



Frances Stark: *My Best Thing*, 2011, film, approx. 1½ hours; at MoMA PS1.

tempo, phrases appear, such as "Harder," "Mmmm" and "Ready when you are my princess." Predictable verbal foreplay (cobbled together from nine different Skype conversations between Stark and various men from all over the globe) sometimes evolves into slightly more serious discussions touching on relationships and career choices. The unexpected turn from canned erotic catchwords to awkwardly personal intimations speaks volumes about the difference between immediate physical gratification and real intimacy.

Stark explores this fine line further in *Nothing is Enough* (2012, 14 minutes), a video projection of text from a Skype conversation with an Italian architect accompanied by a moody improvised piano piece played by another man she met online. Stark paid the amateur pianist for the use of his music, thus legitimizing her sex-chat-room forays as artistic output—to a degree. She and the architect attempt to come to terms with the self-loathing that attends their self-abuse: the architect laments at one point that in Italy there is the "pale shadow of the church," and Stark acknowledges that their activity "feels equally bad and equally good." It's worth noting that the seats provided to watch this piece were church pews.

Presenting imagery as well as text, *My Best Thing* (2011), shown at PS1, is a masterful narrative investigation of a wide range of issues, including the value of cultural production, emotional connections with virtual strangers and artistic control. "I think that from sexual attraction there can be born an idea," one character says, and the video is clearly the spawn of this particu-

lar and peculiar union. In the piece, Stark portrays herself and two separate online lovers as animated Playmobil avatars with automated computer voices—the Italian-accented voice is outright hilarious. She is candid about her inability to separate sex, affection and work. One astute lover nails her self-aggrandizing modus operandi with uncanny accuracy: "So your fantasy is that you'll somehow be a master to a lost soul?" he asks.

Stark hammers home the metanarrative with a clip from Fellini's *8½*, during which a director, played by Marcello Mastroianni, dreams that he shoots himself after being hounded by the press. The message is clear: the pressure to perform, whether as an artist or a lover, can take a significant toll.

—Claire Barliant

## "WHERE DO WE MIGRATE TO?" SHEILA C. JOHNSON DESIGN CENTER

Elevating transience to the status of universal, this touring exhibition, curated by Niels Van Tomme and organized by the Center for Art, Design and Visual Culture at the University of Maryland, Baltimore County, presented work from an international array of artists and art groups variously concerned with the problem of migration.

Anchoring the exhibition were two large video projections offering synoptic takes on the migrant experience. Kim-sooja's *A Needle Woman—Paris* documents a 2009 performance undertaken on a crowded Parisian sidewalk. Em-

bodiment cultural disjunction, the video depicts the Korean-born artist standing statuesque, her back to the viewer, as a stream of predominantly European faces sweeps past her.

In Julika Rudelius's *Adrift* (2007), mid-range and close-up shots capture a racially diverse group of men and women asleep in plastic chairs. The continuous jostling of the sleepers' bodies suggests transit, but they appear to be seated in an ordinary institutional setting. For the figures in Rudelius's video, as for many real world émigrés, the migratory journey begins and ends in the waiting room.

Unsurprisingly, a number of works deal explicitly with the theme of geopolitical boundaries. In Blane de St. Croix's *Landscape Sections: Borders: North Korea/South Korea* (2007-10) and *United States/Mexico* (2010), areas of the two eponymous borderlands are meticulously re-created out of model-railroad-scale components and displayed on large rocklike pedestals. Seeing the border fences of the two regions reduced to a tiny ribbon of hand-cut mesh wire, one is reminded that the actual boundaries separating North from South, "us" from "them," are themselves mere constructs.

Nicole Franchy's video *Ruricancho* (2009) presents viewers with digitized aerial views of San Juan de Lurigancho, a region of the artist's native Peru that has undergone surging population growth in recent years. As an ominous soundtrack plays through headphones, a superimposed animation traces the perimeters of individual plots of land. At the





Xavier Simmons: *Superunknown (Alive In The)*, 2010, 42 C-prints on Sintra with brace, each 20 by 30 inches; in "Where Do We Migrate To?" at the Sheila C. Johnson Design Center.

