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## Acknowledgements

Universities are changing in many ways, restructuring and rethinking the very nature of higher education. University-based museums must also examine their role and authority in order to enhance their value to the arts and artists in the broader cultural sector, the environment of higher education and to the communities they serve. USF's Institute for Research in Art, which includes the Contemporary Art Museum, Graphicstudio and Public Art program, is uniquely positioned to play a critical role in shaping inquiry-based teaching methods, interdisciplinary research as well as life-long learning and community engagement.

The Institute for Research in Art is a unique program in the landscape of higher education. The dynamic synergy of the Contemporary Art Museum and Graphicstudio enables: the development of innovative exhibitions; broad access to the University's art collection for interpretation by students and faculty; artist commissions; research in techniques for the production of limited edition prints and sculpture multiples in collaboration with visiting artists; and the administration of the Graduate Certificate Program in Museum Studies. Lectures and symposia with visiting artists, scholars and faculty, are designed to enhance awareness and response to contemporary international art practice. Ron Jones, Dean of the College of Visual & Performing Arts is a visionary leader

who continues to support the research initiatives and programs of the Institute for Research in Art.

I want to acknowledge and thank Izabel Galliera, Assistant Curator for the USF Contemporary Art Museum for her determination and commitment to this three-part project designed to introduce community-based and socially engaged art. For this project she worked collaboratively with the Tijuana-based art collective Torolab, founded in 1995 by Raúl Cárdenas Osuna, to develop an installation in the form of a proposal for architectural interventions on the USF Tampa campus and for specific sites in downtown Tampa. A one-day colloquium, *Art as a Catalyst for Social Transformation*, brings together visiting artists and scholars with selected members of the USF faculty to address some of the most difficult questions provoked by collaborative art projects. For a related component of the exhibition, Ms. Galliera has selected three films that document on-going community-based projects in Hamburg, Germany, Houston, Texas and Bastar, Central India. On behalf of Torolab and for the colloquium, Izabel has successfully mined the university and local community to bring together a broad range of perspectives on the role and power artists can have in transforming our values and quality of life.

Izabel Galliera is leaving her position at USF as Assistant Curator and Coordinator of the Graduate Certificate in Museum Studies to pursue a Ph.D. in Art History at the University of Pittsburgh. She has already made significant contributions to the field during an extended internship at the Rubell Family Foundation in Miami and for the USF Contemporary Art Museum. Her first solo curatorial project was *StereoVision* installed last year at USFCAM from June – August. She also edited and oversaw the design and publication of a monograph on the extensive photography collection of Robert Drapkin, M.D.

This three-part project identifies some of the key questions related to defining and developing community-

based or socially-engaged art interventions. Izabel's curatorial research and collaboration with Torolab, serves as a model for how the university-based museum can function as a site for dialogue between the academy and the community. Community-based art practice relies on an inquiry-based process and interdisciplinary collaboration. As a university-based museum, USFCAM is uniquely positioned in the environment of an urban research-oriented university to play a critical role in contributing to and assessing this art practice.

I am most grateful for the kind and generous support of the many participants in this project including panelists for the *Art as a Catalyst for Social Transformation* colloquium: Dr. Grant Kester, Rick Lowe, Raúl Cárdenas Osuna and Laurie Palmer and respondents: Wendy Babcox, Shannon Bassett, Dr. Margarethe Kusenbach, Dr. Alan Moore and Dr. Elizabeth Strom. I extend my appreciation to Robin Nigh, Art Programs Manager, City of Tampa, Department of Arts and Cultural Affairs, Laurie Walker, Director, USF Botanical Gardens, JoAnne Sullivan, Ph.D. Student, USF Department of Geography, Dr. Elizabeth Strom, Director, Urban and Regional Planning, USF Department of Geography, Shawn Landry, Interim Director, USF Florida Center for Community Design and Research and Dr. Philip van Beynen, Assistant Professor, USF Department of Environmental Science and Policy, for their time and valuable contributions to make the *Torolab: One Degree Celsius* exhibition a reality. The three-part project would not have been possible without the support and assistance of the staff at the USF Institute for Research in Art: Alexa Favata, Tony Palms, Vince Kral, Don Fuller, Vincent Ahern, Julie Ayers, Stead Thomas, David Waterman, Summer Smith, Noel Smith, Sarah Howard, Kristin Soderqvist, Randall West, David Norr, Tom Pruitt, Peter Foe, David Reutter, Shannon Annis, Kristin DuFrain, Eric Vontillius and Janie Campbell.

In this period of diminishing resources I thank the American Center Foundation for their financial support and

the USF Botanical Gardens for loan of their grow lights and Dr. Robert Drapkin for providing the IV poles and medical transfusion bags. Worm's Way (who specialize in hydroponic gardens) provided consultation and donated materials for the Torolab exhibition.

Margaret Miller  
Director and Professor  
Institute for Research in Art

## Foreword

Socially-engaged art practice is not a homogenous art movement, but an art practice that has been gradually evolving over the past forty years, and includes a wide range of art projects by both individual artists and artists' collectives. While very diverse in their creative and collaborative approaches, socially-engaged artistic initiatives are united by the belief in art's role in engaging a particular community and addressing the broader social, political, economic and ecological context to ultimately improve the quality of life. Scholars have attempted to identify a specific terminology to represent and speak of this practice in which interaction and collaboration are essential forces of aesthetic production.<sup>1</sup>

The University of South Florida Contemporary Art Museum | Institute for Research in Art has organized a three-part project structured to provoke debate and discussion on the cross-disciplinary collaborations of socially-engaged art practice, as it takes form within the broader socio-political and economic contexts. The components of the project include a colloquium, a museum installation and a series of three film screenings.

The one-day multidisciplinary colloquium *Art as a Catalyst for Social Transformation* with scholars, curators, artist

collectives, architects and social scientists, has been structured as a platform for discussion and debate on the multifaceted implications of socially-engaged art. Participants include: Dr. Grant Kester, an art historian and critic, who has coined the term “dialogic art practice” and outlined a critical framework for recent art practices based on performative interactions with participants outside of the normative art contexts in his book *Conversation Pieces: Community and Communication in Modern Art* (University of California Press, 2004); Rick Lowe, an artist actively involved in socially-engaged and community-based art projects, who has recently collaborated with artists Suzanne Lacy and Mary Jane Jacobs on the Borough Project for the Spoleto Festival 2003, South Carolina, and is also the founder of Project Row Houses, an arts and cultural organization located in Houston's historically significant Third Ward neighborhood; Raúl Cárdenas Osuna, the founder of Torolab, a Tijuana-based consortium of artists, architects and designers, established as a “socially engaged workshop committed to examining and elevating the quality of life for residents in Tijuana and the trans-border region through a culture of ideologically advanced design” in 1995; and Laurie Palmer, Associate Professor and Chair of Sculpture at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, whose recent projects question the privatization of land and other shared resources through collective acts of imagining and initiations of public discourse. Through their specific art practice, each of the four participants has addressed particular issues and collaborative methods within the broader genre of socially-engaged art practice.

Four faculty members from different departments at the University of South Florida, with particular research interests, have been selected as respondents to provoke as well as extend the discourse proposed at the colloquium. The

<sup>1</sup> For instance, Nicolas Bourriaud refers to *relational aesthetic*, Grant Kester uses the term *dialogic art practice*, Homi K. Bhabha talks about *conversational art*, and Tom Finkelpearl uses *dialogue-based public art*, to describe art projects that center around communication and collaboration. See Nicolas Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetic* (Les Presses du Reel, France, 1998); Grant Kester, *Conversation Pieces: Community and Communication in Modern Art* (University of California Press: Los Angeles, 2004); Homi K. Bhabha, “Conversational Art,” in *Conversations at the Castle: Changing Audiences and Contemporary Art*, ed. Mary Jane Jacob (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1998); and Tom Finkelpearl, “Five Dialogues on Dialogue-Based Public Art Projects,” in *Dialogues in Public Art* (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 2000).

respondent to Raúl Cardenas Osuna is Wendy Babcox, an Assistant Professor of Photography, who is also a multi-media artist and a member of 6+Woman's Collective, whose "goal is to explore different possibilities for artistic collaborations across geographic and cultural distances." Respondent to Rick Lowe is Dr. Margarethe Kusenbach, Assistant Professor of Sociology, whose current research focuses on urban and community sociology, social psychology and social problems. Respondents to Laurie Palmer are Shannon Bassett, Assistant Professor of Architecture and Urbanism, with a research interest in cultural and regional landscapes and dynamic topographies and how they interface with urbanism, and Dr. Elizabeth Strom, Director, Urban and Regional Planning and Associate Professor, Department of Geography whose current interest is in universities and cultural institutions as urban political actors. Respondent to Dr. Grant Kester is Dr. Alan Moore, critic, writer and activist living and working in New York City, with a particular research interest in New York City artists' organizations since 1969, and local cultural communities and their geographies.

