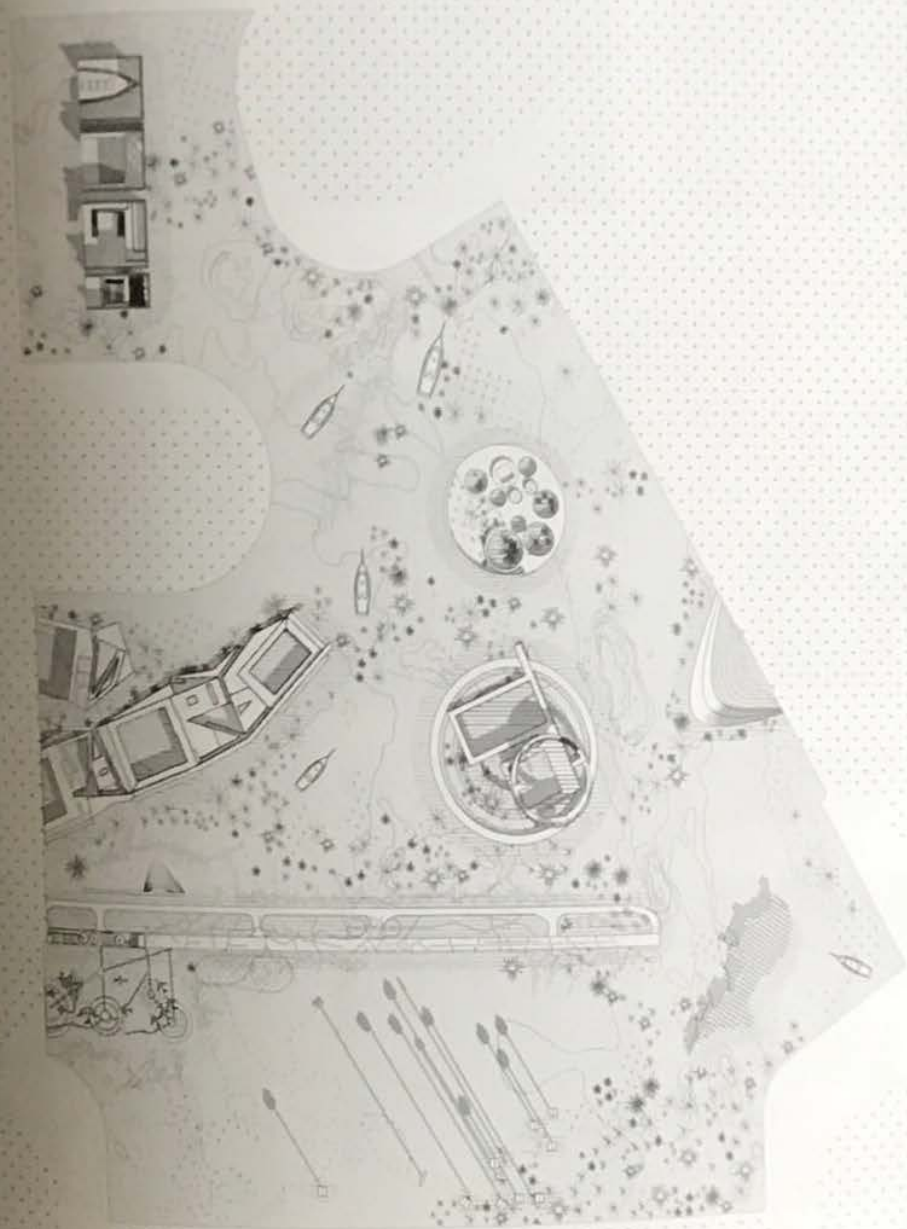




FLOODINGS

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Floodings is an installation in which a gallery space becomes a temporary flooded garden to exhibit five projects designed for and situated in five different cities. Although each one responds to a specific geographic context with dissimilar conditions, the cities share a series of extreme hydrological phenomena.

▲ CF. 48-49

fig. 18 Night photograph from Avenida Insurgentes. When the gallery closes, an artificial cloud starts to form, lasting until the gallery is open again the next morning.

The exhibition subtly modifies atmospheres and environments inside the gallery as visitors arrive. A high temperature and humid environment is generated as the gallery is “flooded” with water retained in hydrogel—minuscule spherical polymer particles mostly used in agriculture, greenhouses, and hydroponic farming, able to absorb up to 150 times their own weight in water. The punctual lighting

from below illuminates the exhibited models and simultaneously heats up the hydrogel, forcing the water to evaporate, and thus creating an artificial interior cloud in almost total humidity inside the gallery. As a result, the gallery windows are cloudy whenever the gallery is closed, yet passersby can still observe the conditions from the exterior.

Luis Callejas in conversation with Geoff Manaugh

▲ JAN 10, 2013

Geoff Manaugh founded the architecture blog BLDGBLOG and is the Director of Studio-X at the Columbia Graduate School of Architecture, Planning and Preservation in New York City.

GM: Islands are often seen as utopian spaces standing apart from the very world they aim to update or perfect. Thomas More's *Utopia* literally was an island, for instance. However, this sense of divergence or separation from the rest of the human community has also been taken up by dystopian science fiction visions, from *The Island of Dr. Moreau* to the blockbuster *The Island*. However, islands are also well known as evolutionary hotbeds, hosting incredible species that emerge, thrive, interbreed, and speciate yet further. The most obvious example of this is Charles Darwin's Galapagos. Could you perhaps discuss the role of utopian isolation in your work?

