

Emily Marston

first iteration of proposal :

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1. OVERVIEW

Bear Garden

Bear Garden is a photographic installation that depicts the Stanley Park Polar Bear Pit as a ruin. In the framework of a ruin, abandoned space is transformed into glorified absence. For this project, a photograph of the empty pit illuminated by visible stage lights will be displayed in a lightbox on one of the elevated platforms in the pit itself. By calling attention to the monumental quality of the concrete modernist architecture, as well as locating the viewer in a meta-critique of the spectacular form, the project will simply re-present the site in a framework for interrogation.

2. RESEARCH AND PROCESS

Initially for this project, I was interested in Vancouver's lack of monumentalized ruins as a city with such a short history, as well as the seemingly constant deconstruction/ reconstruction of its buildings and landscape. This interest lead to readings about ruins such as their creation, how they have been constructed both physically and culturally, and what they signify in a contemporary context. This research was influenced by parallel research into monuments such as how they are rectified and used as means of memorializing and glorifying particular histories. The following quotation from Brian Dillon's *Ruins* (p.12-18) was a point of departure for how I approached the concept of a *ruin* in a critical contemporary context:

"Ruins embody a set of temporal and historical paradoxes. The ruined building is a remnant of, and portal into, the past; its decay is a concrete reminder of the passage of time. And yet by definition it survives, after a fashion: there must be a certain (perhaps indeterminate) amount of a built structure still standing for us to refer to it as a ruin and not merely as a heap of rubble. At the same time, the ruin casts us forward in time; it predicts a future in which our present will slump into similar disrepair or fall victim to some unforeseeable calamity. The ruin, despite its state of decay, somehow outlives us. And the cultural gaze that we turn on ruins is a way of loosening ourselves from the grip of punctual chronologies, setting ourselves adrift in time. Ruins are part of the long history of the fragment, but the ruin is a fragment with a future; it will live on after us despite the fact that it reminds us too of a lost wholeness or perfection."

The ruin and the monument however, with their status and glory, also lead to the "risk" of "fall[ing] into mere sentiment or nostalgia" (Dillon, *Ruin Lust* 4). These characteristics of the ruin are what I will be addressing in this work.

The site of this installation, the Stanley Park Polar Bear Pit, was built in 1962 and functioned as an enclosure for polar bears for 34 years as part of the Stanley Park Zoo. Similar to the city of Vancouver, this architectural establishment has had a short history, now existing as a strange site that reads as both permanent and abandoned. The cold, modernist, and materially enduring nature of the concrete pit

remains a fixture in the park between the aquarium and Lord Stanley, while the enclosure's natural surroundings have slowly found their way in, pointing towards an inevitable restoration of the space from its initial spectacular function. References used in order to develop the formal and conceptual aspects of this piece include Thomas Cole's *The Course of Empire* (1863) series (fig.1), Jeff Wall's *Picture for Women* (1979) (fig.2) in conjunction with Édouard Manet's *A Bar at the Folies-Bergère* (1882) (fig.3), Candida Höfer's study of zoo enclosures, such as *Zoologischer Garten Washington D.C. IV* (1992) (fig.4), Kevin Schmidt's *Fog* (2004) (fig.5), Lynne Marsh's *Planterwald* (2010) (fig.6), and the Yugoslavian monuments that were commissioned by president Josip Broz Tito during the 1960-70s to commemorate sites of action during World War II, such as battles or concentration camps (fig.7) (Crack Two).



Figure 1. Thomas Cole, *The Course of Empire: Desolation*, 1836

One of five paintings from Thomas Cole's canonical *Course of the Empire* series, this particular painting witnesses a state of *Desolation* (fig.1) after the previous two states of *Consummation* and *Destruction*, and preceding the last two states of *Savage* and *Pastoral*. This painting functions as a classic example of a glorified rendition of a ruinous state. The abandoned architecture becomes monumental with purposeful formations of light and space.