Presenters and respondents have been asked to address a range of issues including: How do artists working in a socially-engaged art practice formulate sustainable working relationships within their communities? What is the significance of the collaborative process itself? What is the aesthetic value of socially-engaged art and community-based art, which is most often formed through collaboration and dialog? What are the different dimensions of socially-engaged art? How can art institutions create viable ways to engage in a sustained relationship with varied audiences and communities?

As a way to further extend the topics addressed at the colloquium and to illustrate various examples of community-based art, a series of three films—each featuring a specific project—have been selected to screen in the USF Contemporary Art Museum's East Gallery. *Park Fiction* –

*Desires Will Leave the House and Take to the Streets* (1998) directed by Margit Czenki is a record of the voices and initiatives of the art collective Park Fiction, initiated in 1995, in the St. Pauli neighborhood in Hamburg, Germany, as an oppositional voice to the city government's intention to sell the scenic site of the harbor overlooking the Elbe River to private real-estate developers. *Third Ward TX* (2007), directed and photographed by Andrew Garrison, is a documentary feature about Project Row Houses (PRH), a neighborhood-based art and cultural organization located in Houston's Third Ward, as a way to connect the work of artists with the revitalization of a community. The *Water Water* (2005) video and the accompanying interviews with Adivasi (indigenous and tribal communities) artists and the community of Kondagaon are based on the creation of water pump sites in Bastar villages, in Central India.

While employing different collaborative methods, each artistic intervention documented in the films centers on dialog and interaction with a particular community within specific social, political, ecological and economic contexts. The essay titled *Film Screenings: Socially-Engaged Artistic Practices*, offers an account of each of the featured projects with a particular focus on the nature of collaboration.

While the films feature various community-based projects, the thematically related exhibition *Torolab: One Degree Celsius*, offers a different dimension within the proposed discourse on socially-engaged art. Torolab was founded in 1995 by Raúl Cárdenas Osuna, as a collective workshop and laboratory of contextual studies. In 2006 Torolab began a series of projects under the umbrella name of *Molecular Urbanism*, in which the collective set out to investigate ways to visualize the complex and constantly shifting interrelationship between the human body, urban architectural fabric and local climate. For example, in COMA (2006-2007) Torolab traced the physiological changes of a Mexican person in their everyday

relation to food. The collective's project culminated in creating a new food product, a type of bread containing all the absent nutrients in a typical Mexican diet, according to the Mexican national health census. For the project Torolab collaborated with local gastronomy students, musicians and artists.

For *Torolab: One Degree Celsius* at USF Contemporary Art Museum, also part of their larger series of projects called *Molecular Urbanism*, Torolab engaged various local specialists from USF and the City of Tampa, Department of Arts and Cultural Affairs in order to formulate their proposals for specific sites and architectural interventions on the USF campus and downtown Tampa. Torolab conceptually and physically morphs the Museum space into a proposal and a laboratory for creative experiments investigating the multiple uses of a garden. Ranging from portable or vertical to emergency or egg-carton, each garden is designed to enter and activate various spaces. *Torolab: One Degree Celsius* also includes drawn proposals for large-scale sculptural gardens within various urban voids throughout downtown Tampa and the USF campus. The viewer is immersed within a dynamic think-tank-like space that reveals the artists' working methodology. Videos documenting conversations with local collaborators are presented on separate monitors in the installation. Torolab's experiments and proposals are greatly informed by the locally collected data. Examples include: the use of Florida friendly plants (identified by Laurie Walker, Director of the USF Botanical Gardens); or the creation of the *CO2 Container* accompanied by the *City of Tampa: Urban Ecological Analysis 2006-2007* study (co-authored in part by Shawn Landry of USF Florida Center for Community Design and Research) to address the need to contain and prevent the carbon dioxide emission from entering the atmosphere and raising the air temperature.

Torolab's installation illustrates a system of insertions and communications that are both context specific and universal. While working on the Tampa project, Torolab is also designing

a project for Culiacan, Mexico. In both projects the artists use drawings and sketches to illustrate their proposals for various large-scale interventions within the two cities, responding to the particularities of site and context. *Torolab: One Degree Celsius* includes drawn proposals for large-scale architectural interventions, displayed with functional sculptural elements. Through these aesthetically pleasing elements, the artists envision the creation of multiple bio-ecological environments within specific architectural urban voids, intended to have a transformative long-term positive impact upon the local climate, human interaction and disposition, and the city's physical and socio-cultural condition. Torolab's insightfully modified Google satellite maps are suggestive of this essential multilayered and interdependent correlation. They function as imagined pictographs, visualizing the possible future positive impact of the artists' proposed urban garden interventions.

I am indebted to Margaret Miller, Director for her unwavering confidence and support for this project. The entire staff at the USF Institute for Research in Art was absolutely vital in making this three-part project possible. Discussions with Rozalinda Borcila, Alan Moore, Margaret Miller and Wallace Wilson have stimulated my thinking in formulating the ideas for the one-day colloquium. The colloquium could have not happened without the presence and contribution of the participants and respondents. Most of all I greatly appreciate the opportunity to work with Torolab to realize the *Torolab: One Degree Celsius* exhibition.

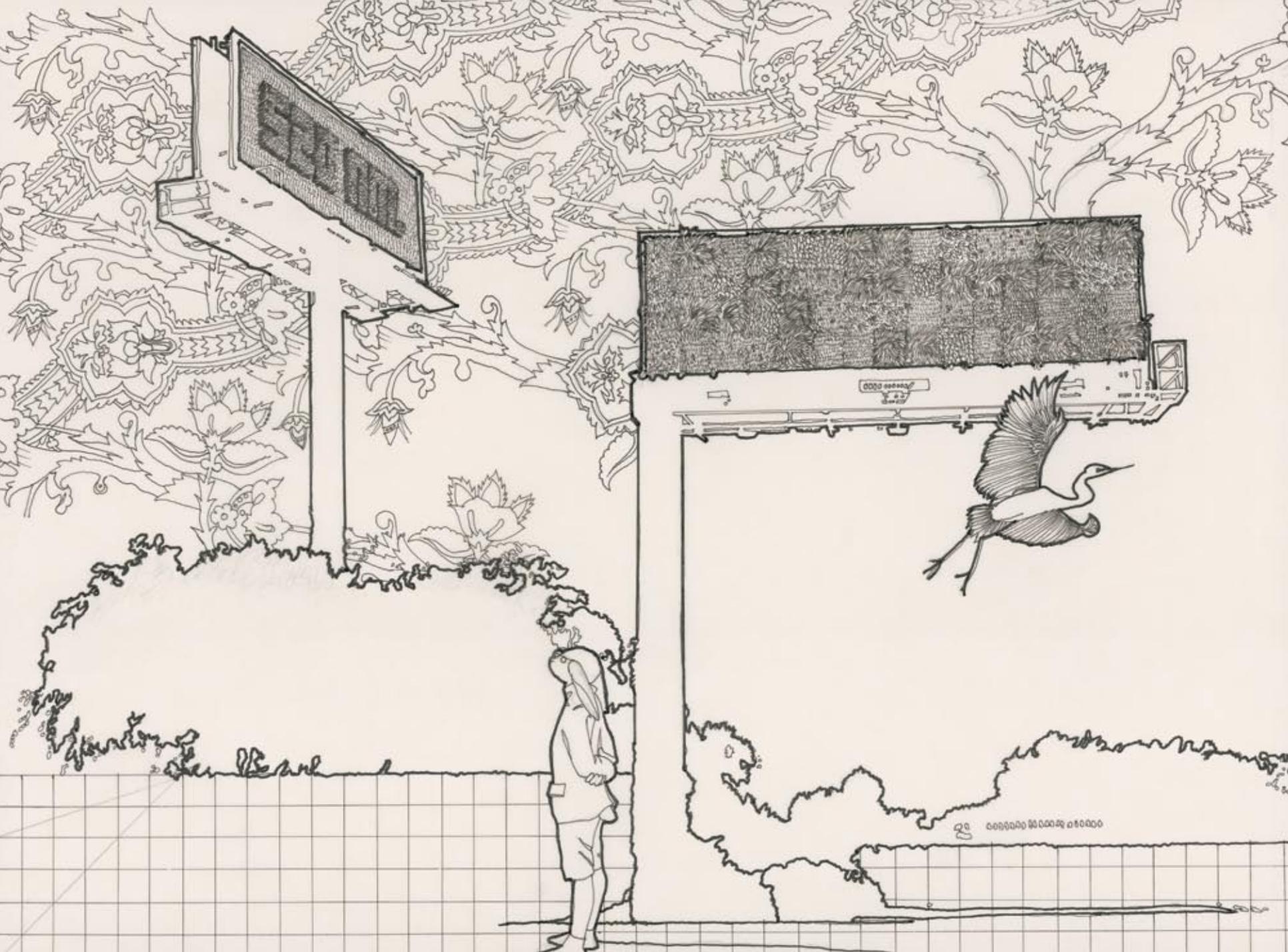
Izabel Galliera

Assistant Curator, USF Institute for Research in Art



Torolab, *1°C Downtown Tampa Parking Lot Gardens* from *One Degree Celsius*, 2008  
Digital image, Image credits: Raúl Cárdenas Osuna  
Facing page: Torolab, *Parking Lots (Vertical & Roof Gardens)* from *One Degree Celsius*, 2008  
Ink on paper, Image credits: Raúl Cárdenas Osuna





