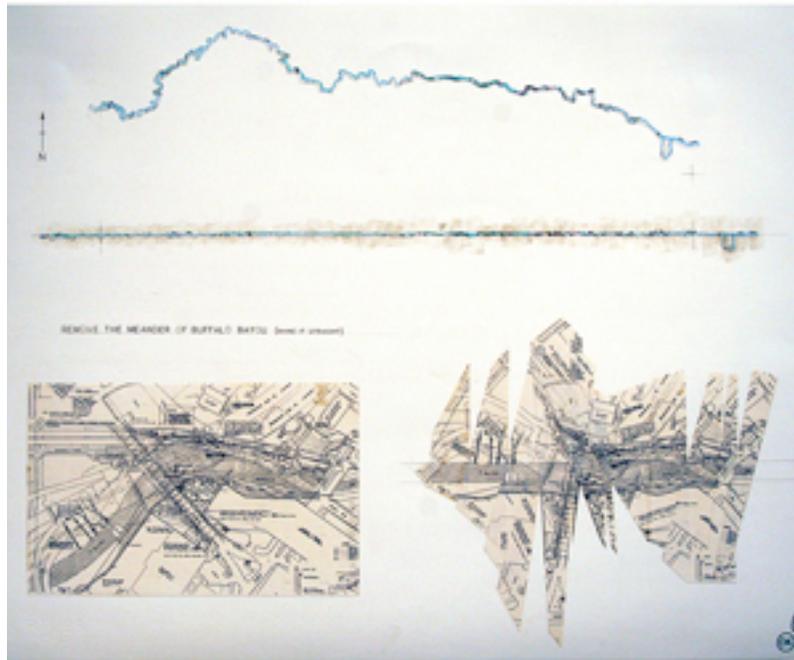


The Art Guys, "Cloud Cuckoo Land"

The Art Guys share 25 years of "drawings, proposals, failed schemes and pipe dreams"

By Troy Schulze, *Houston Press*, September 27, 2007

So you've just made the hour-long trek to Galveston, and you're going to see an exhibit called "**Cloud Cuckoo Land**," a collection of works by Jack Massing and Michael Galbreth — The Art Guys. You may be expecting to see an outrageous stunt on the scale of *Absolutely 1,000 Coats of Paint* or an installation featuring live birds and a weather-generating contraption, something completely crazy. Well, that's all here — you'll just have to use your imagination to make it real.



Shoot for the sky: "Remove the Meander of Buffalo Bayou (Make It Straight)", 1993

"Cloud Cuckoo Land" is a selection of "drawings, proposals, failed schemes and pipe dreams" from the Guys' 25 years of output. The title phrase references Aristophanes's play *The Birds*, in which a character speaks of "cloud cuckoo land," a kind of Cloud City situated between Olympus and Earth. For The Art Guys' purposes, it's simply a state of mind, a telepathic wormhole to the absurd.

The show is essentially an exhibition of ideas. Most of the pieces are framed studies from The Art Guys' long-running series *101 of The World's Greatest Sculpture Proposals*, some of which actually achieved fruition. The real reward here is the lack of filter and the quasi seriousness with which these proposals are, well, proposed. *Travel Light*, an installation comprised of 360 translucent suitcases, was actually assembled and permanently installed at the Terminal E baggage claim at Bush Intercontinental Airport, but then there's *Remove the Meander of Buffalo Bayou (Make it Straight)*, an undertaking on the scale of the Ship Channel. In the study for the latter, two

copies of a length of Buffalo Bayou have been extracted from a Houston map; one displayed as it exists, and one that has been meticulously cut and straightened. It's an example of The Art Guys' shoot-for-the-sky approach to making art. Any idea is open for discussion; any proposal is possible — on paper. And much of it is hilarious and visually stunning.

1 Million Coats of Paint, probably envisioned around the time the famous Absolut Vodka billboard received its 1,000 coats, imagines a horizontal column of paint stretching from one wall to another. The study contains an illustration along with the text: "Start painting an area of paint on opposing walls. Continue until they meet in the middle of the room." One wonders if it was ever attempted. As in most of the studies on display, the work features an official Art Guys stamp of approval and a random photograph — here, a '50s-era pinup girl with very large breasts, which begs an explanation while needing none. It's just part of the weird logic of the entire enterprise.

Walk a Mile in My Shoes is a part performance/part sculpture conceived in 1994 that seems like an inspiration for the Guys' late '90s *Suits* project. The proposal includes a letter to celebrities asking them to donate a pair of shoes, which The Art Guys will wear while walking a mile around a track. The shoes will then become part of a sculpture documenting the project. A list of potential celebrity donors includes pop stars, actors, athletes and politicians, like Madonna, Arnold Schwarzenegger, Michael Jackson, Magic Johnson, Warren Moon and Mikhail Gorbachev, but it's also peppered with names like Robert Rauschenberg, Philip Johnson and Philip Glass. It's a mock-preentious joke, a detail that adds depth to the already audacious proposal.

Get a Handle on It Brick House, a proposal for bricks with metal handles attached to them, features a tiny floor plan for the home they'll be used to build, with rooms named "Fucking Bedroom" and "God Damn Garage."

There's a random proposal called *101 Catastrophes*, which involves breaking shit. In the bottom left corner of the paper, the Guys make their case: "OK here's one that'll get you going. Say we get whole bunches of stuff, suspend them from the ceiling, then whack 'em together until a whole mound of broken shit is left in a pile on the floor...Whack! Whack! Whack! Really bust 'em up. Whadaya think?" I think I'd like to see that.

The driest piece is undoubtedly *Study for Shims*, which is simply a wedge of wood attached to paper and the word "shim."

Among the clouds, gravity occasionally pulls. *Steps in Line*, conceived in 1990, could have been inspired by the outdoor sculpture of Donald Judd. It calls for the acquisition of a series of concrete steps from empty lots in the Fourth Ward, to be installed, in a line, at Buffalo Bayou Park, "creating in effect a missing neighborhood by emphasizing not what is present, but rather, what is absent." It's unclear whether the piece was ever seriously proposed. In theory, though, it has powerful potential.

Many of these schemes seem set up to fail, and fail hilariously, but the incredible confidence they convey makes you think, "Of course it's possible." But then, it's as if The Art Guys are always winking at you. There's no particular school of thought happening here, no art movement to name-drop and supply context. It's simply freedom — an endless ability to experiment. "Cloud Cuckoo Land" is the document of that freedom. These are snapshots of ideas, notarized and catalogued, and decorated with inspiration. Far from simple blueprints, these "studies" demand to be seen, exhibited and enjoyed, over and over again.