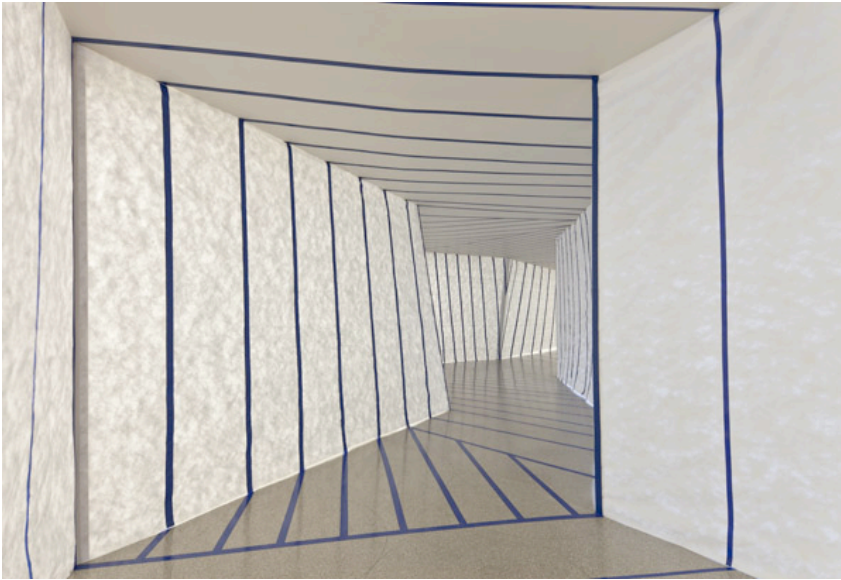


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ARTSEEN

NICOLA LÓPEZ: *Landscape X: Under Construction*
by Noah Dillon



Landscape X: Under Construction (2011). Installation Views, Mixed Media, Dimensions Variable. Courtesy of Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum; photos David Heald.

In a recent interview with the *New Yorker*, Italian artist and architect Matteo Pericoli explained his adoration for New York’s fluctuating skyline. The shape of Manhattan, said Pericoli, “is not a fixed thing. [Whereas] in Italy the idea is that a city’s either finished or it’s ruined.” As I understand Pericoli, New York is less a city than an ongoing collaboration. That exchange is often a kind of beneficent imposition. For instance, we pay a tiny amount for the enormous subway and bus network—but if a train isn’t running you’ll just have to wait.

As part of the *Intervals* series at the Guggenheim, Nicola López’s *Landscape X: Under Construction* (2011) re-imagines the cityscape’s collaborative dynamism while Maurizio Cattelan’s upcoming retrospective is installed. Cattelan’s show is manufactured in secret, behind papery walls erected for López’s project, the sounds of labor penetrating through scrim. Their hidden source remains mysterious; clattering, hammering, saws,

and welding create a teeming environment. With Cattelan's crew in the building, *Landscape X* becomes a work that articulates its own production.

The installation runs up three ramps of the museum's rotunda—a world under development. Like the Passage de l'Opéra of Louis Aragon's *Paris Peasant* (1926), with intoxicating window displays, shortcuts, bookshops, and cafés, López's work is a neat model of the city. On Paris streets, Aragon was shocked into consciousness by radical encounters with unexpected phenomena. As cultural centers, the modern arcades thronged with crowds, attractions, seduction, and revelation. López offers awareness, too, through disorientation.

Moving through the space is also movement through time, through the process of building. Like the Passage de l'Opéra, *Landscape X* condenses great swathes of contemporary life into a single boulevard. The installation uses a series of themed spaces to connect the various galleries currently open to the public. Each zone is occupied by structures composed from tape, plastic, prints on vellum, paper, or Mylar—imitations of typical construction site ephemera. They are layered upon one another or compiled to create imposing structures from thin sheets. Each section is distinct: one of orange materials, others in silver or grayscale, and two in blue, with transitions that can be gradual or sharp. López uses plywood for her printing plates and traces of wood grain remain as texture, making congruous but unexpected material collisions.