Raúl Cárdenas Osuna  
Interview with Izabel Galliera (June-July 2008)

IG: Your project *Torolab: One Degree Celsius* for USFCAM is part of a series of projects called *Molecular Urbanism*. Could you explain more about what you mean by *Molecular Urbanism* and how *One Degree Celsius* becomes part of this larger series?

RC: *Molecular Urbanism* projects are diagnostic and strategic systems of ‘interventions’ in human bodies on both biological and molecular levels and subsequently their environments. For example, let us say you’re either getting thinner or fatter, or perhaps growing or losing hair; these are individually specific phenomena that begin on a molecular-biological level in your body and at first are not visible to the eye. But as soon as you start changing your patterns of behavior, you change the program of your life, and once that happens, you relate differently to your surroundings, changing your immediate space and consequently the way you relate and interact with ‘others’ and their environment. And if those changes happen, they become the breaking or a tipping point when ‘others’ have those same transformations and when you start seeing shifts on an urban scale. The transformations from an apparently invisible state to a macroscopic scale become what I refer to as *Molecular Urbanism*. The Torolab team, including myself, not only intends to create diagnostics to these changes and perform exercises of visualization for portraits of molecular urbanism, but we also intend to project and realize interventions at that very biological-molecular level.

For example, one such project is already happening and working in Puebla, Mexico. It first started as a visualization of how the physiognomy of the Mexican persona changes with their quotidian relationship with food. The second stage of the project (still in progress) is to visualize how the city changes because of that first evaluation. Once we have the data of the physiological changes in Mexicans, the cartographies or portraits become a new ‘food product’ and a system of distribution for such a product. The product was named ‘picudita’ by the people who tasted it first during our initial tasting. Technically, it is a bread that contains all of the missing elements in the Mexican diet in terms of vitamin A, B6, C, D, E, iron & calcium, and leaves out the excesses such as saturated fats and simple carbohydrates—making it into an organoleptic design. So not only did it contain natural organic ingredients, based on the Mexican palate, but we also made it taste good, look good, smell good

and feel good as to provoke a pleasurable experience. We're still growing with this project. Each time we place it out on the streets, we are not giving it away. We distribute and sell it as to produce a new type of economy. We've sold out of Picuditas. We are now in the process of shaping the cartographies that show the changes in the city, but that's an entirely different conversation...

Back to *One Degree Celsius*. This is a project about the relation between constructed spaces and green areas in cities and the relation between temperature and moods or temperaments. Specifically this is an issue in areas where there are high temperatures, even in the cities that seem to have an ideal amount of green areas, like Tampa. It's not about how much you have, but how you make use of it and distribute it. As Spike Lee once put it: *strange things happens on the hottest day of the year*.

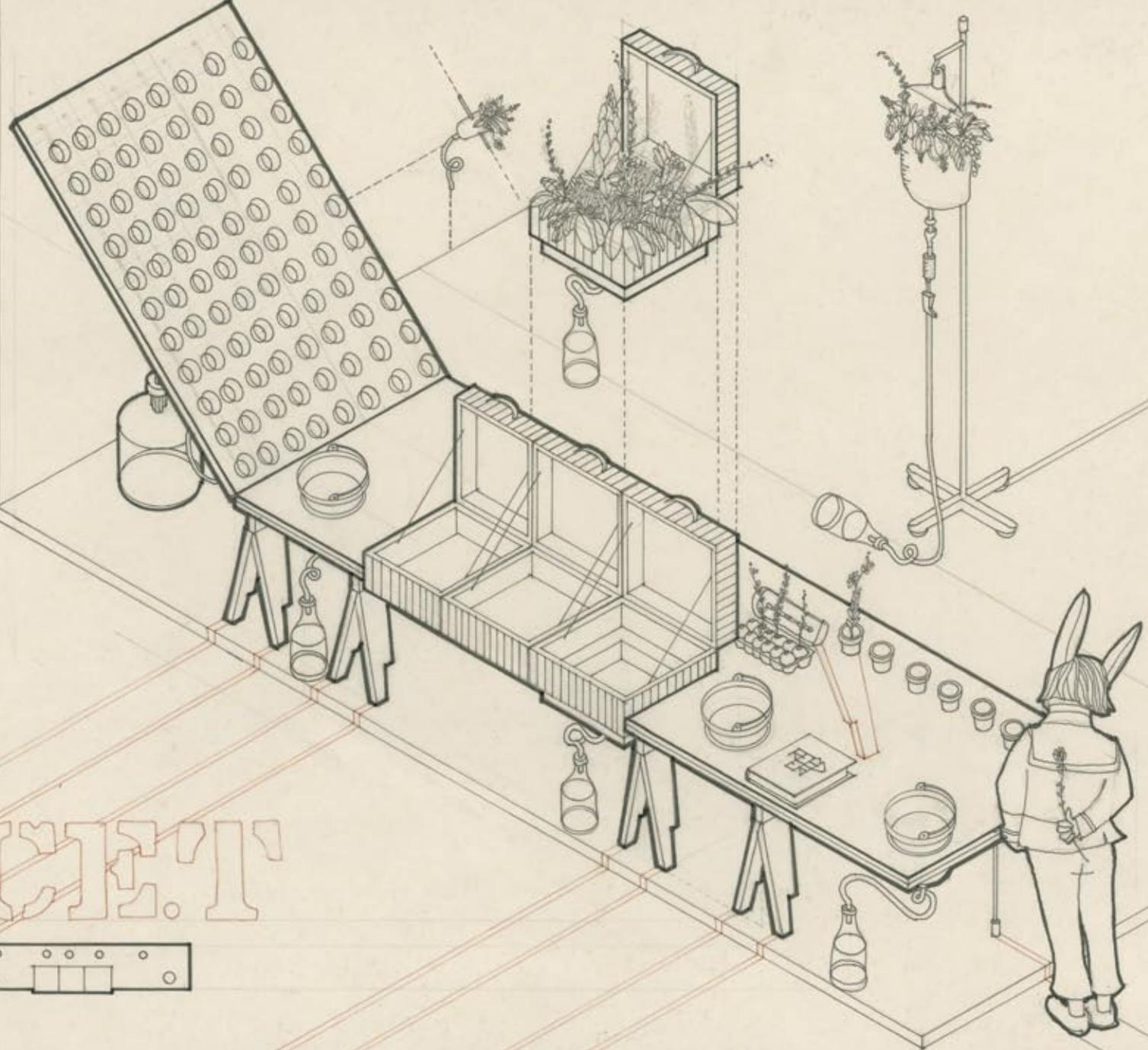
IG: Are your titles suggestive of the particular intentions of your projects?

RC: Yes, the project's name definitely implies a route for engaging green spaces and botanical-biological designed garden structures that will ideally change temperature. As the project grows like a virus, we will go from the micro to macro climate changes in urban environments. So, yes, *One Degree Celsius* is more than a name, it's an intention.

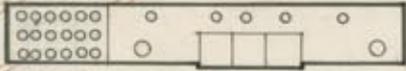
IG: Why gardens?

