Shelf Life

No. 43 — F/W 2016
The stair “overlook” windows frame the large painting storage area. Some works are informally displayed. A rack pulls out to feature a painting. A wall at the back of the room is occasionally used to hang a timely piece. After Charles Garabedian died earlier this year, the museum hung one of his paintings on a rack near the windows—a memorial that Heyer called “improvisational.” “We are educational in an experiential way, not a didactic way,” she explains, noting that while there are wall labels throughout the museum, none are used for these vault views, which are closer to a curatorial inside joke.

For Diller, this casual interplay between museum visions and the daily choreography of the storage areas is part of a changing paradigm in how we comprehend what usually happens out of sight: a hegemonically scaled world is made visible. Perhaps, the Broad’s most urban phenomenon is this transparency—the momentary blurring of the distinctions between what is democratic and what is sacrosanct. “What was obvious to everyone at the beginning was that this wasn’t a place for the staff to perform in public,” she says. “Whatever’s going on is whatever’s going on.”

Catching Rain in Singapore

by Benjamin Leclair-Paquet

View of Marina Reservoir, Marina Bay, one of Singapore’s largest reservoirs (in one ear of the city of Singapore). 2011.

Singapore, by nature, is a dry place. Nest to Kuwait and Palestine, the island ranks as one of the world’s most water-stressed nations. There are no freshwater lakes, rivers, or aquifers. The strategic significance of freshwater reserves came into geopolitical view in 1943, when the Imperial Japanese Army took control of the Bukit Timah water reservoir. Water was already in short supply, and while a full cut off never materialized, the threat loomed large, contributing significantly to an Allied retreat and one of the British Empire’s greatest defeats.

Over the years, Singapore appeared to solidify its freshwater infrastructure through international agreements with Malaysia made in 1961 and 1962, but the fragility of the city-state’s water network was exposed again after Singapore’s expansion from Malaysia in 1965. As Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew began to define the political position of his new government, his counterpart in Malaysia, Tunku Abdul Rahman, reportedly declared, “If Singapore doesn’t do what I want, I’ll switch off the water supply.”

Singapore’s dependency on drinking water from its neighbor has persistently served as a major impediment in the city-state’s quest for self-sufficiency.

The lack of domestic water sources prompted the development of complex catchment, treatment, and storage strategies that have lowered Singapore’s dependency on imported sources despite constant urban growth. Movement toward self-sufficiency can be attributed to three initiatives: the inauguration of a water desalination program, an extensive reclaimed water scheme, and rainwater catchment, which has played an increasingly significant role since the introduction of water design guidelines in 2007.

The guidelines, known as ABC Waters, propose spatial strategies to augment rainfall harvesting through on-land storm water catchment systems, swamps, and artificial lakes. Additionally, they allow the nation’s Public Utilities Board—dedicated to maintaining the country’s water supply, and author of the guidelines—to collect rainwater on two-thirds of the national surface area. The primary attribute to catchment and storage approaches like water reserves is increasingly significant, seeing that Singapore’s population density is greater than that of Mumbai, Tokyo, or the Gaza Strip.

Built-up areas are now constructed in ways that allow water to flow toward underground canal systems. Similar strategies have been adapted for building rooftops, terraces, and vertical greenery, in ABC Waters proposes architectural guidelines that not only maximize harvesting but also increase water purity. It also calls for configurations where rainwater gravitates from rooftops to balconies through systems equipped with filtration stages capable of filtering impurities as liquids travel to lower stores.

As designers, builders, owners, and developers have joined the national effort toward maximum rainwater catchment, what was once relegated to the nation’s remote areas and beyond its borders is now being integrated into the urban design of the city. In this environment, where water storage facilities benefit from military protection and where sufficient freshwater has been udpated as a campaign promise during the election season, programs such as ABC Waters have unknowingly converted urban and architectural designers into geopolitical tacticians.