The following two artworks (fig.2 and fig.3) have been placed in a conversation that questions the presence of medium as well as the spectator's gaze. In reference Édouard Manet's canonical painting *A Bar at the Folies-Bergère* (1882) (fig.4), Vancouver-based photo-conceptual photographer Jeff Wall recreates a similar image and makes visible the medium as well as the presence of the male gaze.



Figure 2. Jeff Wall, *Picture for Women*, 1979



Figure 3. Édouard Manet, *A Bar at the Folies-Bergère*, 1882



Figure 4. Candida Höfer, *Zoologischer Garten Washington D.C. IV*, 1992



Figure 5. Kevin Schmidt, *Fog*, 2004



Figure 6. Lynne Marsh, *Planterwald*, 2010



Figure 7. Example of a Petrova Gora Monument, Yugoslavia

3. CONCEPT

This project will be comprised of a lightbox image of the Polar Bear Pit that will be placed inside of the enclosure itself on one of the many concrete platforms intended for the bears. The photograph will be taken in the pit and displayed in the polar bear pit during the opening and duration of Landmarks 2017, June 10-25. The large-scale (5 ft wide x 4 ft high) coloured inkjet print will be displayed in a lightbox, which will then be set on the right section of the polar bear pit (fig.11). This right section of the space not only has larger flat platforms for more convenient

installation, it would have also been host to more stagnant activities on behalf of the polar bears (in contrast to the left side which contained the pool, diving board, and small bridges where the bears could remain somewhat active).

Similar to projects such as Jeff Wall's *Picture for Women* (1979) (fig.2) where there exists a critical lens towards the medium itself by revealing the medium, this project will extend to include extravagant stage props like large studio lights and potentially a fog machine, in order to simultaneously frame the space as a historical ruin and monument, as well as to critique this spectacular form of glorifying the passing of time. This project does not aim to change the Polar Bear Pit in any way, only to re-present the site in a new framework for interrogation: the framework of a ruin. As a public artwork, the lightbox image will call attention to the already existing space and work as a meta-critique.

The title of the work, *Bear Garden*, makes reference to the 16th century English venue where bear-baiting and other violent sports were practiced as public entertainment. *Bear garden* eventually became a term associated with general instances of violent disorder. Yet, in the context of the pit's 1960s West Coast Style architecture, *garden* also becomes a play on the movement's hallmark: the framing of nature as an object of spectacle.

SKETCHES, DRAWINGS, PHOTOMONTAGES, AND IMAGES:



Figure 8. Heather Pawsey (*Opera*) and Kathryn Cernauskas (*Flute*), (September 2012). **(Example of previous artwork in the Polar Bear Pit)**



Figure 9. Shirley Wiebe, *Hibernators*, (2010).
(Example of previous artwork in the Polar Bear Pit)



Figure 10. Left Section of the Polar Bear Pit.



Figure 11. Right Section of the Polar Bear Pit.