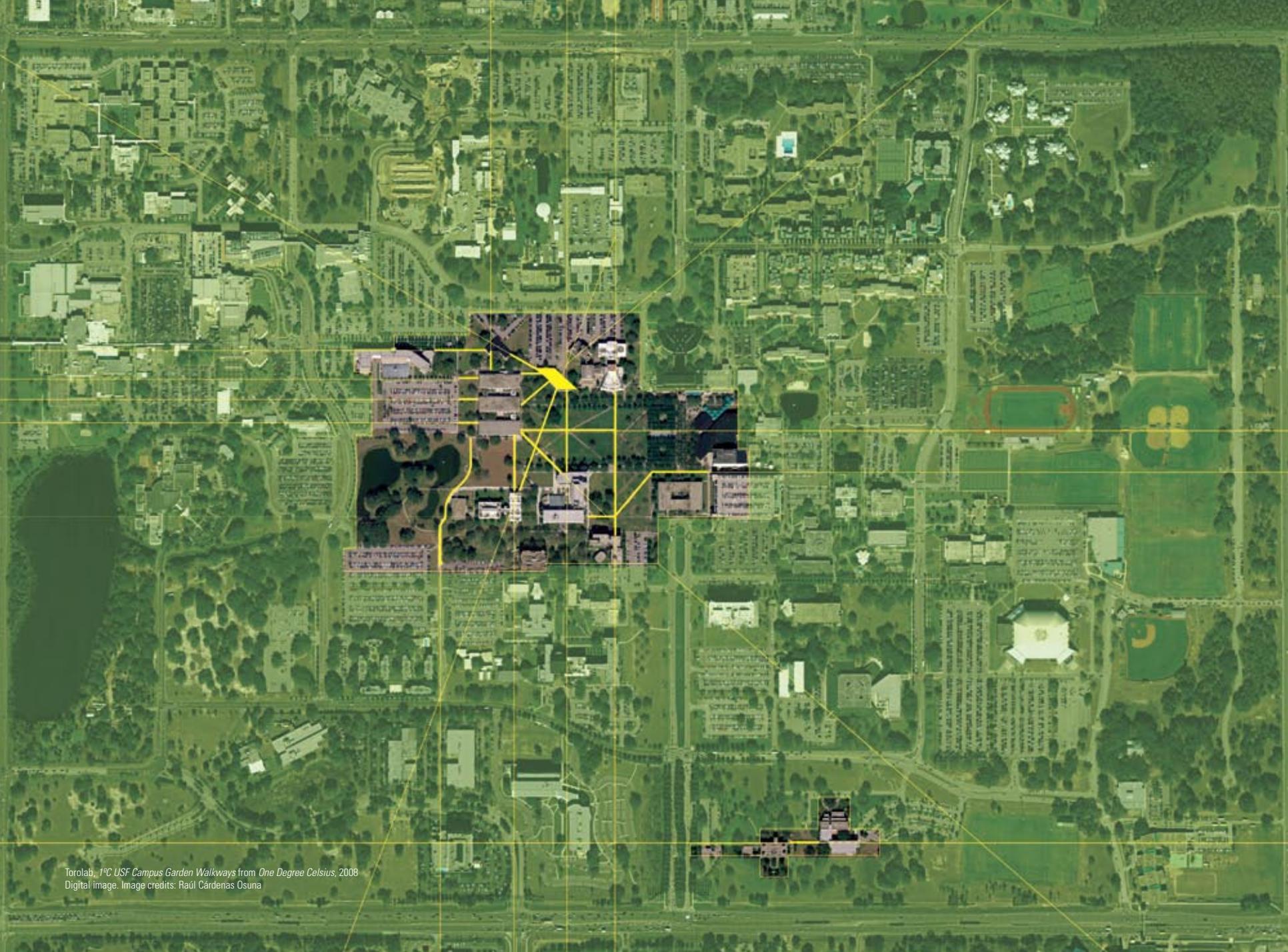
RC: For two particular reasons: First, it all began by making an informal study, more like an overview of Tijuana, Torolab's home. Tijuana has an insulting relation between green and constructed spaces resulting in a change in temperature and elevated rate of bad temperament of Tijuana's inhabitants as compared to the situation on the other side of the border in San Diego, CA. As a result of this informal overview, we have been invited to do a permanent intervention in Culiacan, the capital city of my home state Sinaloa, Mexico. At first we thought of the city's botanical garden as context and catalyst, but we very soon realized that there wasn't an actual site for us to intervene in the garden. That absence became a starting point in the project. We found it beautiful and poetic—the idea of not having a territory to work in or to work from. So, instead of working on a site within the botanical garden, we took the garden out of its fixed place and inserted it throughout the city. The garden is no longer a frame for a structure or a pavilion but becomes the 'piece' or the project itself as it is woven into the urban fabric of the city and grows beyond its limits. For all this to happen, we have a programmatic strategy and a local Torolab cell to implement it.

Secondly, if we talk about temperature and temperaments or moods, we also talk about quality of life where gardens become social activators. In an interview (on view in the exhibition) with Shawn Landry, he mentioned how in a study of 3000 Floridians, a higher mortality rate was found in areas where there were not enough or a lack of trees. I find it a compelling argument that the planting (even at that stage) of a garden can serve as a catalyst for social engagement.

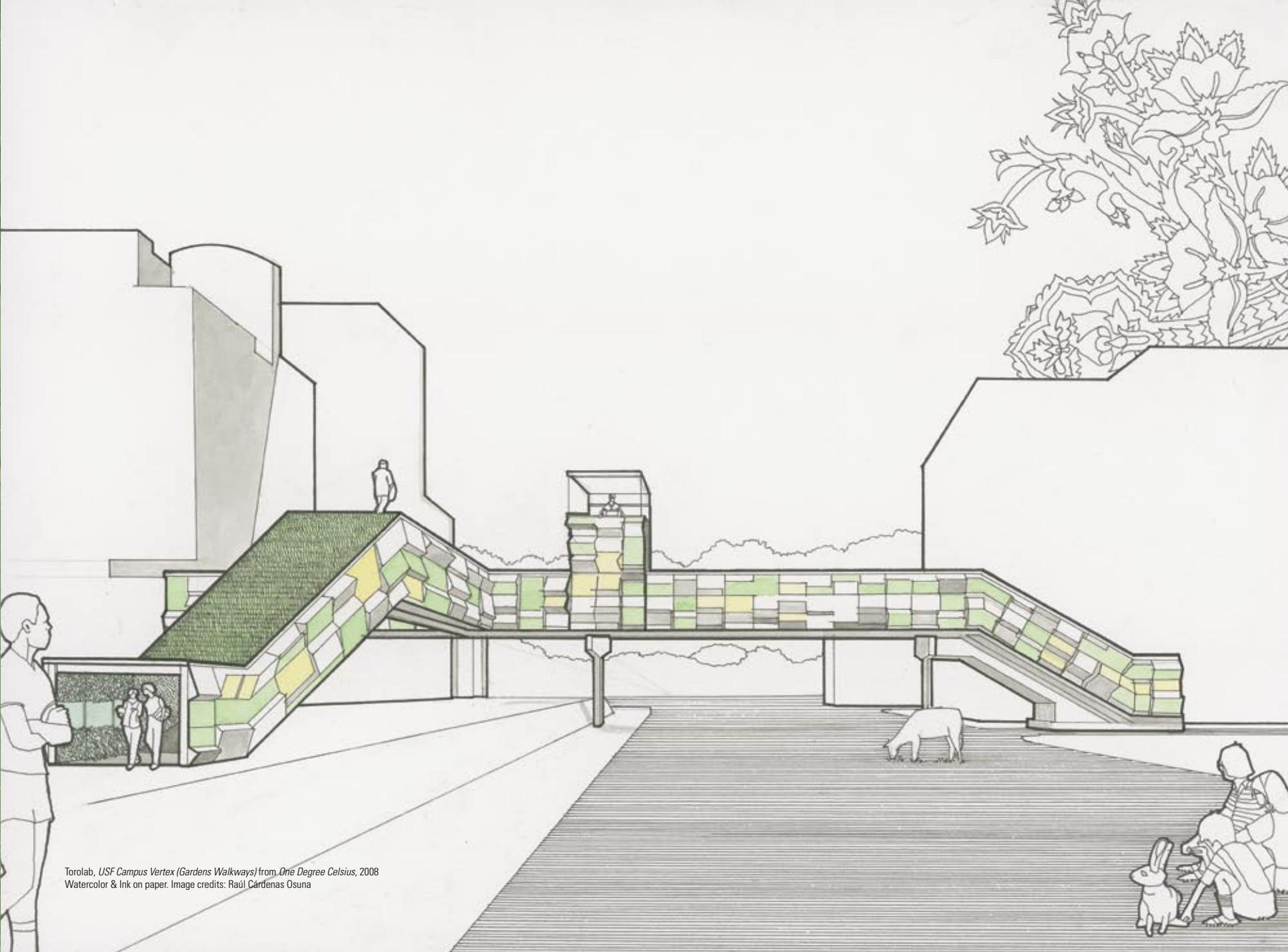


ICET





Torolab, *1°C USF Campus Garden Walkways from One Degree Celsius*, 2008  
Digital image. Image credits: Raúl Cárdenas Osuna



Torolab, *USF Campus Vertex (Gardens Walkways)* from *One Degree Celsius*, 2008  
Watercolor & Ink on paper. Image credits: Raúl Cárdenas Osuna

IG: You talk about envisioning and creating Bio-Ecological Environments within specific architectural urban voids of a city. Specifically what do you mean by ‘urban voids’?

