

**SINGAPORE  
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# TIFFANY CHUNG

Suspended above the floor, the 50 small boats and 43 houseboats comprising Tiffany Chung's 'floating town' extend across space on a horizontal Perspex plane, as if floating on water, swaying with the ambient movement of air passing through the exhibition space. Drawing viewers into this fluid space, Chung constructs an alternative urbanism where motion and fluidity not only course through the 'town' but define its poetic structure. Provoked by predictions that large portions of the world's inhabitable spaces will be submerged by rising sea levels associated with global warming, Chung transforms impending catastrophe into an opportunity to rethink the form and aesthetics of urban life.

Chung's work is inspired by 'arcology' — an urban design movement that mobilises architectural design to address ecological challenges by designing sustainable built environments. But Chung, who lives and works in an overbuilt Vietnamese city itself plagued by floods, is also wary of the dangers inherent to utopian mega-projects. Rejecting the failed utopias of architect-geniuses, her work draws immediate inspiration from the watery world of the Mekong Delta, one of the most vulnerable sites for rising sea levels on the planet, but also a space where social life thrives on the water as much as it does on land. To the fluid forms of the delta she adds solar panels, floating gardens, rainwater collectors, as well as the forms, colours, and 'arcological' details of structures existing elsewhere in places like Cambodia, Thailand, Vietnam, India, and Japan, where people living closely with water thrive in the fluid habitats that may define much of the future world's livable space.

Chung addresses global environmental issues by elevating vernacular form to the status of architecture. Her process involves a form of comparative global ethnography, culling genius from the everyday and translating it into the aesthetic idioms of contemporary art and architecture. To produce the floating town, Chung studies architectural elements of vernacular housing, redesigns them via computer-generated modeling programs, and renders what already exists into the semantic code of Pantone palettes, rasters, vectors, 3D CAD files, tiffs, and jpegs. These forms, rendered legible to expert fabricators, become the basis for the 1:50 scale models that populate her floating town. While the renderings and plans never appear in the final work, the process — moving from the vernacular to the model via architectural renderings — ultimately reveals how vernacular form is itself a form of urban planning.

Erik Harms