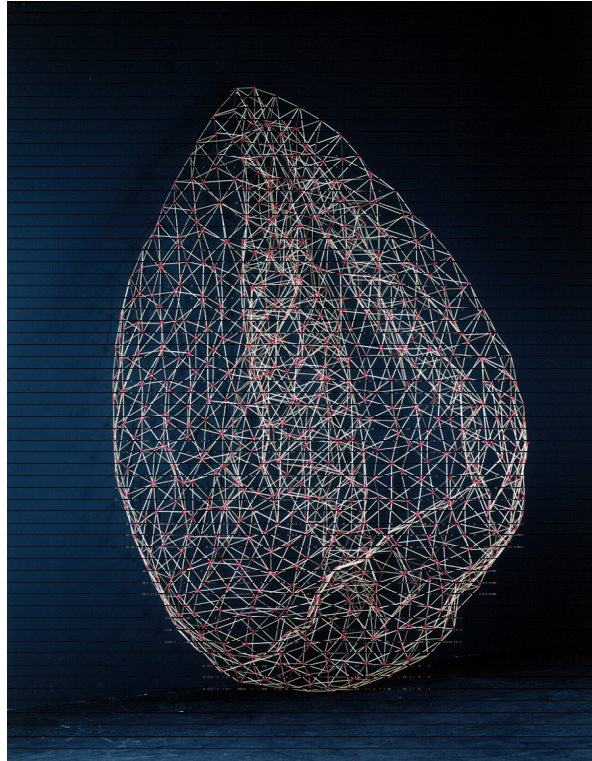


Tobias Putrih

In the Anderson Collection



Tobias Putrih

Quasi-Random #2: A Study on Fuller's Cloud-Nine Project, 2003

Wood and rubber

28" x 48" x 24"

The fragility of the utopian model emerges at the point where it meets reality and can easily disintegrate or degrade in a simulacrum... To rethink utopia means to push a media back in the territory of the intimacy to make it transparent and to present it as pure personal phantasm.¹

According to artist Tobias Putrih, his method of using everyday materials for his projects was a product of circumstance. In his native Slovenia, Putrih recognized the absence of a clearly defined art market. Without that infrastructure in place, he could not hope to find the support necessary for the kind of artistic production filtering in from neighboring Italy and Austria. Since such traditional artistic practices as oil painting or bronze casting would have required unavailable resources, Putrih took another tack. He decided to use inexpensive materials like cardboard and wood, recyclables that wouldn't require a major investment, to investigate the

¹ Interview with the artist provided by Max Protetch Gallery, Anderson Collection Archives.

very nature of an art object made outside the western tradition of the grand art object.² Two characteristic examples are on display here at the Anderson Collection, along with a complementary drawing that demonstrates the artist's sustained interest in geometrical construction.

The importance of materiality comes to the fore in works like *Substructure/L1* (2004). The surprising range of physical properties found in a resource as common as corrugated cardboard presents an unexpectedly wide range of visual experiences. At first the stack of cardboard planes looms large, a twisted monumental tower elevated on a pedestal, its undulating form on display for all to see. The rippling brown edges suggest an organic association as well, like an erratic rock formation laced with cavernous openings. In streaming light, however, that blocky mass dissolves into air, and what seemed an imposingly solid crag appears nearly transparent instead.

By revealing the dual material nature of the cardboard, Putrih has called into question the fixity of our notion of the art object, suggesting it might not be as solid as we assume. He also demonstrates his commitment to the idealist ambition described in the epigraph, as he literally pushes his medium to transparency. For Putrih this phantasmatic quality allows for an intimacy with the object. With that connection, he hopes to generate a new kind of utopian framework rooted in material operations, like the hand-cutting he performed on the cardboard in this piece.

Putrih also explores the relationship between art, structure, and society in *Quasi-Random #2: A Study on Fuller's Cloud Nine Project* (2003), one of several projects that takes up the fields of science and design. Here he builds on R. Buckminster Fuller's utopian vision, in which the tetrahedron, the most stable polyhedron in terms of tensile strength, serves as the building block for the geodesic dome, the crown jewel of Fuller's plan to make society more egalitarian. He imagined a world full of domed cities, which would allow for more comfortable and affordable living for all due to the increased livable space and energy efficiency within each enclosure. In the Cloud Nine Project, perhaps his most fanciful idea, Fuller imagined domes so large that the heat generated within would be sufficient to lift the entire megalopolis into the air.

In his construction made with toothpicks and rubber joints, Putrih offers his own variation on Fuller's plan. By using a flexible substance where the structure most needs rigidity, he has created a sagging, collapsible form with none of Fuller's lofty potential. Furthermore, the triangular voids subvert the proposed social betterment of the original project by exposing the enclosed space to outside elements. With these material reversals, *Quasi-Random #2* suggests the potential for even great ideas to deflate when they encounter reality, despite the reverence of their adherents.

Heather Green
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² All background information from artist interview with Brett Littman:
www.wps1.org/include/shows/material_culture.html.