RC: In a project of contextual analysis done by Torolab in 2000, we named Urban Voids: channels of denied and lost opportunities, left as billboards of voids between public engagement and political denial, between the physical urban layout and public domain. These channels become a fluid territory for Torolab, an aesthetically prone instigator, to negotiate, exchange and activate projects.

IG: Your drawings illustrate aesthetically and beautifully designed sculptural elements, which appear to me as creative experiments in a garden’s multiple uses that enter and reactivate everyday spaces, like a kitchen or hospital room; almost, like miniature bio-ecological environments for people living in these spaces. How do you see these smaller scale sculptural elements in relationship to your larger architectural interventions within a city’s urban layout?

RC: Just as in *Molecular Urbanism*, we go from nanometers up to acres. These drawings (considered in their proper scale) are compositional diagrams and form the building blocks of ideas. They are not only part of the process but are also tools to interact in various stages of project development and strategies for new areas of engagement. These drawings are as essential as the actual implementation of a Torolab system. Usually we don’t show them at all, only the finished systems; this will be the first time. For example, here at USFCAM, the *Garden Table* functions not only as a sculptural element but also as a dialogical vehicle. Fitted with wood suitcases that contain drawn proposals for particular sites throughout USF campus and downtown Tampa, along with plant samples, and related educational and research material, the *Garden Table* becomes a point of interaction, experimentation and exchange between Torolab, our proposals and the viewer, user and participant. The *Billboard Garden (520NM)* offers another type of exchange, as it establishes a direct sensory and olfactory connection with the viewer. The legend *520NM* (written with live multi-colored plants) denotes the beginning in the range of light frequency measured in nanometers that composes and allows us to perceive the color green. Additionally, the *Billboard Garden (520NM)* is a maquette, a proposal, to be ultimately implemented outdoors, in an actual urban environment. So the gallery space is transformed into an evolving and on-going experiment illustrating our working methodology. Essentially, we see our garden proposals as both sculptural elements and dialogical vehicles on the relation between temperature and human temperament, and the relation between green and constructed areas and social interaction within an urban environment.

IG: How important is collaboration in your working process and how does it take place, particularly for the *Torolab: One Degree Celsius* at USFCAM?

RC: I love this question because the Torolab working model is hard to grasp at times. First there is a context to work with, and once a situation or a void is identified, a Torolab team is put together to diagnose and activate projects. It is imperative that the projects work and are engaging. You can only achieve this with knowledge and credibility with the local community.

So the aesthetic endeavor starts with engaging the local team or cell, if not, it becomes stale and you cross the line from team member to somebody who only performed a service. So even if I'd love to do all of the projects with the same team, there are always resources to consider: time, knowledge, and of course, money. Sometimes I find myself working with old teammates, and sometimes I develop the project by myself (but that's something I dearly try to avoid). In the case of USFCAM, the Torolab team or the Tampa cell, could not have worked without Tony and you, Izabel. I think you're going beyond your duties as curator and are now an accomplice in this. Also I'd like to acknowledge the participation of Robin Nigh, Laurie Walker, JoAnne Sullivan, Elizabeth Strom, Shawn Landry and Philip van Beynen. Even if they are not members of the team, they are absolutely essential for the diagnostic and development of the proposal.

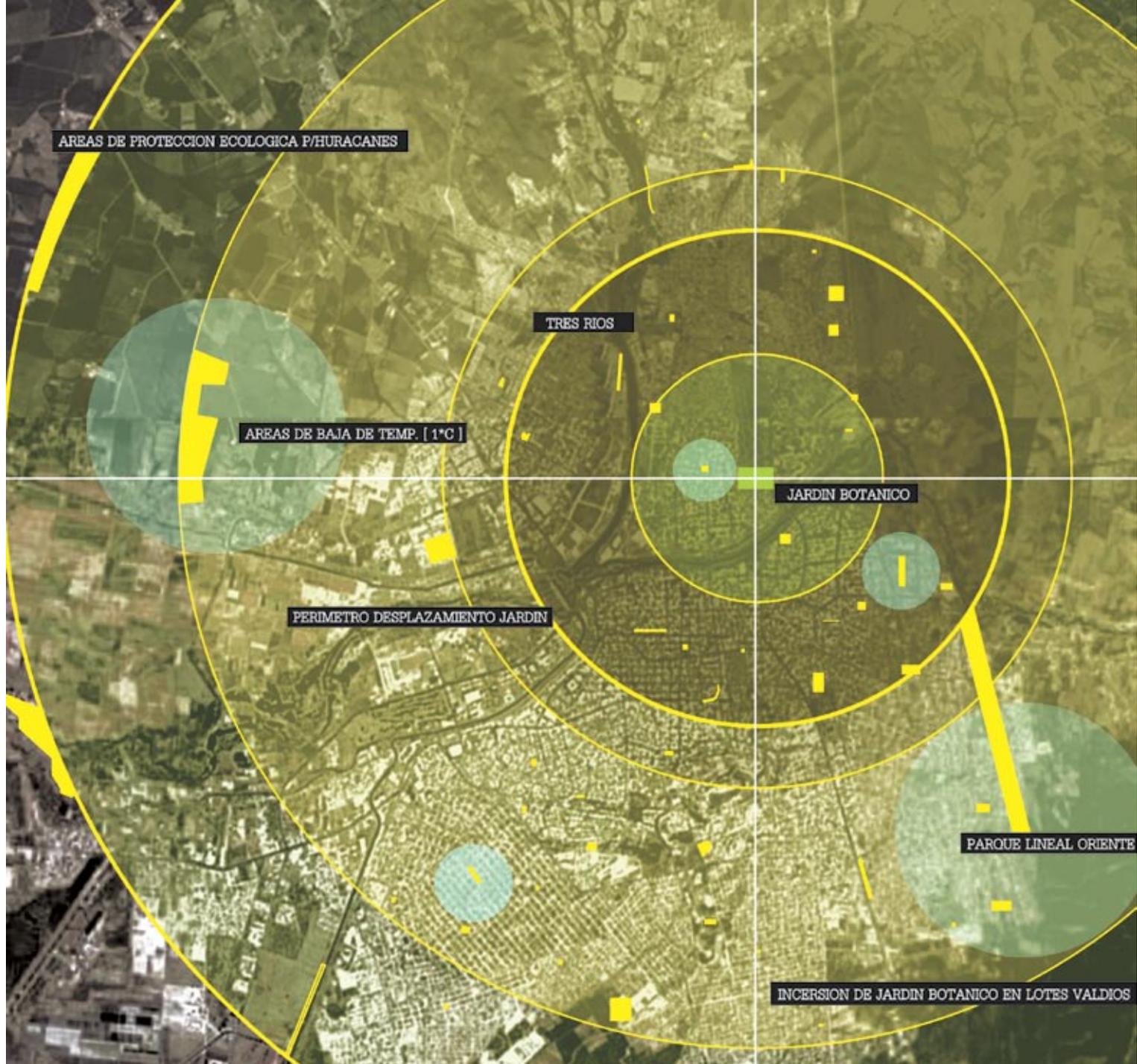
IG: When conceptualizing and creating your proposals for context specific projects, how are you informed by the particularities of a specific site? How do you go about collecting local data and what are the evaluative criteria for your projects?

RC: It depends on the context, but I have developed several work processes that mutate and help me overcome the white piece of paper. It all starts with observation and dialog with the context itself. Then conversations and, in some cases, interviews become necessary; but it all varies according to the particular sense of place. This is where you and the USFCAM staff really have supported me in Tampa, because field-work is essential for the project. Just as I have been doing my rounds in Culiacan, every place where I do a project I have to move there. It is not until the project instigates dialog and exchange and activates new actions with the user / guest / visitor that we can measure a form of success in Torolab's projects and their aesthetical value. The project's success is only accomplished with contextual credibility. You live, breath, sleep and wake-up in the environment, or acquire the human resources that can at least give you that notion of the context.