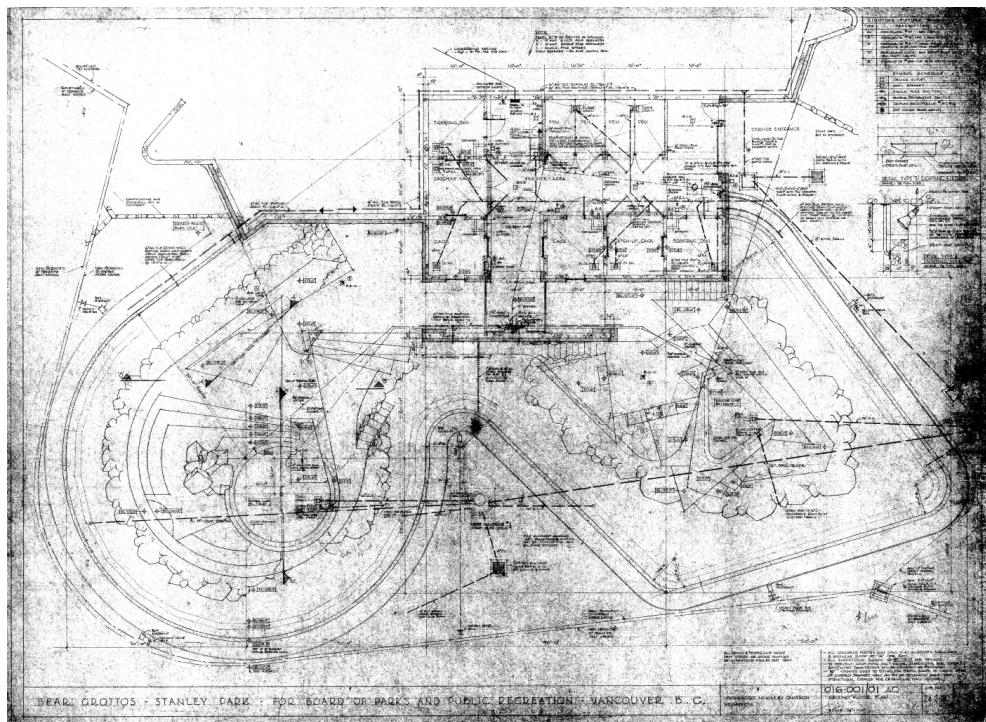


Figure 11. The pit was designed by the architecture firm *Underwood McKinley and Cameron*, which later became *Underwood McKinley Wilson Smith*.



Figure 12. Sketch of the photograph that would be placed in the lightbox.

