

# kolaj

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# Urban Landscapes as Acts of Collage

Luigi Galimberti investigates the works of Bel Falleiros, Larissa Fassler and Junebum Park

With over half of the world population living in urban areas, it comes as no surprise that artists from all over the world have chosen the city as their main research interest. Since the artistic experiments of the Dadaists and the Surrealists in the first decades of the 20th century, all the way through the Situationists and up to the Land artists and beyond, the urban environment—or the experience of it—has become an artwork in and of itself, rather than being a mere representation. The three artists in this review conjugate those two approaches by representing the urban landscape as a collage of images and experiences alike.

The works of Bel Falleiros (Brazilian, based in São Paulo), Larissa Fassler (Canadian, based in Berlin) and Junebum Park (South Korean, based in Seoul) look quite different from each other at first glance. However, they have in common two fundamental characteristics. Firstly, the three artists experience the city through meticulous and prolonged observation and exploration, before presenting the outcome of their research in the form of artwork. Secondly, their works take the form of collage at some stage of the artistic process, although the final products are often presented with a different medium.

As the title of this article suggests, the principal argument is that urban landscapes are acts of collage. From an initial observation, this is evident at two levels. At a macro-level, buildings, roads, railways or other major urban constructions form a landscape that is often characterized by

its complexity, which grows together with the size of the city. Indeed, a significant number of artists focus their attention on the megalopolis; that is the case of Bel Falleiros' works on São Paulo or Junebum Park's

*To Let* (video still)  
by Junebum Park  
8 minutes, 20 seconds; single  
channel, high definition video,  
NTSC, silent, colour 2011.  
Courtesy of the artist



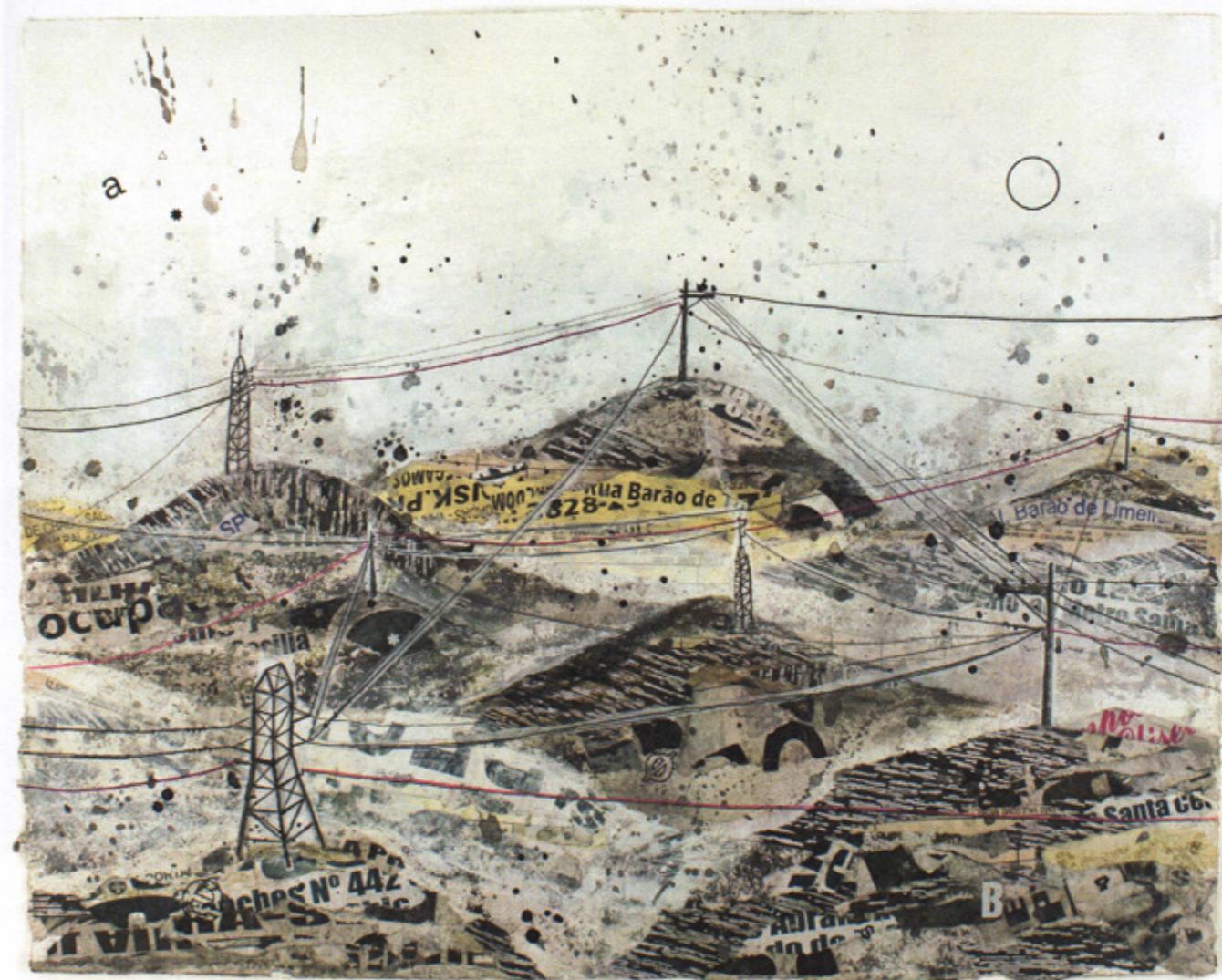
Regent's Street/Regent's Park (*Dickens thought it looked like a racetrack*) (detail) by Larissa Fassler  
63" x 114.6" archival C-print; 2009. Courtesy of the artist.