IG: And finally, how does the *Torolab: One Degree Celsius* project in Tampa differ or resemble the project in Culiacan, which you are simultaneously creating in Mexico? Why is it important to consider and view these projects side by side?

RC: It's about an import and export of dialog that forms the basis for the conceptualization of the proposal. The projects initiate with an exchange of plant specimens and urban policies of social cohesion, which will ideally emerge as a project working in both environments and that can lay the basis of 'referential landscapes.' So the projects form out of an improbable conversation between two contexts with layered similarities and inherent differences that connect through contrast and build possibilities in their voids or necessities.





AREAS DE PROTECCION ECOLOGICA P/HURACANES

TRES RIOS

AREAS DE BAJA DE TEMP. [ 1°C ]

JARDIN BOTANICO

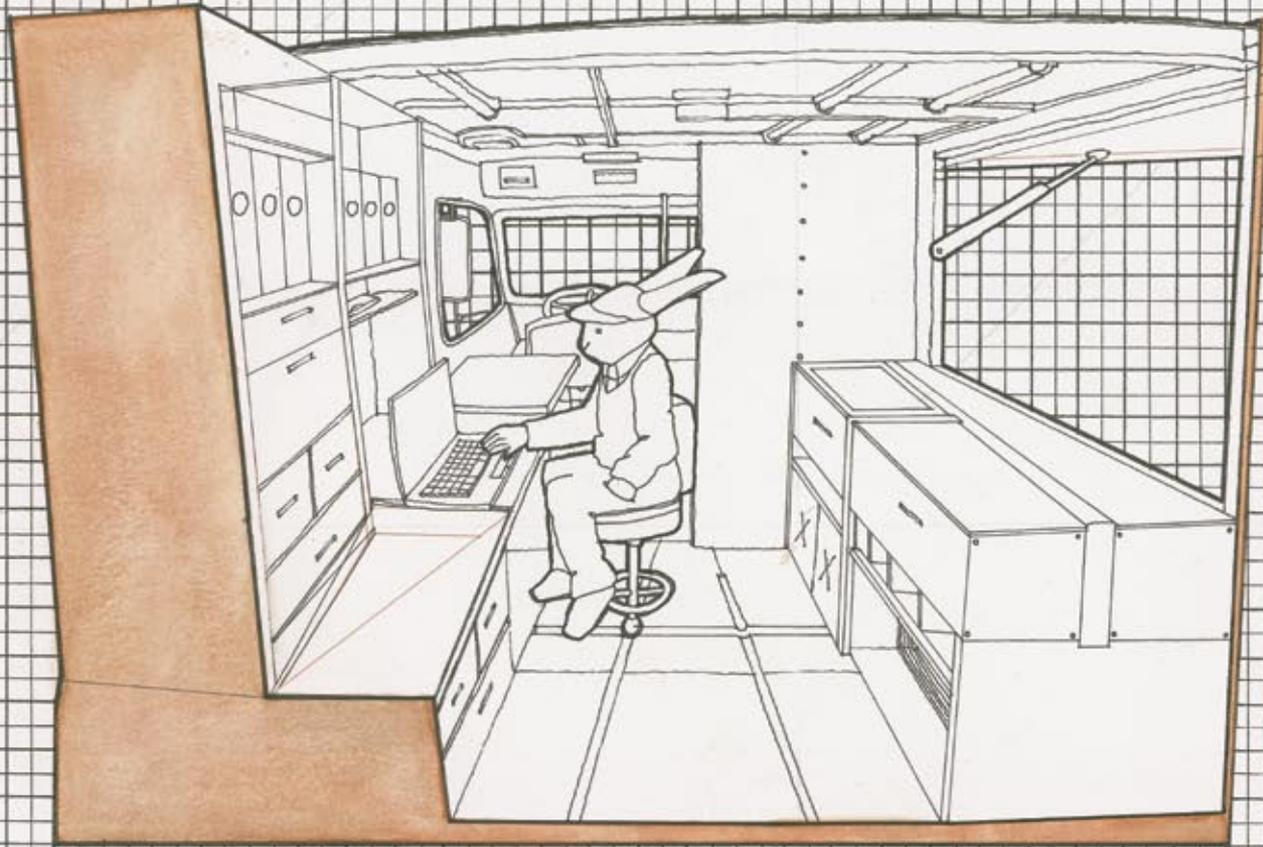
PERIMETRO DESPLAZAMIENTO JARDIN

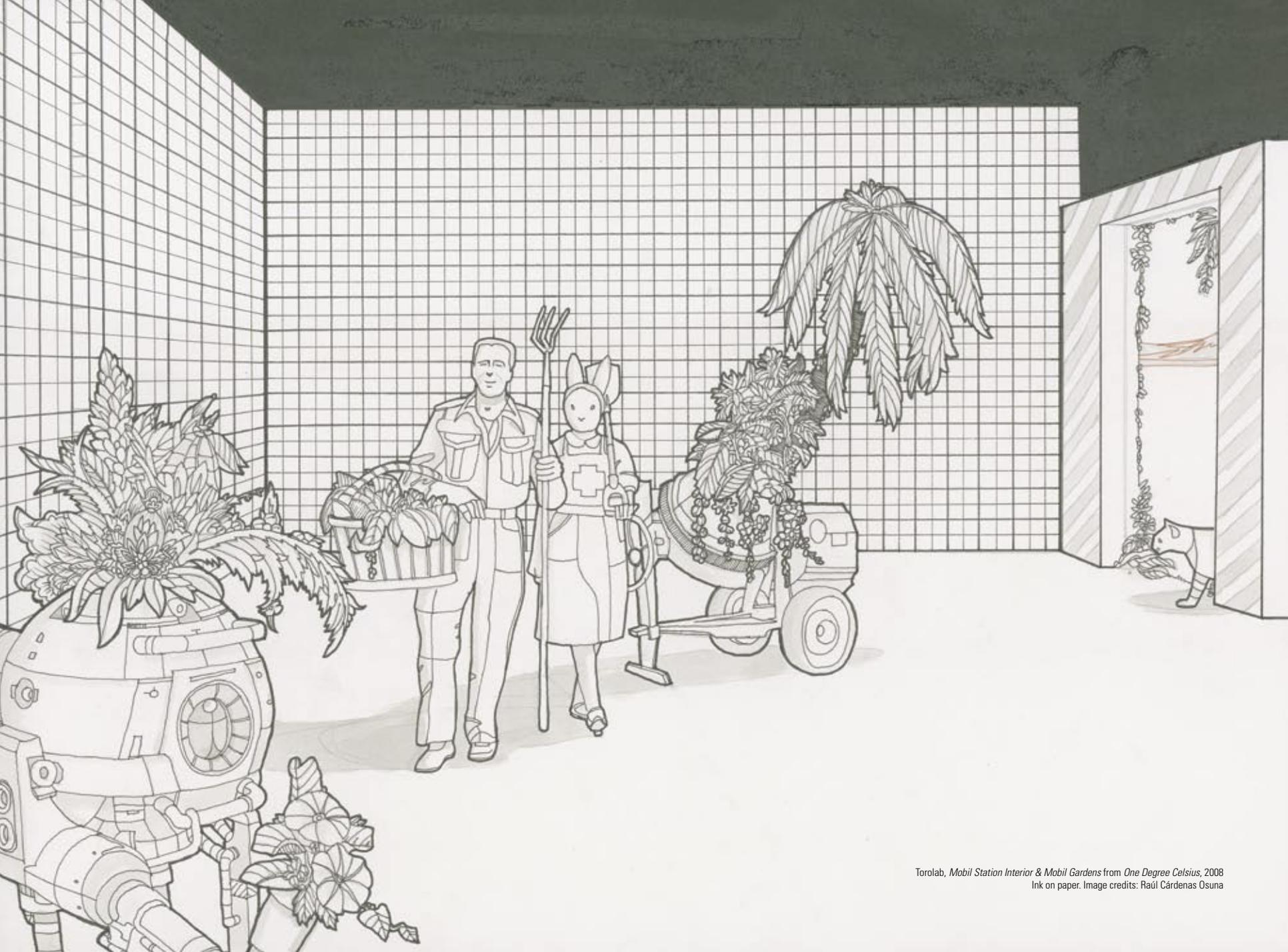
PARQUE LINEAL ORIENTE

INCERSION DE JARDIN BOTANICO EN LOTES VALDIOS



Torolab, Mobil Lab Station from *One Degree Celsius*, 2008  
Ink on paper. Image credits: Raúl Cárdenas Osuna









## Film Screenings: Socially-Engaged Artistic Practices

The selected series of three films: *Park Fiction – Desires Will Leave the House and Take to the Streets* (1999) directed by Margit Czenki; *Third Ward TX* (2007) directed and photographed by Andrew Garrison; and *Water Water* (2005) created by Navjot Altaf, feature three different socially engaged art projects, developed by artists working closely within a community without any direct institutional support. Avoiding essentializing approaches to community, each film illustrates collaborative methods and artists' interventions centered on dialog and interaction with a specific group in a particular social and economic context. While aiming to ultimately improve the quality of life, in each of these projects artists are able to fuse the aesthetic with the social concerns. In the context of this screening, the films are intended to function

on multiple levels, as aesthetic expressions in their own right, as documentaries of specific artistic initiatives, and most importantly as extensions of the featured projects themselves aimed to provoke dialog on socially-engaged art practice.

