



Jason Rogenes

at POST, 19 October–16 November

The integrity of its span was as rigorous as the modern program itself, yet around this had grown another reality, intent upon its own agenda. This had occurred piecemeal, to no set plan, employing every imaginable technique and material. The result was something amorphous, startlingly organic.

—William Gibson, *Virtual Light*

Increasingly, society enters the post-technological age, wherein the engineering marvels of the nineteen sixties and seventies are unseated by the power failures of the nineties. Only now is it obvious that the ostensible madness of phenomena such as the accelerated space race was a byproduct of Cold War ideology. The optimistic notions of a future inspired by such advances were replaced in the mid nineteen eighties by images more chilling and cynical. A generation reared on such views, with the advantage of information technology expertise, has a deeply mistrustful and absurdist outlook on the future of technological or human potential. Jason Rogenes expedites this vision in his site-specific installation *Project 5.09e* (1996).

Rogenes' installation appears to be a futuristic industrial complex, reminiscent of the kind of spaceship landing dock one might see in any *Star Wars* or *Star Trek* film. The towering, monumental chassis at the installation's focal point would seem entirely fit for venerable, old-fashioned modernist awe were its effigy not betrayed by Rogenes' calculated selection of materials. This specious space-age structure is, in fact, an elaborate assemblage of polystyrene—the kind that comes in idiosyncratic shapes and sizes inside new computer or stereo equipment boxes that are randomly embossed with numbered codes. Rogenes fits together these Styrofoam pieces, then breaches them in several places by long fluorescent lights. The glowing tubes, two of which are suspended outside the central structure in mid-air, connect to one another and to a single hidden power source via an elaborate network of electrical cords that drape across the gallery's silver ceiling.

Rogenes' use of cardboard redefines the gallery space; plain, flattened boxes

cover the floor and walls, their irregular, rectilinear edges neatly sealed with brown plastic packing tape. So meticulously has the artist wrapped the room's interior (not one centimeter is left unmasked) that he has invented a novel visual experience far removed from what we one might find in the average gallery setting, or anywhere else, for that matter. This gesture effectively displaces even the most seasoned viewer, inducing the loss of one's sense of scale. While one may feel dwarfed by this complicated art structure at one moment, one feels like a giant standing before it the next, reading the work as an architectural model. This uncanny effect piques one's imagination. Not content to identify it within the strict parameters of either sculpture or architecture, one imagines something arcane and provocative that is altogether unrelated to these quotidian genres.

Rogenes' use of materials, however, plays a role greater than mere formal invention: In *Project 5.09e*, the artist becomes the beloved bricoleur, inventing cultural monuments out of culture's recycled waste. This links him with several generations of artists that have worked with society's leftovers. More aptly, the work's imagery proves him to be a descendent of one of the all-time granddaddies of junk, novelist William Gibson. Like many of Gibson's imaginary models of future life, Rogenes' work conjures up a structure made not by plan, but by the chaos that disrupts any plan and by the messy process of accretion. Rogenes' installation could very well be a part of Gibson's image of San Francisco's Bay Bridge, a massive shanty town composed almost entirely of relics such as old slabs of marble that were once bank façades, the fuselage of a 747, tons of scrapped neon, and all forms of makeshift housing that extends to the top of the bridge's broad cables. Like Gibson's writings, Rogenes' installation stands out not only for the effective economy through which its message is communicated, but for the increasing relevancy of the message itself. The future is now, like it or not.

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Jason Rogenes
Project 5.09e, 1996
Polystyrene, electrical components,
cardboard, and packing tape
132" x 72" x 64" (sculptural unit)