on Seoul. At a micro-level, elements of urban furniture, billboards, graffiti or even litter abandoned in the streets create an extremely intricate pattern of shapes, colours and meanings. Maybe because they are easier to comprehend or because their language is closer to that of artistic composition, many artists, including the three presented here, focus their attention on the micro-elements that form the urban collage of the city. Furthermore, besides being a collage of images, cities are also a collage of actions, times, memories or even weathers. The buildings and the streets of a city are first of all an arena where a large part of the world population lives its own life and actively changes the urban context. A lost object becomes a sign of passage or a selfie becomes a memory, as a sudden storm empties the streets or a sunny day makes a skyscraper's windows glow.

A first demonstration of how artists have addressed the overwhelming stimuli originating from an urban con-

text is found in the work of Larissa Fassler. For *Regent Street* (2009), the artist photographed every single sign, notice, ad, billboard, regulation, poster, sticker, graffiti, in other words, everything that was visible in the public space of London's famous shopping street. She then separately redrew each of these pieces of information on a piece of A4 paper. Finally, she scanned these individual pieces into the computer, digitally cut them out and built the final form in Photoshop. The final product, which is a collage of all these disparate pieces, reflects the visual pastiche that seems to void all those graphic elements of their original meaning—whether it was the name of a agency or a traffic instruction—and reduces them to a colourful decoration of the urban landscape.

Similar attention to the overlapping of visual elements in the city's fabric is Junebum Park's *To Let* (2011). This video, slightly more than eight minutes long, shows the hands of the artist pasting dozens of small pieces of