LC: Embracing isolation as a desirable condition allows me to produce in a way in which I have a high control over the limits of interventions while maintaining the opportunity for unexpected results within those limits. As a method, it liberates my work from some of the contemporary moral weights assigned to ecology as a design medium. I am interested in designed ecologies, but at the same time, it is frustrating when design vitality is forced to step back just because of the infinitely interconnected implications of dealing with live matter. Recently—and much too late—generative-based

approaches to design have become relevant in the field of landscape architecture, partly to deal with that moral weight. I am not interested in that at all but rather need the recognizable boundaries. My work is situated on the boundary between architecture and landscape—it is often territorial, yet I am not interested in open-ended indeterminacy or endless process-based repetition.

GM: What about isolation's effects in terms of evolutionary change or adaptation? I'm also curious if the unpredictability of evolution also challenges your design practice.

LC: Isolating ecologies as a means to trigger unexpected reactions—not necessarily positive ones—is fascinating to me. In this, your reference to Dr. Moreau is an appropriate association; he is a designer, and as such he is open to failure, while Darwin is merely an observer. Moreau needed the island as a container of his work. In a way it is about the potentials of quarantine and not really evolution. Going back to the geographic categories, I think the atoll is a better term to frame my interest in contained unpredictability. I like the determinacy of the external figure—the figure defined by the beach is clear, yet it is vulnerable to erosion and wear. At the same time the liquid interior gives me a perfect

frame for vital and amoral play with live matter as a design medium.

GM: In an era of rising sea levels and shrinking glaciers, the "island" seems to be an increasingly omnipresent category—as if islands were really the secret logic of terrain everywhere. Whole new islands, for instance, have been "discovered" off the coast of Greenland as the ice cap melts: what once appeared to be peninsulas are revealed as islands after the ice has disappeared. The island was there all along, we could say; it was simply hidden. In any case, could you address the idea that islands are, in fact, hidden in plain sight all around us, and how the idea of the emergent island—or an island yet to appear—is a more common landform in today's geography?

LC: Geographers distinguish two kinds of islands: oceanic—ancient isolated landmasses; and continental—fragments derived from continental masses. Thus all emerging or yet to appear non-volcanic islands are of the continental type. They will likely form new archipelagos and very rarely be completely isolated. In a world of urbanized coasts it can mean two things: urban islands or total disaster, or possibly both.

GM: Do you see potentials for your practice here?

LC: In a way, these hidden or emerging islands are future fragments of past continents. Some of them are the size of buildings, while others are the size of cities or parks. It is fascinating to think of the potentials of occupying those new landforms that derive from larger territories. The formation of these new archipelagos is not necessarily restricted to the effects of global warming. My work deals with processes of urbanization on those yet-to-appear platforms, in all scales, from temporary research stations on top of floating ice to parks occupying newly isolated land in extreme landscapes.

GM: The construction of artificial islands is seemingly as old as human beings themselves. The first artificial islands are not in Dubai, of course. Prehistoric island-building projects from South America, where islands are more like textiles woven together by reeds, and even Neolithic Ireland, where manufactured island-structures called *crannogs* were used as housing, show how old the practice is. The list could go on and on. In this era of rapid mechanical dredging and other crossover technologies from marine construction, where might island construction go next?

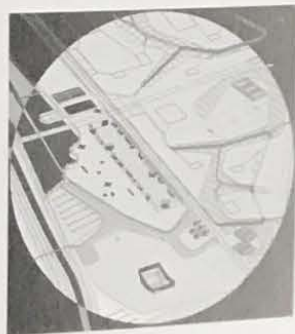
LC: The future is not as much about the territory within the boundaries

of the islands—as in the case of Dubai—as it is about really engaging with the systems in which the islands float. Artificial islands offer the exciting possibility of approaching landscapes as a field in which you can employ relatively small-scale platforms to transform vast territories, as opposed to actually design vastness. Perhaps the next step lies in a new wave of islands as itinerant vessels. There is already a fascinating and extensive history of floating hospitals, casinos, hotels, et cetera, but there are not enough examples of interesting itinerant and floating public spaces. The discipline of landscape architecture has not yet seen a single practice committed to floating surfaces—whether aquatic or atmospheric—in contrast to the sixties and seventies, when so many architecture practices envisioned floating buildings.

GM: Would you say that fiction is often equally important in your own work?

LC: Definitely. The first project that I built started as a fiction in a way. We were doing the competition for an aquatic center in Medellín in 2008, just four months after starting the practice, and we honestly never thought we would win that one. It had a lot of speculation in it—images of water surrounded by more water, and we decided to do a building

without walls or a roof. Our entry was a serious fiction about responding to an architecture competition brief with a landscape operation. We won, and two years after that we were swimming in those pools! I experienced that just after starting the practice, and now I never question the seriousness of crafted fictions.



▲ CF 51

fig. 1 Airport as Island (2012).
Le Carlin Airport Park
Proposal for the transformation of
Cartago's airport into a
metropolitan park.