Lebbeus Woods: *Centricity*, 1987, pencil on paper, 24 by 23 inches; at Friedman Benda.



video's conclusion, the landscape fades, leaving only the outlined borders—the map has replaced the terrain.

Many of the exhibition's artworks benefited from the dialogues opened by their placement within the gallery. Adrian Piper's *Everything #4* (2004) is a memento mori in the form of a mirror engraved with the words "Everything will be taken away." The poignancy of this simple statement was augmented as one caught sight of the work of Xavier Simmons reflected from the facing wall. Simmons's *Superunknown (Alive In The)*, 2010, is a grid of 42 photographic prints depicting makeshift seafaring vessels perilously overcrowded with migrant passengers, many of whom, one suspects, had nothing left to lose.

Intelligent curatorial decisions transformed what might have been a straightforward thematic survey into a thought-provoking examination of the discontinuities that persist in our steadily globalizing world. A neon sign in Arabic (*Foreigners Everywhere*, 2005) by the French collective Claire Fontaine was hung street-facing in the gallery's ceiling-to-floor window, and a soundtrack of bustling traffic by New Delhi-based Raqs Media Collective was piped throughout the space. The suggestion was that the boundaries between inside and outside had collapsed: an optimistic gesture honoring those who seek to defy their sociogeographic fate.

[The exhibition travels to the Contemporary Arts Center, New Orleans, June 30–Oct. 7, and the Rubin Center for the Visual Arts, El Paso, dates TBA.]

—David Markus

## LEBBEUS WOODS FRIEDMAN BENDA

Imagine, snaking through Berlin's subway tunnels during the Cold War era, bulbous pods filled with scientists. The pods burst out of the city's center, eventually tethering themselves to the Eiffel Tower. The American architect Lebbeus Woods envisioned these scenes in several inter-related sets of drawings made shortly before the Wall came down.

The examples selected for this recent show remind us not only of Woods's skills as an illustrator of mythic realms but also of his influence on generations of architects. Just around the corner from the gallery, for example, stands Neil Denari's new 23rd Street apartment building, folding and twisting over the High Line like a concrete embodiment of Woods's vision.

During the 1970s and 1980s, while employed by Kevin Roche John Dinkeloo and Associates in New Haven, Conn., Woods helped to design buildings like the Ford Foundation in Manhattan. He then became one of New York's most successful illustrators, using his Prismacolor pyrotechnics to sell postmodern skyscrapers to developers and the public. In the mid-'80s, when he became a professor at Cooper Union, he began drawing buildings that would exist only in his mind. This puts him in a historical lineage, as gallery press materials point out, with Leonardo, Piranesi, Étienne-Louis Boullée and the Swiss Surrealist H.R. Giger; it also links him with the Italian Futurist Antonio Sant'Elia, Britain's 1960s Archigram group and various 1970–80s "paper architects" who created fantasies never intended to be built.

Woods's drawings evolved into the series "A-City" (1986–87) and "Centricity" (1987–88), depictions of a world that, in keeping with the Deconstructivist thinking of the time, was more dystopian than utopian. The basic elements were what appeared to be inhabited ruins of refineries, bulging towers covered with steel plates, and a landscape of shifting planes that swirl up into gang-planks and gestural lines.

The architect's most elaborate and finely drawn series, "Underground Berlin" (1987) and "Aerial Paris" (1988), culminated in the pictures of half-destroyed, half-metastasizing buildings in "Architecture and War" (1990–92), produced after he visited war-torn Zagreb. Woods signed many of the images retroactively, and most contain his scribbles, which at first appear to explain the drawings but are actually unintelligible. The exhibition contained some surprises, such as black-and-white drawings from the "Region M" series (1984), showing Victorian-clad gentlemen moving through a landscape of crumbling towers rife with heavily bolted equipment, tubes and protuberances. These images may have helped inspire Steampunk art, which features 19th-century styles and technology thrust into an alternative future.

This exhibition—marked by delight in representation, myth and elaborated form—was also a reminder of what came next: Deconstructivism's pulling apart of such images to reveal their internal contradictions and suppressed violence. I hope the show will coax more drawings out of Woods's and others' archives so that we can better understand the central place his images have in late 20th-century architecture.

—Aaron Betsky