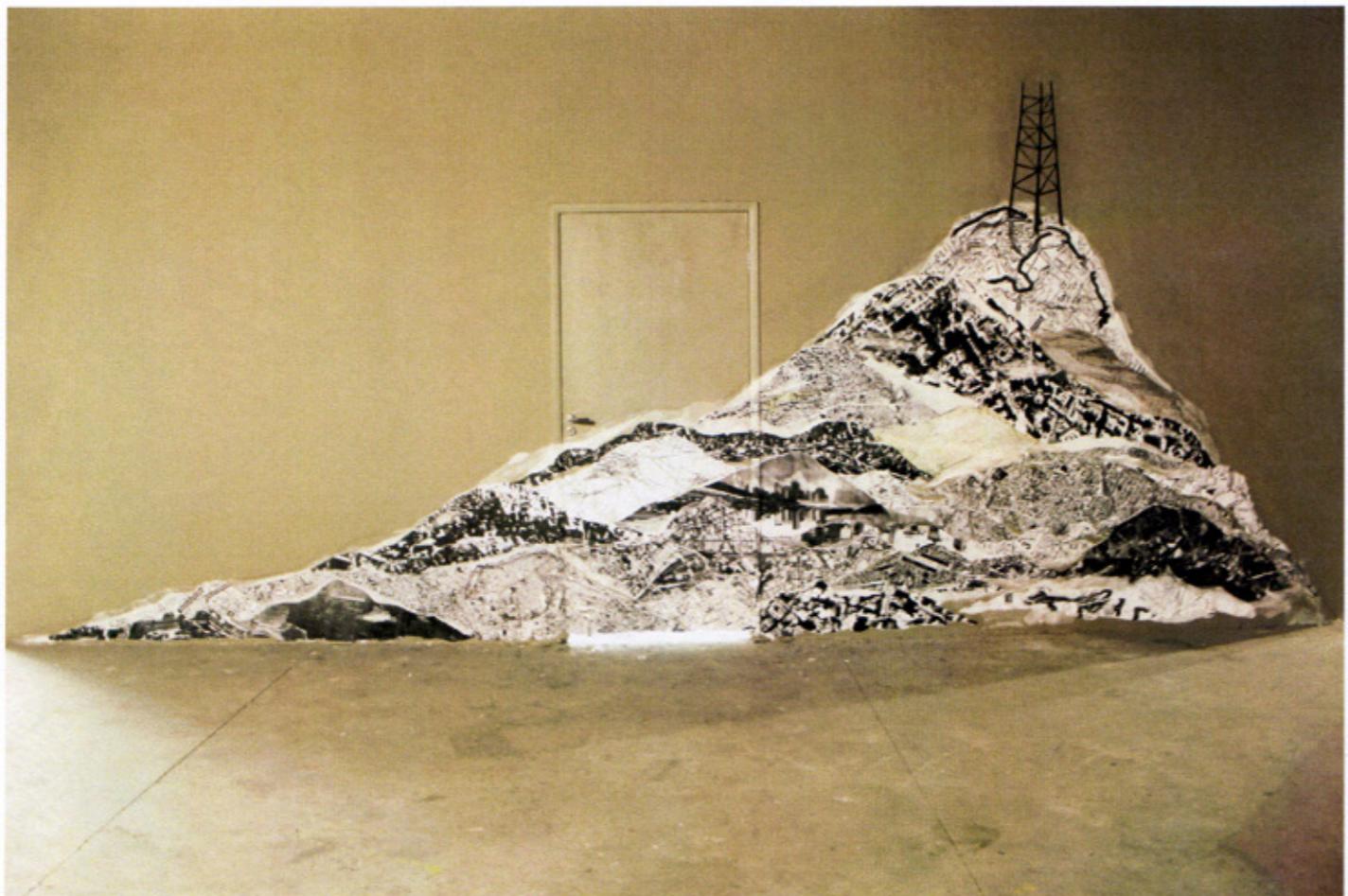


*Barafunda* (from the "De Saida" series) by Bel Falleiros  
12.6" x 15.7" paper collected from the neighbourhood, crayon, chalk, ink, Letraset on paper; 2012. Courtesy of the artist

paper with "To Let" advertisements on them on a large photograph of a typical Manchester red brick building. The artist had previously photographed the "To Let" signs around the city, which he then printed and cut in order to be reinstalled by him on the photograph of the portrayed building. The result, as in Larissa Fassler's *Regent Street*, is an emetic superimposition of "artificial" visual elements on the "natural" architectural texture of the city. One could argue that those two works show an attempt by the inhabitants to repossess the cities in which they live and to humanize the buildings that surround them by attaching human-made signs to the alien architecture that preceded them.