Socially-engaged art, also referred to as community-based, dialogic, participatory, interventionist or collaborative, addresses social issues, can function as political activism and engages in long term collaborations with specific communities. Miwon Kwon calls it “art-in-the-public-interest model.” She situates this model, which began in the early 1990s, after the removal of Richard Serra’s *Tilted Arc* from Federal Plaza, New York, in 1989, as the last paradigm in an evolutionary historical path of public art starting in the mid-1960s.<sup>1</sup> Grant Kester uses the term “dialogic art” or “dialogical interaction” to describe a socially-engaged practice that foregrounds dialog and close collaborative interactions.<sup>2</sup> Typically, in institutionally supported and mediated community-based art projects, artists are invited to develop site-specific projects with communities whose local political dynamics, histories and cultures are entirely unknown to the artist.<sup>3</sup> In such contexts, the community is generally perceived as the socially, economically and culturally inferior *other*. Additionally, Kwon observes how the term *community* is often employed outside the art world to reference socially coherent groups. “It is deployed equally by the left and the right to muster public support for certain social programs, political candidates, and

1 Thus, from the mid 1960s to the mid 1970s “public art was dominated by the art-in-public-spaces paradigm – modernist abstract sculptures that were often enlarged replicas of works normally found in museums and galleries, that almost entirely ignored any reference to the site. This paradigm is illustrated by public art such as, Alexander Calder’s *La Grande Vitesse*, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1967 and Isamu Noguchi’s *Red Cube*, Manhattan, New York, 1968. The second paradigm is the art-as-public-spaces approach, typified by design-oriented urban sculptures of Scott Burton, Siah Armajani, Mary Miss, Nancy Holt, and others, which were meant to take into consideration the specific qualities of the site thusly functioning as street furniture, architectural constructions, or landscaped environments.” See Miwon Kwon, *One Place After Another: Site-Specific Art and Locational Identity*, (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2002), p. 61.

2 Establishing a historical lineage for the collaborative art practice, Kester references specific shifts in conceptual and minimal art of the 1960s and 1970s. He identifies “three key shifts in conceptual and minimal art: the gradual movement away from object-based practices; the interest in making a given work dependent on direct physical or perceptual interaction with the viewer (as seen in works by Vito Acconci, James Turrell, and Robert Irwin, among others); and a related shift toward a durational, rather than instantaneous, concept of aesthetic experience (as manifested in Dan Graham’s early video installations, which require an extended period of viewer participation).” Additionally, Kester places the socially engaged practice within the historical avant-garde lineage, in opposition to the representational, narrative function of art (embodied in the neoclassical and realist traditions) and the 20th century formalist avant-garde (associated with the criticism of Clive Bell, Roger Fry, Clement Greenberg and Michael Fried). See Grant Kester, *Conversation Pieces: Community and Communication in Modern Art* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 2004), pp. 13-14, 50-51.

3 *Ibid.*, 172.



Stills from *Park Fiction – Desires Will Leave the House and Take to the Streets* (1998)  
Directed by Margit Czenki

legislative agendas; it carries weight in debates ranging from education and health care to housing policies and zoning regulations.”<sup>4</sup> Similarly, Kester observes the concept of community is subject to profound levels of abuse, considering community “as either wholly positive (the redemptive domain of ‘community values’ so dear to conservatives) or entirely negative (the dangerously essentializing community that is regularly invoked in continental theory).”<sup>5</sup>

The three films selected for this exhibition feature individual projects that avoid such characterizations, by approaching community in terms of its members’ constantly evolving identities and histories. The art collective Park Fiction was initiated in 1995, in the neighborhood of St. Pauli in Hamburg, Germany, as an oppositional voice to the city government’s intention to sell the scenic site of the harbor overlooking the Elbe River to private real-estate developers. Park Fiction (with artists Christoph Schäfer and Cathy Skenea as initial members, and later Margit Czenki and Gunter Greis) organized a local network of diverse community members that included: artists, musicians, priests, a headmistress, a cook, a psychologist, café-owners, squatters and politically active residents. In order to block the developers’ plans, Park

Fiction initiated a “parallel planning process and a collective production of desires for the park without being commissioned to do so by authorities.”<sup>6</sup> For the parallel planning process, Park Fiction conceptualized and created a series of interactive strategies, including: lectures on parks and politics, an open-air cinema, slide shows, raves, park-related exhibitions in the local church, schools, shop windows, a planning container, a telephone hotline for people to call in with ideas, a garden library, and also an *Action Kit*—a mobile planning office with questionnaires, maps, Dictaphone, foldout harbor panorama, and an instamatic camera to capture ideas. Beyond being a tool in Park Fiction’s overall alternative planning process, and a record of the voices of the park, the 1998 film *Park Fiction – Desires Will Leave the House and Take to the Streets*, written and directed by Margit Czenki, is a powerful work that can also be critically analyzed as an autonomous work of art. At once, the film is a vivid collage of a surrealist parallel universe of projected desires and a critical investigation into the urban politics surrounding the multi-faceted issue of public space, in Hamburg’s St. Pauli.<sup>7</sup> After nine years of activity, Park Fiction has been able to realize some of the initially proposed components: *Tree Island* or *Tea Garden* and the *Flying Carpet*,

4 Kwon, p.112

5 Kester, p. 129

6 Christoph Schäfer, “The City is Unwritten: Urban Experiences and Thoughts Seen Through Park Fiction,” (2004). See Park Fiction’s website: [parkfiction.org](http://parkfiction.org)

7 Ibid. The St. Pauli neighborhood of Hamburg is the poorest in western Germany, though Hamburg, paradoxically, is the second richest city in the European Union.



Stills from *Third Ward TX* (2007)  
Directed by Andrew Garrison

which officially opened in September 2003. To move their plans forward and continue the discourse on urban issues, Park Fiction initiated the Institute for Independent Urbanism. It cannot be denied that Park Fiction's success was in part due to their familiarity and credibility that they inspired by belonging to that community.

The 2007 film *Third Ward TX* directed and photographed by Andrew Garrison, is a documentary feature about Project Row Houses (PRH), a neighborhood based art and cultural organization located in Houston's Third Ward. "PRH was established in 1993 on a site of 22 abandoned shotgun houses (c.1930) to connect the work of artists with the revitalization of our community."<sup>8</sup> The vivid paintings of shotgun houses by the African-American artist Dr. John Biggers (1924–2001) were the inspirational driving force for PRH. Rick Lowe initiated the project along with a group of local artists, pastors from churches and various residents, by staging twenty-four hour "Drive-By" exhibitions of paintings executed directly onto the boarded shotgun houses. What began as a temporary guerilla style art project is now a self-sustained not-for-profit organization. Currently, PRH organizes several programs including: exhibitions on a

rotating six-month basis, through an art residency program, an annual African American Festival, and after-school art programs that cater to local children. PRH also provides transitional housing and services for young mothers and their children through the Young Mothers Residential Program and implements strategies to set up barriers to stop real-estate developers from taking over Third Ward.<sup>9</sup> Ultimately, the Project Row Houses initiative has been more about activating a sense of community centered on various types of social interactions, and less about the creation of actual objects or structures to be consumed as aesthetic forms.

The 2005 *Water Water* video created by Navjot Altaf is a visually compelling narrative based on a series of site-specific *Nalpar* or water pumps projects. In 1997, Altaf began collaboration with three local Adivasi (indigenous and tribal communities) artists Rajkumar, Shantibai, Gessuram and the community of Kondagaon in the creation of water pump sites in Bastar villages, in Central India. Through a poetic and aesthetic rendering of sound and images, *Water Water* communicates the important role water plays in the residents' everyday lives. The accompanying interviews with local residents conducted by the artists make clear the existing

<sup>8</sup> See Project Row House's webpage: <http://www.projectrowhouses.org/history.htm>

<sup>9</sup> Ibid. "To preserve and protect the irreplaceable historic and cultural legacy of our community, PRH spawned a sister organization, the Row Houses Community Development Corporation. Together, we're expanding the original campus which now includes 13 units of low-income housing, two of which are long-term artists residencies and two commercial buildings, one of which houses the historic Eldorado Ballroom, an artist-initiated bike co-op, and an artist residency/gallery space."



