

Renée Green

Modern empires have strategically used the power of exhibitions to stage representations of a regime as cultural experience. In museums and exposition halls, such exhibitions function as loci for reproducing sanctioned narratives and consent: The empire's imperative is to control symbols and contain interpretation, to seek totality through enclosure and instrumentalization. At the extreme, political exhibitions are engineered experiences that materialize emotion by bolstering valorizing myths and collapsing historicity. Art, artifacts, archival material, and historical mise-en-scènes are summarily put to work in defining master narratives.

The art practice of Renée Green counters such foreclosure of history and representation by presenting heuristic zones that open potentialities at the intersection of culture, discourse, and institution. Extending the critical project of Conceptual art in the radical reconfiguration of art's materiality and the interrogation of institutional authority, Green proposes rigorously decentered sites of exchange involving language in relation to visual forms.

In the context of an exhibition, Green's work seeks to establish a subjective space that is a part of its surroundings in both autonomous and constitutive senses. For Documenta 11, she presented *Standardized Octagonal Units for Imagined and Existing Systems (S.O.U.s)*, 2002, which consisted of eight freestanding octagonal structures, varying in content and design, that were situated throughout the grounds of the Auepark in Kassel. Each open unit contained seating and sound elements, creating a perceptual experience for the viewer that was simultaneously empirical and evocative of imaginary places. According to Green, the units exist "as quasi-autonomous zones, affected by existing in the environment into which they are placed, yet they offer separate frames for perception, actual and metaphorical."¹

In the same way, Green's "Space Poem" series—consisting of graphical text banners suspended from a ceiling—engages the site and conditions of the exhibition as a reality to be exceeded. Fragments of evocative words, names, poems, tags, and images on the banners function as meta-references to be activated by the viewer/reader—a sort of hyperlink to other possible identifications, histories, and existences. Green eschews the banner as a proclamatory medium; instead, she treats it as a matrix for interpretation and access to information and the imaginary.

As a salient inversion of this open scenario, the "*Mostra della rivoluzione fascista*" (Exhibition of the Fascist Revolution), mounted in 1932 at the Palazzo delle Esposizioni (the same venue as "Empire State"), demonstrated the subsumption of history, representation, and artistic production under Benito Mussolini's regime in a celebratory display of total cultural synthesis.² Today, under the hegemony of global capitalism, strains of this totalizing imperative persist in the representational power of the exhibition. As Green states, it is important to "observe many links between things, and perceive the enormity and the complexity possible, which disavows conveying any one idea in isolation."³

— Howie Chen

1 Renée Green, "Notes on Documenta 11," *Texte zur Kunst*, September 2002, http://backissues.textezurkunst.de/NR47/tzk47_green2.htm.

2 The Fascist exhibition expropriated various works by the European avant-garde to complete its own narrative of modernist progress and revolution. Interestingly, this inversion of modernism was celebrated by poet Ezra Pound, who was inspired by the "Exhibition of the Fascist Revolution" and, similarly, instrumentalized poetry toward totalitarian synthesis, in contrast with his early work.

3 Renée Green, *Renée Green: Ongoing Becomings Retrospective 1989–2009* (Zurich: JRP|Ringier, 2009), 77.

Empire State

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