As mentioned before, however, it is not just the visual elements of the city that the artists look for. Two more

works by Larissa Fassler explain this point. In the series "Kotti" (2008-2014), dedicated to the Kottbusser Tor, an emblematic Berlin landmark, Fassler's data collection went beyond the visible and involved the re-drawing of archival photographs, newspaper images, cost projections for redevelopment, municipal reports, Google search results, crime statistics, and even three pages from a novel. As before, all was scanned, cut out and assembled. In the "Schlossplatz" series (2013) named after the site formerly occupied by the recently demolished East German Palace of the Republic and by the earlier, Prussian Berlin City Palace, even more information is layered into the images: the movements, trajectories, activities, and interactions of tourists and the Roma beggars, the weather, where punks sit, where people urinate, the colours of umbrellas, what people



Monumento (an intervention in the basement of the Palace of the Arts, São Paulo) by Bel Falleiros  
118" x 236". Xerox transfer tissue paper, wax paper, graphite on wall, 2012. Courtesy of the artist.

photograph, the location of shell game players, their lookouts, the undercover police who survey them, the dominant colours of the site, the light levels at night or the intensity of the sun and the shadows cast at different times of day. The sites and the people who inhabit them become the subject of analysis, deconstruction and reconstruction in the artist's works, which, in her words, "are ways of understanding the past, present and future of a place and city and even perhaps my place with in it."

Presenting both abstract and concrete elements, the works of Bel Falleiros show how the artist has been able to adapt the technique of collage to the urban experiences, materials and themes that surround her *São Paulo a pé* (São Paulo on Foot, 2007) is one of the artist's first collage works. The artist explored the city where she lives and that she described as "being at the same time one of the biggest metropolises of the world a small countryside town, a rain forest, a g

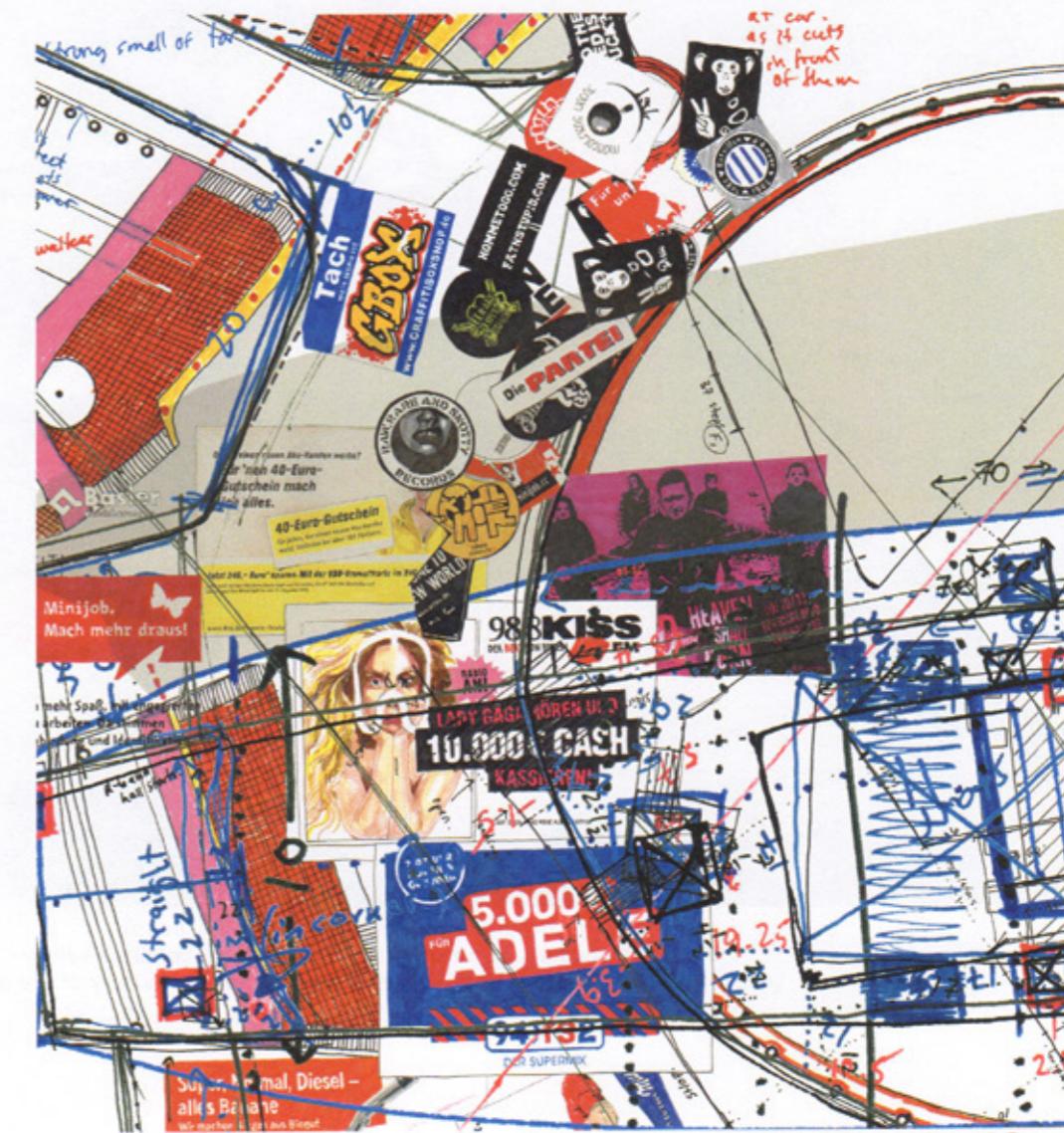
iant slum, a quiet farm, a violent highway, an informal neighbourhood with its own codes, an old and beautiful Art Nouveau European city" by walking through it at a slow pace. From each walk, the artist collected impressions, objects, materials, sounds, stories, photos, stones etc., which she brought to the studio. There she made those personal urban relics cohabit with the images and texts that she found researching in preparation for the walks, as was the case with *Barafunda* (2012) or with other works from the same year, in which she used scraps of paper collected from the streets as building material for her urban landscapes.