People may skip around the show with elevators or stairs. I followed the installation's route, going to the second floor and then cruising along a collage of spidery white-on-white roadways running across the walls and ceilings. Those arteries darken and overlap and congeal into a metropolis, illuminated by strings of small lights in yellow or pale grayish orange.

At the city's outskirts is an ominous arch of damaged "fence." There is a sense of trespass in moving through that unmanageable hole; I feel I'm breaking and entering. Bright, spinning lamps force pedestrians to be alert as they move into a border zone of

paper chainlink and razor wire. An oculus overlooks one of Cattelan's workshops, where fabricators cut steel, manufacture armatures, and assemble sculptures for display.

A fiery glow emanates at left: halogen lamps glare from the floor. Behind them, an orange canopy of net-like danger fencing drapes from the ceiling. Some of the fence material is real and plastic; some of it is simulated with prints. Bare light bulbs strung about cast shadows on the white walls. The fences direct us to weave through a dense, monochromatic jungle. Soon, the fencing mutates into sparse clumps of silvery honeycomb hung in corners and on walls. White lamps snake from white cords.

When that dreamscape ends, an eerie tunnel of dilapidated chainlink binds me back to some reality. It rises 10 feet from floor to ceiling with imposing pewter-colored grids. The printed curtain sometimes reveals the curious spaces beyond. I felt an electric current channeling our bodies from overhead: daisy chained yellow cables punctuated by light bulbs.

Where the chainlink ends the roadways return, now closer, as yellow, white, and gray road stripes of vinyl tape. The path opens abruptly to pocketed walls and a barricaded gallery. Roads sweep along the floor; construction materials are drawn across walls and ceilings. An avenue of black dashes floods up the ramp and then turns blue. It runs up a wall, receding in bands down another Tyvek tunnel. The architecture is closed and distorted with zazy stripes that spiral at hard angles. I'm pressed off balance. The alley's form is increasingly unclear. How much room remains between the wall and my body? Does the floor still tilt upward? Is everything shrinking?

The ramp opens dramatically to bright, flat walls and blue lines zipping down every vertex. Masking tape reiterates the building as if it were a living blueprint. The section calls attention to quirks in the museum's construction and upkeep. Edges waver. Drips of paint bulge and crease, exaggerated from years of retouching. I can pinpoint the angle at which walls and ceiling intersect. The program raises questions: what is the purpose of the sloped skirts at the bottom of each wall? Why is the ramp parceled into

bays? Is this what Frank Lloyd Wright imagined for his design after 50 years?

Aragon writes that Paris's avenues and arcades, passages where people gather or disperse,

collide with a singular kind of kiss whose cumulative effect on the vast body of [the public] is quite unpredictable. It seems quite possible, though, that a good part of the human river which carries incredible floods of dreamers and dawdlers ... may divert itself through this new channel, and thus modify the ways of thought of a whole district, perhaps of a whole world.

López's *Landscape* is a somatic channel, reorienting the thoughts of strolling visitors to this place and consciously establishing them within its architecture.

López persuades us to re-examine the place where we walk and live. We see, as a car or a plane or as a newly aware person, how we might create and live in a city. Walter Benjamin, in his essay "On Some Motifs in Baudelaire," identified the psychic shock of newness as a pre-eminent experience of modern urban life. Physical and mental disorientation contains rich, visceral experience. *Landscape X* brings disruption from street to institution and the shocking transitions along the ramp awaken keen haptic awareness of the installation and the pedestrian world.

Downtown at Zuccotti Park, the students, artists, activists, and unions of Occupy Wall Street have gathered to reconstruct their nation's physical and political space. They were galvanized, in part, when some young women were pepper-sprayed after being penned in by police with orange danger fencing, construction materials turned into weapons. *Landscape X*, with its floating barricades, coincides with a crucial moment that demands new ways of inhabiting location and the expropriation of materials for use by what are being called "the 99 percent." Today I saw an occupier being arrested at a branch of Citibank, one of the Guggenheim's corporate sponsors. She was closing out her account as protest against corporate malfeasance. *Landscape X* insists that we rebuild such institutions afresh, and, appropriating Aragon, "thus modify the ways of thought of a whole district, perhaps of a whole world."

[Nicola Lopez: Landscape X Under Construction](#)
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