

Chris Foster – Frontiers in Real Estate

Frontiers in Real Estate is the latest offering from Halifax-based artist, Chris Foster. His work is informed by a nostalgic interest in 1970s-era do-it-yourself aesthetics combined with a deep-seated anxiety about the future. We are frequently inundated with news reports detailing threats of nuclear war, economic collapse, effects of climate change, widespread disease, and other forms of impending doom; Foster's works function as wry suggestions for how a new generation of concerned, determined survivalists will persevere through these crises. This new series of miniature mobile homes and prints of covert watchtower dwellings suggest that the future of domestic space may look a lot like the past. The sculpture works are comprised of meticulously-constructed miniature houses built atop plastic model vehicles. They propose the necessary means for escape while maintaining a comfortable homelike environment. These sculptures make reference to "rolling/freewheeling homes" custom-built in the 1970s by capable hippies. The original rolling homes of the '70s simultaneously provided refuge and freedom, an effectual paradox on wheels, for those wishing to reject the established system of buying deeds to land in order to build property. The architectural details of Foster's rolling homes are referential of the heritage-style wood shingling and embellishments common to houses in Eastern Canada. By no means are these slick, modern or aerodynamic units of escape, nor are they entirely ramshackle or makeshift. Instead, they suggest a culture of re-use, salvaging wood and car parts to conceivably establish a dream home on wheels.

The accompanying prints illustrate an altogether different style of dream home. High above the ground, perched atop telecommunication towers, are multi-storied wood cabins, depicted in a style influenced by traditional engravings of romanticized landscapes. Like treehouses for adults, equipped for everyday living, these structures would allow inhabitants a pan-optic view of the surrounding land for as far as the eye can see. One can imagine a spectacular view of the expansive forest top. But these domestic dwellings serve another more important duty as watchtowers; from our perspective, the buildings are hardly noticeable, yet occupants can quickly discern an incoming threat from miles away. Of course, with current advances in digital surveillance, geo-locating and cell phone tracking, telecommunication towers already function as modern-day watchtowers.

Throughout his art practice it is clear that Chris Foster has become deeply concerned about the future and how to live in it. A few past projects with regard to this topic include: *Progress* (2008), drawings about entrapment domestic scenarios; *Vehicles of Tomorrow* (2009), drawings of invented vehicles for a post-car world; and *New Civilizations* (2012), a book of collages depicting post-apocalyptic community-building scenarios. *Frontiers in Real Estate* continues this investigation of the future of residential spaces, and seems to put forward the option of dropping out of society entirely, being perpetually in transit or in isolation. These frontiers may indeed be final ones.

– Kate Walchuk, 2012