Although the concrete action of bringing a piece of the urban landscape (as insignificant as a scrap of paper might be) into an artwork is a common but defining feature in Bel Falleiros' artistic production, *Barafunda* also contains another distinguishing element of her practice. Indeed, the artist mixes the findings of her urban exploration with her memories and feelings in such



Top  
Making an Apartment  
(video stills)  
by Junebum Park  
3 minutes  
single channel, digital video,  
NTSC, silent, colour  
2005  
Courtesy of the artist

Bottom  
Kotti (revisited)  
by Larissa Fassler  
62" x 63"  
fine art print  
2014  
Courtesy of the artist





*Ruins* (from the "Berlin" series) by Bel Falleiros.  
8"x8"x2.4" posters torn from walls, found paper, coloured vellum, Letraset, stamp, pencil, plaster, and ink on wood; 2011. Courtesy of the artist.



*Regent's Street/Regent's Park (Dickens thought it looked like a racetrack)* by Larissa Fassler  
63"x114.6", archival C-print; 2009. Courtesy of the artist.

a way that the urban landscapes that she portrays often become unrecognizable. For instance, the neighbourhood of Barra Funda, where the artist had been living for a long time, is a densely inhabited district in the west of São Paulo. However, through the lenses of her personal experience of and feelings towards the place, Barra Funda was eventually portrayed as a desolated and inhabited and, dominated by chaos--playing on a pun with "barafunda" as a much-used word that means "mess" in Portuguese. A further development in Falleiros' practice is the transition from combining different materials into a single work to assembling the materials she finds on her walks or sketches to form an installation of uncolaged elements. That is the case of *Sobre pedra-Perus II* (2014), a composition of three drawings (two small and one slightly larger) a stone and an old, barely legible badge which belonged to a worker in a cement factory. The evident, but unresolved, tension between the exhibited elements could be read as an invitation to the viewer to make his/her own story and their own visual collage of those elements.

Going back from the minute urban leftovers used by Bel Falleiros in her installations to the macro-level of urban planning, the videos of Jungsun Park become relevant once more. In *Making an Apartment* (2005) and *Making Songdo* (2009) the artist hand builds parts of Seoul's landscape using a technique similar to what he used later in *To Let*. In particular *Making Songdo* is a two-channel, five-minute video that juxtaposes (on the left screen) footage of the actual Songdo construction site, one of the world's largest real estate developments located 64 kilometers south of Seoul, and (on the right screen) the imaginary construction site built by the artist by collage paper cuttings of entire buildings or parts of them on a large photograph of the yet-to-be developed site. The robotic gesture of adding layer after layer to the urban landscape highlights the seemingly unstoppable—and rather nonsensical—expansion of urban landscapes in which human beings cannot play but an ancillary role.