

Home

News

Sport

Business

Travel

Jobs

Motoring

Property

SEARCH

Arts home

Books

Festivals

Film

Music

Stage

TV & radio

Visual arts

Arts blogs

Picture galleries

Seven magazine

Telegraph magazine

Box office

Chess Club

Crossword Society

Horoscopes

Announcements

Arts

Blogs

Comment

Crossword

Dating

Digital Life

Earth

Expat

Family

Fantasy Games

Fashion

Features

Food & Drink

Football

Gardening

Health

Why you'll soon be avant-gardening

Last Updated: 12:01am BST 16/06/2007

By 2030, two thirds of the world's population will live in cities. A new show at Tate Modern shows what their lives will be like. Sukhdev Sandhu reports

• **In pictures: Global Cities**

There was a time, not so long ago, when the phrase "global city" had sheen and swagger. It conjured up images of gleaming corporate towers rising above urban skylines, trading floors full of men yelling "buy buy buy", stiff-necked twentysomethings wearing adjustable-collared stripey shirts and stuffing wads of £20 notes down the knickers of upscale lap-dancers. New York, Paris, Tokyo, Frankfurt: interlinked hubs of Western capitalism whose names, when recited aloud, sounded like the chorus of a Euro-pop anthem.



City limits: Copan tower blocks in São Paulo, photographed by Andreas Gursky

- Horoscopes
- My Telegraph
- Obituaries
- Promotions
- Science
- Sudoku
- Telegraph e-paper
- Telegraph magazine
- Telegraph offers
- Telegraph PM
- Weather
- Your Money
- Your view

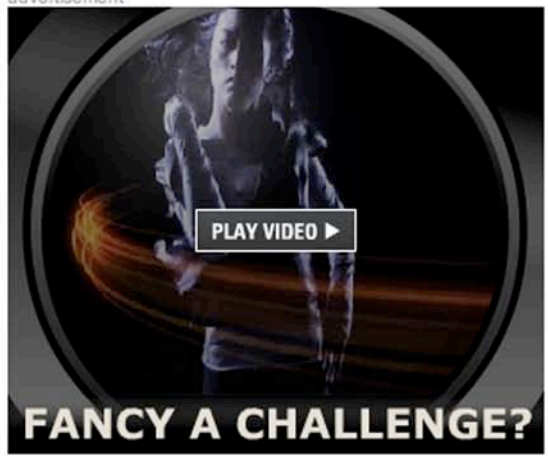
The 10 global cities featured in Tate Modern's new show of the same name, among them Cairo, Shanghai, Istanbul, Mexico City and London, represent something different: they are, mostly, megalopolises that have experienced huge population and spatial growth over the past 20 years because of changes in the world economy. They reveal the seemingly unstoppable rise of urbanism: by 2030, two thirds of the world's population will live in cities, as compared with just 25 per cent a century ago.

"The goal of the show is not to convince visitors that urbanism is good for you," says architect Ricky Burdett who, together with curator Sheena Wagstaff, presented a version of Global Cities to some acclaim at the Architectural Biennale in Venice last autumn, and has brought a remixed version - more focus on London, more artist displays - to Tate. "The goal is to make apparent that a large percentage of the world lives or is moving to cities and to explore the impact of those changes."

Those changes, notated and critiqued by the likes of Zaha Hadid, Rem Koolhaas, Francis Alys and Andreas Gursky, include the emergence of gigantic slums and squatter colonies on the fringes of existing cities, environmentally wasteful geographical sprawl, and growing social polarisation as the rich inhabitants of east London and Johannesburg alike segregate themselves from their poorer neighbours with tall fences and electric gates.

Grand questions - "Can cities be improved by design?", "Can cities promote social justice and create equality?" - overhang the installation of photographs, texts, models and films in the Turbine Hall. But the exhibition, while bringing together urban planning, academic theory and architecture, is also eager to incorporate an element of what Burdett calls "the artist's subjective, soul-outwards" approach to the landscape.

advertisement



Curator Wagstaff prefers to talk about "responsivity" to the environment. She has been keen to programme documentary-rooted films, such as Paromitra Vohra's droll and enlightening Q2P, a futuristic essay about public toilets in Mumbai. These, she thinks, are necessary alternatives to the clichéd urban shots used by architects in their proposals and PowerPoint presentations: "I'm amazed how uncritical they are when it comes to thinking about and using reproduced images," she says. "Too often architectural photos of cities have the same zooms and crazy angles. Or they're of a detail rather than the city proper. Or they look like a picture straight out of National Geographic."

In the early 1980s, London was seen by many politicians and journalists as close to extinction, a ghosted capital full of no-go inner-city ghettos. Burdett points out that Tate Modern stands on the site of an old power station in Southwark, a place that "ten years ago no one knew or ever went to". Now millions of visitors flock there.

London is a success story: organic, messy, a magnet for adventurers and refugees alike. Its growing population is in stark opposition to the steady desertification of many urban areas across Europe; 35,000 builders from Poland and Estonia are scheduled to come to the east of the city to work on Olympic projects alone. Migration of this scale may or may not cause social friction, but it will surely lead to new cultural encounters and energy. For a city, anything, according to Burdett, is better than stasis: "The tendency towards fossilisation is lethal."

- NEWS SERVICES**
- Blackberry service
- Desktop alerts
- Email services
- Home delivery
- Mobile
- Photographs
- Podcasts
- RSS feeds
- Weekly Telegraph

FEATURE FOCUS



Architect Nigel Coates is also buoyant about London. His contribution to the show is *Mixtacity*, a vision for the future of the Thames Gateway that eschews the usual doomy prognostications about how high winds and rising tide levels will submerge the barrack-style houses being planned for service workers in that area. Instead, he has fashioned a ludic cityscape comprising toothpicks, chess pieces, giant hands - and teddy bears dressed in bridal costumes. It is, in every possible sense of the word, fantastic.

"It's not meant to be literal," says Coates. "Architecture is a medium of expression. It's a moment to think, a freedom to express a whole set of ideas. Architects, and especially developers, are very conservative considering London's internationalism, its seething, scintillating mix of cultures. The Thames Gateway should be a city in its own right, not an endless suburb of central London; it shouldn't look like Sweden. There's no use in London hanging on to its cute, village past. It needs intensity."

A different approach, embodying the range of strategies and tactics highlighted in the show, is taken by American artist Fritz Haeg, who has taken over a dishevelled plot of land 10 minutes' walk from the Tate and, with the help of the residents in local council blocks, turned it into an *Edible Estate* elegantly planted with lettuce, herbs and apple trees. His is a modest but significant contribution to "avant gardening", a growing sub-genre of urban intervention in which the modernist city's neglect of nature is replaced by a series of creative gestures, most famously by guerrilla gardening activists who repurpose urban areas of neglected land by replanting them under cover of night.

"Most cities are engineered for isolation," says Haeg. "We're separated from the food we eat by the industrial processes that sustain our lives. Gardens go against immediate gratification. They're slow, tactile, first-hand, unmediated by a TV screen."

His garden is surrounded, in almost panoptic fashion, by separate residential blocks; potential vandals, as well as those locals who tend the fruit and vegetables, are easily visible.

"The *Edible Estate* lies outside the exhibition, but I wanted to make it a public spectacle, almost like a stage. The gardeners are performing for their neighbours."

The estate is a tacit manifesto for the importance of public space as much as it is a horticultural resource. It is a fascinating example of how today's artists need not just record or describe the cities they inhabit; they may actually seek to change them.

- 'Global Cities' is at Tate Modern, London SE1 (020 7887 8888), from June 20-Aug 27.