Stills from *Water Water* (2005)  
Created by Navjot Altaf

crisis in Bastar around the shortage, waste and pollution of water.<sup>10</sup> The artists created sculptural elements that were not only meant to beautify but also to render the existing water pump sites multi-functional. Thus, the four artists designed elevated structures of specific heights for easier lifting of water-carrying pots<sup>11</sup> and drainage systems to reuse the run off water.<sup>12</sup> As the local municipality continues to neglect the maintenance of several water pump sites, the artists continue to work directly with local residents. In addition, they continue to navigate the constantly changing socio-political environment, being able to activate a sense of community through not only a communal sharing of responsibilities to keep the water pump sites clean, but also by transforming the sites into spaces for social interchange. To fund their projects and work in the Indian villages, the artists received three grants (in 1997, 1999, and 2001) from the India Foundation for the Arts. Under Altaf's initiative and supported entirely through sales of their own art works, the artists have also founded the center called Dialogue – Interactive Artists' Association as a way to bring awareness and continue dialog

on the social, political, economical and ecological issues addressed in their socially engaged art practice.

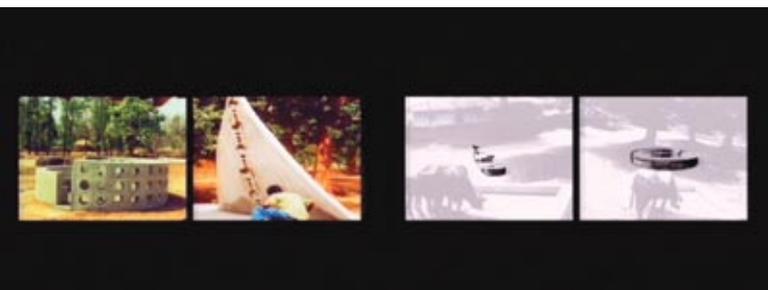
While the films *Water Water*, *Third Ward TX*, and *Park Fiction – Desires Will Leave the House and Take to the Streets* can function as aesthetic expressions, the screenings are primarily intended to serve as case studies and promote open discourse on socially-engaged art practice with particular focus on methods of collaboration and interaction.

In each of the featured projects, dialogic interaction and close collaboration with the local residents provided the artists with the medium for their artistic investigation. According to Kester “the process of dialogical interaction requires a reciprocal openness, a willingness to accept the transformative effects of difference on the part of both artist and his or her collaborators.” Instead of imposing an *a priori*-formulated concept, *Park Fiction*, *Project Row Houses*, and the Indian artists' guiding principle was first to listen and hear the thoughts and concerns of various local residents. While grounded within the community the artists' aesthetic manifestations were an integral part of their methodology.

10 Water is essential in local agriculture, health and hygiene, playing a role in folk tales, myths and religious rituals, and also in the education of young girls in the villages, who often have to walk miles each day to fetch water. See Navjot Altaf in *Groundworks: Environmental Collaboration in Contemporary Art*, Exhibition Catalogue, (Pittsburgh, PA: Regina Gouger Miller Gallery, Carnegie Mellon University, 2005), p. 113.

11 The proper lifting of the heavy water pots avoids weight on the bent leg before the pot is placed on the head, which in time causes damage to the spine. From *Audio Interviews* (2005) conducted by Navjot Altaf with community members and local artists in Kondagaon, Bastar, Central India.

12 Ibid. The saved water was used as drinking water for animals and for construction purposes. A proper drainage system also meant a clean site, with no muddy potholes that would attract mosquitoes and insects, which in turn would eliminate infections and diseases.



The relationships formed between artists and residents had transformative effects on both parties. The artists' works were greatly informed through dialogic interaction with the local community and a sense of community was also activated through the artists' interventions.

In addition, these artists were able to successfully fuse aesthetic and socio-political concerns, both through artistic representations and activation of discourse on locally significant complex political and social issues. For instance, each of these projects questioned the local government's role and continued lack of support in the lives of residents in poor neighborhoods.<sup>13</sup> In her 2006 article, *The Social Turn: Collaboration and Its Discontents*, Claire Bishop observes how serious criticism regarding socially-engaged art practice has been framed around ethical issues. She points out that while attention is given to how collaboration is undertaken and the dynamic and sustained relationships provide the project's markers of success, aesthetic considerations are entirely neglected.<sup>14</sup> The projects featured in these three films are an exception to Bishop's observation. They not only actively engage a specific group of residents in a particular geopolitical

area, aiming to ultimately improve their quality of life, but also have an intentional aesthetic value. As Christoph Schäfer of Park Fiction says: "Collaborating with others should not mean reducing yourself to a social worker. Nor should it mean reducing your artistic work to the administration of the creativity of others."<sup>15</sup>

If the absence of institutional involvement is partly the reason for the success (if we define success in terms of sustainability) of the projects discussed here, we may ask: How do art institutions evolve ways to engage in a sustained relationship with varied audiences and communities? What fundamental changes and restructuring are art institutions required to make in order to support artists working in a socially-engaged art practice? Such inquiries prompted the organization of a one-day colloquium at the University of South Florida on the general theme of *Art as a Catalyst for Social Transformation*. Conceived as a platform for questioning and debate focused on the multifaceted implications of socially-engaged art, the colloquium has been designed to address aesthetic considerations and implicit cross-disciplinary collaborations that such projects entail as they take form within the broader socio-political and economic contexts. Ultimately, participants have attempted to address the role of the artist and the contemporary art institution in formulating a sustained relationship within communities.

Izabel Galliera  
Assistant Curator, USF Institute for Research in Art

<sup>13</sup> For example, Navjot points out how the state plays a key role in the local crisis. For example, "the state government in Chattisgarh recently sold a part of the River Kelo to a private industrial firm. As a result, the local tribal community, which depends on this river for its survival, may be forced to migrate. It is essential that people become aware of their rights and responsibilities in this regard, so that they can protest the marketing if their water wealth." See *Groundworks*, p.113.

<sup>14</sup> Claire Bishop, "The Social Turn: Collaboration and Its Discontents," in *Artforum*, (February, 2006).

<sup>15</sup> See <http://www.parkfiction.org/2006/07/132.html>



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## About the Institute for Research in Art

The USF Institute for Research in Art is the umbrella organization for the *Contemporary Art Museum*, *Graphicstudio* and *Public Art* program. Part of the University of South Florida College of Visual & Performing Arts, the IRA is dedicated to an international artists' residency program that brings to the University and Tampa Bay community today's most accomplished and influential artists working in the international art arena. Exhibitions, collection development, publication of limited edition graphics and sculpture multiples, commissioned public art works, lectures, symposia, workshops and special events are designed to foster awareness about the role of contemporary artists in shaping our culture and society. Participating artists represent the full and diverse spectrum of contemporary art practice including, but not limited to, painting, sculpture, photography, electronic media, and performance.

The University of South Florida *Contemporary Art Museum* (USFCAM) organizes and presents significant and investigative exhibitions of contemporary art from Florida, the United States and around the world, including Africa, Europe, and Latin America. Changing exhibitions are designed to introduce students, faculty and the community to current cultural trends. USFCAM also publishes relevant catalogues, schedules critically important traveling exhibitions and underwrites new projects by artists emerging on the national and the international fronts. USFCAM maintains the university's art collection, comprised of more than 5,000 art works. There are exceptional holdings in graphics and sculpture multiples by internationally acclaimed artists.

*Graphicstudio*, founded in 1968 as a non-profit, university-based, collaborative art making facility, remains unique in its commitment to aesthetic and technical research in the visual arts. Leading contemporary artists are invited to work in *Graphicstudio*'s state-of-the-art studios in collaboration with expert artisans to create works on paper—including prints, photographs, digital images, books—and editions of sculptures in a variety of materials. In addition to its publishing program, *Graphicstudio* carries out a program of research and education including technical workshops, conferences, tours, lectures and publications.

The *Public Art* program at USF focuses on site responsive works, typically resulting in the creation of places, as opposed to objects. Most projects have been developed for the interjacent spaces between buildings, with footprints that result in plazas, gardens and courtyards. These projects serve as informal gathering spaces for the various academic neighborhoods of our campus.

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