

SIMPARCH's *exhausted*, is a brass tacks Godzilla, a no-fuss, architectonic simplification of a massive biological organism. The sculpture has all the important and iconic attributes of the movie character - the snake-shaped skull, the craggy spine plates, and the T. rex-like, taloned limbs - but unlike its theatrical counterpart, SIMPARCH's Godzilla is an inert, makeshift shelter - a paean to the nuclear age.

Founded in 1996 as a collective of four artists based in Las Cruces, New Mexico, SIMPARCH (a contraction of "simple" and "architecture") creates architecturally-scaled work that offers an experimental and populist perspective on the built environment. Their installations evidence an interest in infrastructure and disenfranchised populations, and offer a thoughtful, yet refreshingly deadpan, interpretation of contemporary polemics. In 1999 and again in 2003, SIMPARCH participated in the Center for Land Use Interpretation's artist residency program. The ensuing work is heavily influenced by the history and architecture of the residency location: a WWII airbase in Wendover, UT. The 2003 (and ongoing) installation, *Clean Livin'*, is a Quonset hut redesigned to function as an autonomous living facility through the introduction of solar and man-powered technologies. The following year, the influence of the Wendover residencies extended beyond the base location in the form of a modified contemporary Quonset hut installed by SIMPARCH in the Whitney Museum's sculpture court as part of the 2004 Biennial. The artwork, titled *El Tubo Completo*, was a structural addendum to the museum in the form of a cinema. In both instances, SIMPARCH upended the intended military function of the prefab architecture.

The latter day SIMPARCH, a partnership between founders Steve Badgett and Matt Lynch, is

happiest outside the system of art institutions, preferring to make functional contributions to the public at large. For the installation at Open Satellite, the artists initially looked to Boeing and to Nickelsville, a homeless encampment near the Port of Seattle, for source material; but the length of the Open Satellite residency did not allow them to develop a practicable work. Instead, they elected to build a 50 ft x 25 ft x 15 ft Godzilla. They titled it *exhausted*. This rough and ready example of biomorphic architecture, a sort of reptilian take on the Quonset hut, packages a long, complicated story: nuclear proliferation.

Completing the installation in less than eight days, SIMPARCH forewent construction drawings for a painter's tape outline of the reclining monster on the floor of the gallery. Within this sketch, at regular intervals, the artists placed a series of upright-standing circles cut from sheets of plywood. The shortest circumference was at the tail and the largest at what would become Godzilla's midsection. Using hundreds of thin strips of plywood, the artists sculpted the body around these rib-like wooden arches. The skin over the plywood bones of the monster is black and green shade cloth (the kind used in greenhouses to mitigate light) cut into irregular scraps, stretched taut, and stapled in place. The shade fabric filters the gallery lamps and the sun, bathing the inside of the sculpture in a diffuse, green-tinged light.

Godzilla reclines on his side, his neck and tail wrapping the building's cement support columns and his back pressed to the window wall on the northern end of the gallery. SIMPARCH elected to omit shade cloth from the intersection of monster and glass, so that gallery visitors, upon entering the carpeted belly of the beast, can see directly through the glass to the street outside. At night, alternatively, the gallery lights render the cavity of the sculpture visible through the glass

portal to passersby.

A **5-channel, [Delete bold]** looped audio track provided by the composer Kevin Drumm, an occasional SIMPARCH collaborator, captures the internal and intermittent rumblings of a sleeping beast. These noises erupt from **five** tiny, palm-sized speakers tucked into nooks and corners on the inside of Godzilla's neck and torso.

Badgett and Lynch were influenced in their decision to work with Godzilla by Chon Noriega's essay: "Godzilla and the Japanese Nightmare: when *Them* is U.S." [Bibliographic entry is at the end of the document. Can be placed here or entered as a footnote or endnote, whatever works best with the layout.] Noriega, a professor in UCLA's department of Film, Television and Media, divides the audience for the Godzilla franchise (originating in Japan with Toho Company's 1954 film *Godzilla*) between its two largest constituencies: post-WWII Japanese and American viewers. Noriega observes that Japanese audiences are sympathetic to Godzilla (a monster created, in part, by a nuclear accident) and to his status as a tragic hero. Like Mary Shelley's Frankenstein, his supernatural abilities result from a Promethean tampering with powers that are constrainable to the point of use, but not to the extent of full control or understanding. On the other hand, American audiences are observed to have little sympathy for Godzilla and to respond most often with fear or ridicule. (Important to note: The Japanese Godzilla frequently battles other nuclear and alien monsters who threaten Tokyo, whereas the 1998 U.S. contribution to the franchise casts Godzilla as a vicious aggressor.) Because American culture requires, indeed thrives on, political and economic provocations against foreign powers, Americans fear and deride any perceived reciprocity. With *exhausted*, SIMPARCH addresses these motivations by embodying a

population fatigued and bankrupted by a decade of aggressive foreign policy and fear.

exhausted is both time and site specific. It fills Open Satellite's cavernous gallery space, and in explicit ways, resonates with the immediate surroundings: Bellevue's wide boulevards and apartment towers. The majority of the high rise structures in the city's downtown core are less than a decade old; shiny and Ford tough. And Bellevue, as a new city, is enjoying a grace period of cleanliness and lawfulness. No one is prepared for the senseless chaos of a Godzilla-style trampling. The population would literally be caught off guard, quietly going in their sleep (or at the mall or in the gym parking lot) in what would unfold as a foreseeable, repetitive and non-cinematic experience. Godzilla, the film character, is like the nuclear threat - a menace that however unpredictable, is known and anticipated.

Arriving in Bellevue, Godzilla's distress about unrelenting proliferation - be that overpopulation, overproduction, or international floods of nuclear and traditional arms - is lost on his affluent American audience; tragedy becomes absurdity. Placid and depressed, he lies down and sleeps, relaxing his duct tape clad talons. His roughly beautiful insides become a hallway for the audience's diversion and entertainment. Warning unheard.

Abigail Guay

Note: Chon Noriega, "Godzilla and the Japanese Nightmare: When *Them* is U.S.," in Asian Cinemas, eds. Dimitris Eleftheriotis and Gary Needham (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2006).