

Michel Foucault stressed that heterotopias must necessarily stem from a relationship to real sites and experiences, and the Seburns make clear that their bunker draws from the historical and current context of its surroundings. What they present us with, however, conveys not so much an association with reality, but an ominous anticipation of disastrous effects. By tying together recent urban development with historical narratives in a complex entanglement, the Seburns show us that we are not progressing along a linear path, but rather, are participating in a consistent push-pull dynamic. Could it be that bygone fears of mutually assured destruction are returning, only with developers replacing flagrant social intolerance? The Seburns point out that fear of destruction is apropos of all generations.

—D'Arcy Blake

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REVIEW**

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We Should Take Below: The Gambling Splinter

written
by

D'Arcy Blake

about
the
exhibition

*We Should Take Below:
The Gambling Splinter*

Rachel & Sarah Seburn

UNIT/PITT Projects

236 East Pender Street, Vancouver, BC

November 13 – December 19, 2015



RACHEL AND SARAH SEBURN
amalgamate an architectural
aesthetic with cultural commentary
to critique urban development.



Reacting against encroaching development and the gentrification of Vancouver's Chinatown, the twins have transformed UNIT/PITT Projects into a sardonic presentation center for their prospective subterranean oasis. The hypothetical bunker is a proposition to "take below" as surrounding historic buildings continue to be demolished.

In what is perhaps a jab at Chinatown's impending beautification, the Seburns' alternative space plays it remarkably safe when it comes to building code regulations. Insulated foam, shiny Plexiglas and crisply formed concrete mark the perimeter, while sea-foam green commercial grade rebar pokes out from the angular blocks. Although their straight-laced construction practices appear to be up to code, one cannot dismiss the bunker's air of ephemerality. Propped up walls constantly remind that its duration will not outlast the exhibition. Interrupting the floor plan, an elbow joint painted bright red and set in concrete contradicts its material immobility as it sits upon a weathered dolly. Two compressed gas cylinders, one painted blue and the other grey, also in a cart, suggest that relics of an industrial past can be simply rolled away and replaced by sleek, streamlined modernity—or at the very least, painted over.

The Gambling Splinter does more than offer a romantic solution. It also dredges up past rumours that have long circulated about an alleged system of tunnels underneath Chinatown. The myth has since been debunked—as it turns out, the tunnels were more like unconnected cellars. Nevertheless, they likely provided refuge from racism and also acted as hideouts for more nefarious enterprises like opium dens, brothels and gambling rings. The Seburns hint at this suppressed culture with a poker table queued up for fictional real estate buyers, while the bunker itself echoes the form of the century-old gambling parlours. Furthermore, the rolled-metal door atop a precariously mounted staircase and a dusty transistor radio perched above a wooden ammunition box seem to allude to Cold War era bomb shelters and the concomitant anxiety that permeated the latter half of the twentieth-century.

Image: Rachel & Sarah Seburn, *We Should Take Below: The Gambling Splinter* at UNIT/PITT Projects. Installation view. Courtesy of the author.

