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Varley
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JENNIE SUDDICK is a Markham-born, multi-disciplinary artist based in Toronto, ON. She earned her Masters of Fine Arts from York University and holds a Bachelor of Fine Arts and an Advanced Visual Studies Certificate from OCAD University.

Suddick has participated in numerous residencies and her work has been exhibited in Canada, the U.S., Europe and Asia. Most recently, she was part of *Land|Slide: Possible Futures* at the Markham Museum and the Shenzhen & Hong Kong Bi-city Biennale of Urbanism/Architecture. She is currently an Assistant Professor at OCAD University where she is also Associate Chair, Contemporary Drawing and Print Media.

OF NAILS AND ROPE LADDERS JENNIE SUDDICK

SEPTEMBER 19, 2015 – JANUARY 10, 2016

OF NAILS AND ROPE LADDERS

This project is part of *right here I right now*. Launched in 2014, this initiative aims to foster the work of contemporary artists in York Region by providing them with exhibition opportunities and ongoing professional development.

A monochromatic landscape sets the stage for Jennie Suddick’s newest body of work; a series of white architectural models of tree houses and forts. These diminutive buildings, along with miniature Muskoka chairs, rope bridges and trees, etc. are carefully crafted and assembled out of paper to create three-dimensional renderings of fantastical outdoor play areas.

The inspiration for this body of work, aptly nicknamed *The Tree House Project*, comes from Suddick’s own experience of growing up in Markham’s suburban neighbourhoods. The town Suddick knew as a child, however, is quite different from the city that exists today. Much like other rural areas across the country, our immediate landscape has changed dramatically over the last two decades due to suburban sprawl. A recurring theme in the artist’s practice is the mediated relationship between

inhabitants and nature that results from the growth of such manufactured environments. As the green spaces around us change, the contact we have with nature and the relationship we forge with our surroundings evolve.

The tree house offers Suddick a means through which to explore this contemporary condition as well as to ponder issues of autonomy, fantasy and nostalgia. As Suddick explains “often elaborate or capricious, children commonly devise grandiose plans for their own spaces that cannot be built due to limitations imposed by the real world, such as a lack of materials, skill, time, funds, and increasingly commonly, space.”¹ If given the freedom – and necessary means – to do so, how would children (or adults for that matter) realize their imaginary spaces and what shape would they take?



ACTS OF FANCY

During a residency at the McKay Art Centre from March 16 to 22, 2015, Suddick invited visitors to contribute to her project through discussion and collaborative sketching. Interaction with members of the public is an important element of the artist’s practice, especially in this case, where the work is created and exhibited in the community from which it stems. Over one hundred participants visited her converted studio and were encouraged to recall their own childhood dreams of outdoor play areas, both real and imagined. Structures quickly took shape as adults and children alike drew their plans, detailing the size and shape of their tree houses as well as determining layout and décor. Designs ranged from peaceful sanctuaries serving as escapes from the bustle of daily life, to gravity defying hangouts equipped with modern conveniences such as high-

speed internet and video game consoles. Several of these drawings, which served as inspiration for her models, are exhibited alongside the artist’s own detailed sketches and blueprints.

THE MINIATURE ALLOWS THE ARTIST TO GIVE CONCRETE FORM TO THAT WHICH EXISTS ONLY IN THE IMAGINATION – MAKING THE IMPOSSIBLE POSSIBLE.

MINIATURE WORLDS

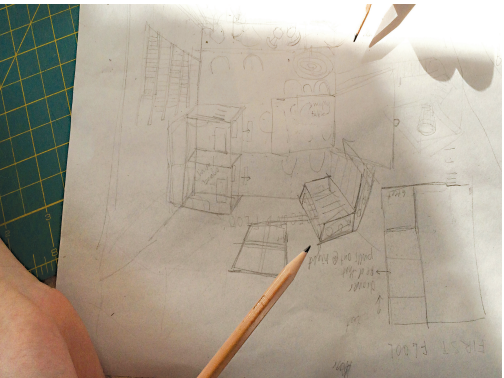
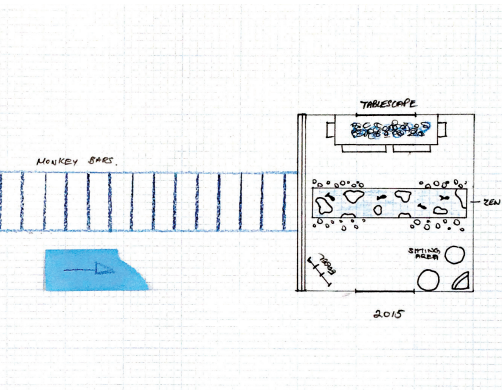
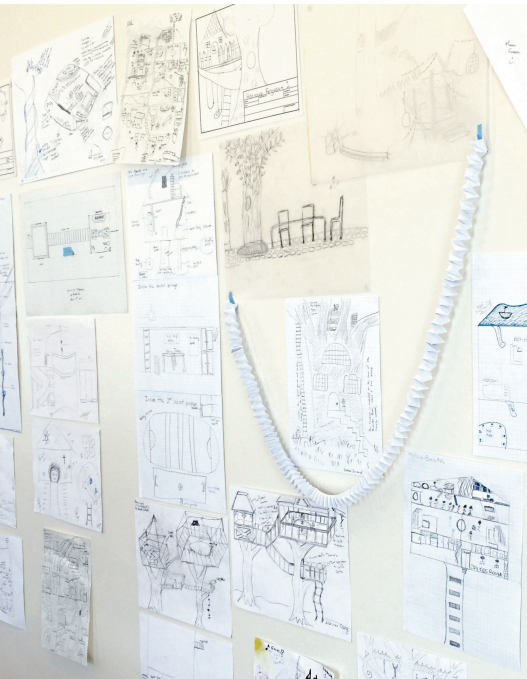
The scale of Suddick’s tree houses further emphasizes their fantastical and child-like qualities. Fabricated models often bring to mind toy train sets or dollhouses and according to Susan Stewart, miniatures are often “linked to nostalgic versions of childhood.”² Yet as artworks, these delicate sculptures are removed from the world of play and installed on pedestals to be discovered by the viewer. As the artist explains, “I often utilize the format of architectural models and miniature museum dioramas to draw upon familiar modes of viewing, those which present information as truthful and authoritative.”³ In this case, the miniature allows the artist to give concrete form to that which exists only in the imagination – making the impossible possible.

Suddick’s sculptures do symbolize an escape from parental authority and

from the confines of reality, yet speak of a sentimentality about the past brought forth by the rapid changes within her own environment. As Sylvette Babin suggests, contemporary artists use the miniature to not only illustrate “ideal and marvelous worlds,”⁴ but also as a means of social critique. Kim Adams, Alex McLeod and Karine Giboulo, for example, marshal miniature figures and models to present hidden dystopias, or to tackle current fears and anxieties linked to issues of globalization, consumerism or the environment.

Ultimately, *The Tree House Project* offers each of us the opportunity to reflect on our individual childhood experience. It facilitates a nostalgic trip down memory lane to a land where nature, however mediated, was a place full of possibility and wonder.

ANIK GLAUDE, CURATOR



1 Jennie Suddick. “Current Project.” *Jennie Suddick*, n.d. Web. July 3, 2015.
2 Susan Stewart. *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007), 142. iTunes. 2012. Web. June 26, 2015.
3 Jennie Suddick. “Artist statement: Service Centre Beacons.” *LE Gallery*. n.d. Web. July 3, 2015.
4 Sylvette Babin. “Small is beautiful?” *Esse Art et Opinions*, 70, Fall 2010: 4-5.