

SlaveCity

Atelier Van Lieshout

Text: Rosa Lleó

A dystopia is a perverse utopia that normally refers to a fictitious society where the social tendencies are taken to apocalyptic extremes. It maintains a strong relation with the time and socio-political context in which it is conceived. We are used to contemporary dystopias focused on trans national capitalism with high degrees of technological sophistication but AVL's latest project, *SlaveCity* goes a step further and works in the line of our XXI century nostalgic and disenchanting spirit.

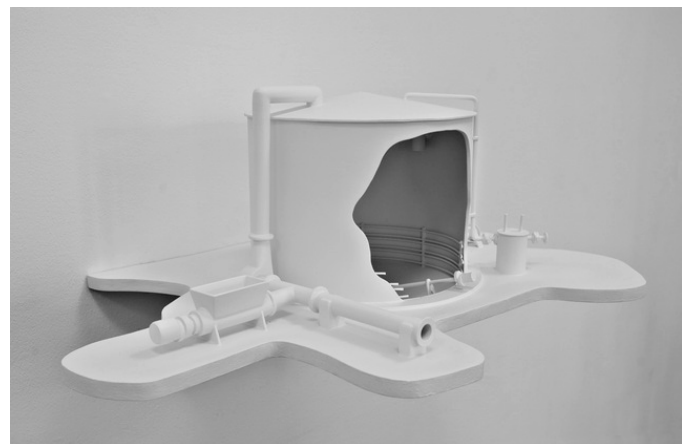
SlaveCity recuperates utopic literary models from the first half of the XX century that warned against the dangers of state socialism, general mediocrity, social control, evolution towards totalitarianism, and consumerism (George Orwell's *1984*, Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World*). Also formally it echoes examples from the 60s and 70s turned into cinema such as Ray Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451* and Pierre Boule's *The Planet of the Apes* with organic shapes and materials in design and architecture.

What would be the ideal of a contemporary society? *SlaveCity* just shows the hybrid reality we live in a late-capitalism present, in the most pragmatic way. The project is a carefully designed inventory of objects, plans and models and considers the two main worries of our late-capitalism governments: economic crisis and sustainability. In this sense, *SlaveCity* would be the most perverse but successful model to follow. A town of 200.000 habitants will have a seven billion euro net profit per year, and the most important, completely sustainable and energy saving. That could only be done by clever and young people, strictly selected at the *Welcoming Centre*. The rest will be eliminated, and of course, re-used. Old, ugly, sick and bad tasting people will be recycled in the biogas digester. Healthy, not so clever people will be recycled in the meat-processing factory. Young and very healthy people will be able to take part in the organ transplant program.

There are head studies, crockery, maps and sculptures that reveal a perverse enthusiasm and humanistic spirit, mocking any utopic modernist tradition from the Bauhaus or De Stijl, where art, industrial design and architecture were looking for harmonic shapes that had to be realistic. At the same time, the project goes beyond contemporary works of designers-artists proud of accomplishing the modernist idea of the functional becoming 'Art'. Following that, important buildings such as Universities and High-Class Brothels will be complicated architectural models, whereas modular brothels will mix 'the style of Bauhaus, a Socialist Plattenbau and a ramshackle wood construction'.

On Marcel Duchamp's *Big Glass*, there is a perfect mechanism for a surreal machine that omits for nothing. We know that the attempt to mechanise love and sex will always become a failure, even though a perfect running mechanism has been created for it. The same happens with pseudo-scientific artistic project such as Bill Burn's *Safety Gear For Small Animals*, in which he creates a whole range of clothing and mechanisms to protect birds against any sort of danger. They turn upside down the notions of utility in design and engineering. Although carefully designed to be pragmatic and successful, the system is false and becomes a complete failure. Its success exists as a critical concept, showing the contradictions of our society as far as its aim to get to perfection and progress is concerned.

Copy editing: Dimitra Arvaniti



Atelier Van Lieshout, *Biogas*, 2006, courtesy the artists.

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