates that an underlying grid awaited these homes, despite the apparently inhospitable nature of the surroundings. Echoing Gideon, the surface of the earth becomes a lego-logic awaiting predestined components that do not deviate from an extent series of models.

Yet this seemingly congruous, logical relation between structure and surface does not completely resolve the contrast between the homes and their bleak environs. Toister's manipulations of color turn the presumed efficiency of modern housing developments into an aberration, as if these tracts are geometric wounds across an undulating, deserted surface. While Toister compliments something like Lewis Baltz's work, he also draws a social concern one would see in Allan Sekula's. Though peers, Baltz and Sekula approached the same material (the bureaucratization of the everyday) with two wholly different approaches: Baltz through a minimal, detached aesthetics, Sekula through a pointed, captioned sociology. The refinement of Toister's project is his ability to pursue both ends, the aesthetic and the social, within the formal values of a single photograph. For Toister, color

becomes commensurate to caption.

While Toister's slight attenuation, an editorial withholding/exposing of color, may distort appearances, it does not exaggerate anything about the relation between land and architecture. Instead, Toister's color correction draws upon the latent dilemma of modernist logic. These images depict uninhabitable landscapes, an unsustainable locale where disregarding the effects of the surrounding place is part of maintaining a technologically supported lifestyle. Toister's images communicate a sense of unease that lies dormant in the incongruous, continual spread of modern rationality across untenable geographies. These photographs point us toward the arbitrariness we have inherited from modern architecture's utopian visions (Gideon's being key among them). In Toister's images the bureaucratic deployment of efficient housing maintains a principle of amnesia. The surrounding landscape is forgotten, as late capitalist habitat becomes defined by an apathetic relationship to geography. The aesthetics of amnesia have become the zoning code of the present.

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