



Liset Castillo's *Suburban Planning*, 2005, a photograph of a sculpture inspired by Lakewood, California, one of the nation's first planned communities.

Liset Castillo wrinkles her nose. "Do you smell it?" she asks, referring to the sulfurous odor that floods her Manhattan studio. The stench comes from the craft sand she uses to make the abstract sculptures that appear in her photographs.

Castillo, 31, became interested in sand while photographing sand castles on Miramar Beach in her native Cuba, where she made her first sculptures. But the sun's bright light made it difficult to capture the work on film, so she began experimenting with play sand in a garden, eventually moving to an indoor studio. She came to New York last February with a grant from the Guggenheim Foundation to participate in the International Studio & Curatorial Program.

Castillo begins each sculpture by projecting satellite pictures of Earth, aerial photographs of highways, or architectural blueprints onto a cardboard base, sometimes layering one set of images atop another. She traces the projections with charcoal, and then uses her hands, a trowel, baking tins, and other tools to build a sand sculpture on the floor. Each takes several weeks to complete and measures around 12 feet square and 1 foot high. She then photographs the sculptures, and the resulting images—such as those in her "Departure Points" series (2003)—resemble networks of smooth highways surrounded by rubble, mountains, or craggy terrain. Others, like those in "Landing Strips" (2003), which show sculptures made with water and pigments in addition to sand, evoke luminous landscapes or moonscapes.

Castillo destroys the sculptures after they've been photographed, because the sand is too fine and too fragile to transport from her studio. "It feels terrible!" she exclaims. "But they're really just ephemeral events."

The daughter of a psychiatric therapist and an aerial engineer, Castillo studied art for 12 years at the Instituto Superior de Arte in Havana, graduating in 1998. She moved to Amsterdam in 2000 to join de Ateliers, a two-year program for international artists, and has since made the city her home. Now a Dutch resident, she was able to enter the United States but plans to return to Amsterdam in the spring.



Her work was on view at the 8th Havana Biennial in 2003 and last summer's scopeHampsons art fair. At a solo show last month at Brooklyn's Black & White Gallery, prints from "Departure Points" ranged in price from \$5,500 to \$7,500. Her most recent photographs are on view through the 20th of this month at Remy Toledo Gallery in Manhattan.

Castillo is currently working on a series based on aerial images from the late 1940s of the Los Angeles suburb of Lakewood, one of the country's first planned communities, and plans to exhibit one of the sculptures at the Black & White Gallery booth at the OMNIART III fair in Miami this month. Photographs of the sculptures will be shown at the California Museum of Photography in Riverside in 2007. Castillo is also experimenting with sculpting in concrete, cement, plaster, and other more permanent materials. She intends to keep making large-scale works, so long as "they can fit through the door."

—Rachel Somerstein

Rachel Somerstein is the editorial assistant at ARTnews.