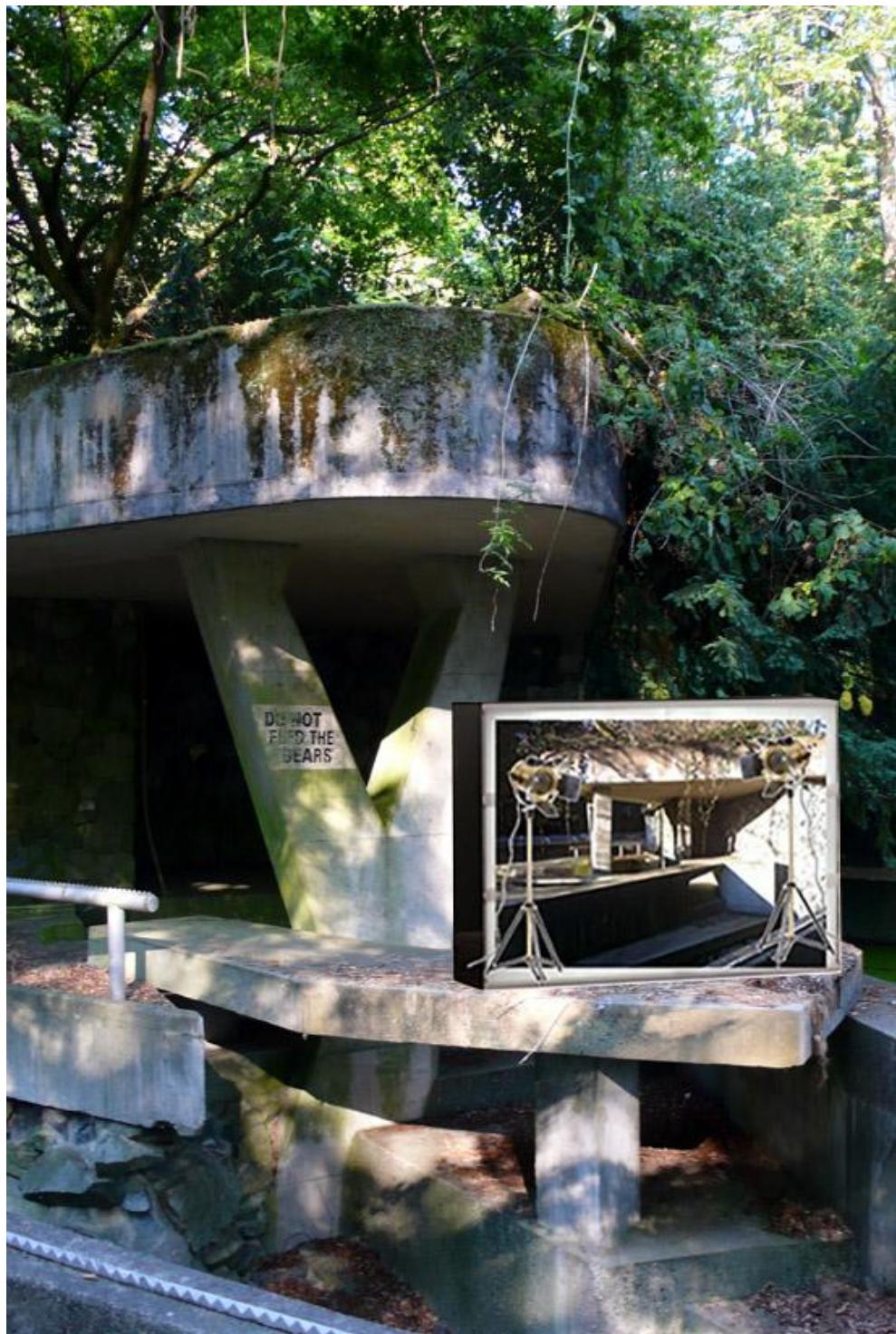


Figure 12. Digital mock-up of the lightbox image placed inside of the Polar Bear Pit

4. CONTEXT

My first entry point into the formal/conceptual aspects of this project were the many historical paintings of ancient ruins by artists such as Thomas Cole and Giovanni Paolo Panini. The way that Thomas Cole's landscape and history paintings depict sublime and spectacular aspects of nature are used as reference for the formal elements of the piece. I am interested in recreating the dramatic and theatrical lighting found in his paintings of ruins by placing stage lights in and around the polar bear pit. The stage lighting will function in two ways, first to emphasize the spectacular nature of the pit's architecture, and second to frame the pit as an historical monument on par with those of ancient ruins (like those painted by Cole in the 1800s).

Moving from painting into the realm of photography, we have looked to the work of Jeff Wall as a formal and conceptual entry point into how the photographic image can bring the past into the present moment. For example, in *Picture for Women* (1979), Wall references Édouard Manet's *A Bar at the Folies-Bergère* (1882) by formally suggesting a recreation of the image, while also revealing the medium with the presence of the camera. I will employ this same strategy that relies on both mimicry and the deconstruction of a spectacular lens.

In another aspect of our research, we have looked to photographic projects such as Candida Höfer's *Zoologischer Garten* (1991) and Lynne Marsh's *Planterwald* (2010). Both of these projects call attention to sites that have been used for the consumption of spectacle. In Höfer's, she takes photographs in zoos but focuses on the architecture of the space instead of the animals themselves. In Marsh's project, she addresses a site that has already been abandoned (an amusement park) by photographing it as to capture its ominous qualities in its current ruinous state.

Our project seeks to bring attention to the Stanley Park Polar Bear Pit in its existing state by framing it as a ruin. This reframing of the site will attempt to bring awareness not only to the site's past as an architectural space for the consumption of a spectacle, it will also bring attention to it as a site that is steeped with value for the future. As a site-specific installation, our audience will inherently be whomever is passing by, however the conceptual direction of this proposed project will hopefully guide us to an audience that is interested in Vancouver's short history of displacement and replacement, as well as possibilities for its future both near and far.

7. REFERENCES

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Heather Pawsey (Opera) and Kathryn Cernauskas (Flute) performing on our day of experimentation in September 2012. Digital image. Kristina Lemieux. Kristina Lemieux, 26 Oct. 2012. Web. 1 Apr. 2017.<<http://kristinalemieux.com/30/>>.

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