

forms & functions



Better living through sterility

Like most things loved by children and feared by parents, dirt has a lot going for it. Architect and designer An Te Liu takes a critical look at the modern obsession with hygiene in *Condition*, a show opening this fall at New York's Henry Urbach Architecture gallery. *Condition* consists of fifty-six air purifiers arranged in a room and all turned on. Liu, whose resume includes stints designing retail clothing outlets and working on models in Frank Gehry's office, is a SCI-Arc graduate who now teaches at the University of Toronto.

Liu suggests that the current popularity of "hygiene machines" is evidence that human beings are uninterested in Le Corbusier's bigger-picture "machine for living." Instead, we retreat inside gated communities and sealed homes that we fill with small-scale objects that let us believe we are controlling the environment. We privately become slaves to purifiers, ionizers and humidifiers, whose authority derives partly from their resemblance to things we see in hospitals. Believing they work is, according to Liu, an act of faith.

Surrounded by three-metre stacks of humming machines, visitors to *Condition* will experience the effects of home-purification-on-steroids. If it's like Liu's previous installations in Los Angeles and Vancouver, some guests will leave feeling cleansed, while others will complain that they've been breathing, as one gallery-goer put it, from "a freshly opened plastic package." But for the hygiene marketers, there is no such thing as overkill: it's in their best interests to sell health as a commodity whose value increases with redundancy.

Condition is on view from September 11 to October 25 at Henry Urbach Architecture in New York (212) 627-0974

HEATHER MACKAY

Architect and artist An Te Liu installs fifty-six air purifiers in *Condition*, opening this fall in New York. By amassing these columns of "hygiene machines," Liu creates a sterile environment to demonstrate what happens when the fear of dirt goes too far.