

# Feipel & Bechameil

ZÜRICH,  
at Katz Contemporary

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View of Feipel & Bechameil's *A Perfect World*, 2013, mixed mediums, at Katz Contemporary.

Feipel & Bechameil's exhibition "Among Silent Rooms" contained an echo of their unsway installations for Luxembourg's pavilion at the 2011 Venice Biennale (Martine Feipel is from Luxembourg, Jean Bechameil is French). There, visitors walked through the interior of a palazzo transformed by the artists into an entirely white space in which columns appeared to buckle and furniture to collapse. In the first room at Katz Contemporary they likewise included altered white furniture and items of décor cast in polycarbonate, such as *Sleeping Place*, a fine-lined bedside table that had lost its structural integrity and slumped helplessly on the floor. (All works referenced are 2013.)

As always, the duo's enquiry was, for the most part, engaged with architecture. The back wall of the entrance space was covered in peeling layers of paint as if in a derelict building (*A Thousand Years*). The device was not wholly convincing in the context of Katz's clean, industrial-like rooms. From there, a corridor leading to the main gallery was hung with several spare pencil-and-cut-paper drawings from the series "Dernier Souffle" (Last Breath). These illustrate mass housing blocks during their demolition by explosives, in the brief moment when they seem to hover in the air before dissolving into debris. Fine lines line details of buildings, and cuts in the paper pushed into relief represent slabs of concrete that, forced outward by the blast, flutter like swarms.

The centerpiece of the exhibition was *Un Monde Parfait* (A Perfect World), a sculptural installation of four white towers of differing heights, the tallest nearly touching the ceiling: a fifth structure, a long, white rectangular block articulated with openings, came to waist height. All are made in an acrylic resin resembling plaster. Each of the four towers is formed from a cluster of conjoined cylinders, and each re-creates out of another of the 11 towers that make up the Tours Ailland development in Nanterre, outside Paris, better known as the Tours Naages (Cloud Towers) for the shape of their footprints and the detailed mosaic of clouds on their surfaces. Feipel & Bechameil's versions seem primed for destruction, the flanks gatted by holes and the interiors bare, an exaggeration of the stripping-down that takes place in the first stage of demolition. The other sculpture represents the Cité des 4000 (Project for 4,000), another landmark building that stood in the outskirts of Paris until its destruction in 2004.

The artists present buildings in limbo (as the Tours Naages indeed currently are), giving the viewer a moment to pause and consider their short but concentrated history. Built in 1977 and 1961, respectively, the Tours Naages and Cité des 4000 were constructed at astonishing speed and with high hopes; in the optimistic and idealistic spirit of late modernism, they were to resolve pressing shortages of reasonably priced housing while generating simple, humane spaces for living and working. Unfortunately, such hopes were dashed as poor maintenance and shifting demographics (many original residents moved out and low-income immigrant families became the principal tenants) led to the buildings' disrepair, ghettoization and stigmatization.

Feipel & Bechameil's re-creation of the towers presents them as empty follies, though their version of the Tours Naages with its gaping holes reminds one of Antoni Gaudí's Sagrada Família building in Barcelona, a construction that started in 1882 and is still ongoing. But Feipel & Bechameil's display of historical hubris contrasts markedly with their delicate, palpably fragile drawings. In the latter, hope still hangs in the air, even as destruction looms. This body of work is not an unqualified praise to the architects and planners, but more a melancholic celebration of utopian ambitions.