

# Frieze

## Amy Lien & Enzo Camacho's Send Up of New York's Lowline in Freiburg

BY SCOTT ROBEN 25 OCT 2018

The transfer of a proposed New York subterranean garden project to Kunstverein Freiburg raises questions about community and private interests



The proposed 'Lowline' park on the border of New York's Lower East Side and Chinatown neighbourhoods marks one of the real estate industry's latest advances on private-public urban space. Developed by a non-profit design group with a tech start-up ethos, if realized, the proposal would transform an enormous, unused trolley station into a subterranean garden. Sustaining underground greenery by redirecting sunlight through fiberoptic channels, the park would uproot long-standing neighbourhood ecologies while boosting profits for real estate developers. Amy Lien and Enzo Camacho's most recent exhibition fashions the cavernous space of Kunstverein Freiburg into a two-tiered, makeshift likeness of the Lowline. Its title, '陰府 (Shady Mansion)' is a Chinese term for hell.

Above, visitors squint as light from several spotlights floods the room, accumulates in upside-down umbrellas, and is channelled further downward by makeup mirrors into cardboard tubes – an imitation of the Lowline's underground skylight technology. In the darkened, tomblike chamber below, the four weakened streams of light fall directly onto five tree-like sculptural assemblages that twist upward like spindly-limbed spectres. Each is crowned with a paper model of one of five high-rise condominium towers that would be built in proximity to the Lowline. Between their branches, tableaux of found or handcrafted objects offer coded depictions of some of the park's potential effects. Handwritten labels pinned throughout articulate some: 'sunken tranquillity garden relaxes class guilt', 'overtaxed sewage system', 'pet spa'. With its odd ornamentation, the provisional architecture casts the park as a ghost landscape haunted as much by its past as by an imagined future, where it doubles as both garden and grave.



Amy Lien & Enzo Camacho, *260 South Street, NYC, NY 10002*, 2018, installation view. Courtesy: the artist and 47 Canal, New York; photograph: Marc Doradzillo

It's well-known that the production of copies has often served as a potent critical strategy for artists throughout the last century. At work in this installation is one of the copy's less attended-to sub-genres: the funerary effigy. For a clue here, look to the mailable invitation card, a reprinting of a burnable, Chinese paper bill intended for funerary offering in the amount of 'one thousand the hell dollars.' Riffing on the additional funerary tradition of Chinese money trees, the show at large poses as an effigy, drawing an unborn public space and its local frictions into the afterlife. The gesture is as surprising as it is fruitful. The artists conjure a scenario in which the Lowline retains its local specificity even as it is symbolically unmoored from the earthly realm, doubling as a porous surface through which a host of alternative signs may drift.

In this way, the artists implicate a local political issue in a web of sticky global and cultural crossovers that build toward an eccentric critical elasticity. You

only have to look as far as the pretzels and Black Forest biomatter tangling between the branches, or the handwoven baskets of Hawaiian poké upstairs, or the material traces of the artists' past projects, to see the beginnings of this logic in play. Despite the show's sombre underpinnings, you might glimpse joy in the unlikely interstices. Importantly, too, the exhibition stages an encounter between the Lowline and the architecture of the Kunstverein and seeks to bring aspects of local politics in Freiburg into view, such as cooperative urban living and housing policy. As a site-specific installation, the show stakes a robust claim for an understanding of 'site' as a necessarily plural, and even contradictory, construct. Moreover, the artists' idiosyncratic staging of the lowline suggests how a site of unequal struggle between a local community and powerful private interests might produce new cultural and political arrangements.



Amy Lien & Enzo Camacho,  
*259 Clinton Street, NYC, NY  
10002*, 2018, installation detail.  
Courtesy: the artist and 47  
Canal, New York;