



**MATHIEU GALLOIS, CAZ COMINO AND VESNA TROBEC**

**1 HOUSE = 1000 HOMES**

# FOR SALE



## 1 House = Housing for 1200 Tungteeya Low-Income Individuals

Located in the Accra Metropolitan Assembly in the capital city of Ghana, The Tungteeya group of the Old Fadama branch of the Ghana Federation of the Urban Poor operates within the worst and largest slum in Ghana. The Old Fadama squatter community lives on 31.3 hectares of land with a high density of 1121 persons per hectare. Located along the Korle lagoon, this is a water-logged area earmarked for open space development for the city. Security of tenure is a major need for this group of the federation.

With the funds available from the 1 house = 1000 homes project, The People's Dialogue on Human Settlements proposes to purchase and develop 2.25 acres of land to house an estimated 1,200 individuals (200 households) in near-city sites in either the Ashaiman or the Kasoa Municipality near Accra.

Estimated Cost per Family:  
AUD \$2800 – AUD \$3100  
Total Project Budget:  
AUD \$560,000 - AUD \$620,000

[www.1house1000homes.com](http://www.1house1000homes.com)



IMAGE: For Sale: The People's Dialogue on Human Settlements, Ghana Caz Comino 2009

## INTRODUCTION

I began talking with Mathieu Gallois about a new visual arts commission for Performance Space in the Autumn of 2007. The project idea was simple and beautiful: a completely white and light, floating house situated in the foyer of CarriageWorks. The house was to be carved and constructed entirely from polystyrene. It was to resemble an existing house 1:1 in scale. The house would hover in space uncannily; slightly elevated from the ground, wavering almost imperceptibly in the breeze. The literally domestically-scaled work would be juxtaposed against the gritty post-industrial interior of the foyer of this great brick building.

However, the *Suspended House* proposal – so simple you can already see it in your mind’s eye – was scrapped by the artist. On some level though (symbolically), it has found its way back into *1 House = 1000 Homes* after several radical project revisions: from a suspended sea container abode titled *Container/Refuge*; to a two-person, ecologically sustainable architectural project entitled *The Bower*. The Australian home, like its minimalist abstraction in the yet unrealised *Suspended House*, floats around the *1 House = 1000 Homes* project as an idea and an archetype to be demolished, dissembled and re-purposed.

Mathieu Gallois is an artist whose practice over the last four years has become informed by a study of architecture and architectural theory. His interest in construction and the primacy of the art object has evolved towards an interest in the subtle uses and affects of built environments: how people occupy them and how they feel when they inhabit them. *1 House = 1000 Homes* is also influenced by Gallois’s association with a group of architects proposing the repurposing of materials used in existing suburban houses to create more energy-efficient and sustainable homes. While the *Reincarnated McMansion* project deals with material redistribution of the standard Australian home, *1 House = 1000 Homes* speculates upon the possibility of its financial redistribution for the benefit of community-based housing projects, and possibly hundreds of families.

Joining forces with graduate architects Caz Comino and Vesna Trobec, Gallois has created a speculative project that has invited international community groups and NGOs to submit housing proposals that could be funded through the sale of an Australian home. This exhibition, which includes artworks by the *1 House = 1000 Homes* team, as well as the community housing proposals, is the beginning of a longer-term campaign to raise funds so that some of these projects may come to fruition.

The six NGOs involved in this project are: Technical Assistance Organisation Inc. (Philippines), Openspace (Thailand), Namibia Action Group, Espacio Expresion (Peru), Society for Promotion of Area Resource Centre (India) and People’s Dialogue on Human Settlements (Ghana). Each organisation’s prospectus has been bound in a hard-copy book and interpreted within a standard Australian real estate sign format, designed by Caz Comino. The installation at Performance Space also includes an array of audio and visual material from each group including architectural plans, photographs, animation and video that represent problematic living conditions, and each group’s attempts to remediate, intervene and educate within communities for the realisation of safe and sustainable futures.

Performance Space would like to acknowledge support for this project, from both funders and the companies and organisations that have offered in-kind support and expertise to the *1 House = 1000 Homes* team: Habitat for Humanity, Australia; Real Estate Institute of NSW; WDA Campaign Track, VFX Digital Print on Demand and AEP Metal Sheetwork. Mathieu Gallois is the recipient of an Australia Council New Work grant through its Visual Arts and Crafts Board. Performance Space's visual arts program is supported by the Visual Arts and Crafts Strategy, an initiative of the Australian, State and Territory governments, the Australia Council, its arts funding and advisory body, and the New South Wales Government through Arts NSW.

Bec Dean

Associate Director, Performance Space



IMAGE: Mathieu Gallois *Frontier (Polystyrene House)*, 1998. Campbelltown neighbourhood development, Blair Athol, NSW Australia. Polystyrene. Scale 1 : 1

## GRAND DESIGNS

*"Okay. Listen to this. With our population of roughly twenty million people, if everyone in Australia mailed just one dollar a week to a certain address and that money was divided by twenty, every single week of the year twenty Australian families would become millionaires."*

*"That's it?"*

*"That's it!"*

*"That's your idea?"*

*"That's my idea."*<sup>1</sup>

The altruistic pyramid scheme hatched by Martin Dean, antihero of Steve Toltz's *A fraction of the whole*, might lack foresight, but the scene reminds us that it is usually those outside the world of high finance – those with little to lose, perhaps – that are most passionate about social change. While artists have a history of addressing social injustice in their practice, few have the means to take a proactive stance in doing something about it. Activist artists of the late 20th century rallied against homelessness, poverty and war, but it is only with today's far-reaching communication technologies that people from the small end of town can garner powerful support for change.

Mathieu Gallois, Vesna Trobec and Caroline Comino belong to a new generation of activist artists who utilise multi-disciplinary skills to address a range of socio-political issues. 20th century precursors include Hans Haacke, whose Shapolsky et al. *Manhattan Real Estate Holdings, A Real Time Social System as of May 1, 1971* (1971) also explored power relations between rich and poor in the context of housing. Haacke's work combined photographs and business documents to reveal how wealthy developers had engaged in fraudulent business practices over two decades to gain a monopoly over slum dwellings in New York.<sup>2</sup> In another project that penetrated the machinations of money-making, Australian artist Michael Goldberg recently traded from an art gallery on the share market over a four-week period in a public interrogation into the vicissitudes of the global financial markets.

People debated whether or not Goldberg's project constituted "art". The artist's response is also relevant to *1 House = 1000 Homes*, a project likely to provoke similar questions: "If [the project] slips between attempts to define it, if it elicits a suspension of the aesthetic categories and criteria of art, then perhaps the viewer is better prepared to consider and reflect on the ethical and political implications embedded in the work...That the arts should be considered as ideologically neutral is anathema"<sup>3</sup> Also in 2002, German artist Maria Eichhorn used her allotted production funds for *documenta* to create a public company with the stipulation, in defiance of capitalist rules, that the original investment can never appreciate in value.

As the world's leading recurrent art event, *documenta* has often provided a forum for artists to be agents of change. The idealistic concept, ambitious scale and seemingly uncomplicated methodology of *1 House = 1000 Homes* is reminiscent, for example, of a work by another great humanist artist of the 20th century's, Joseph Beuys. Invited to take part in *documenta* in 1982, Beuys delivered to Kassel a pile of 7,000 basalt stones, declaring that they could not be moved unless an oak tree was planted for each stone. Stone by stone, day by day, 7,000 oak trees were eventually planted, an enduring testament to art's capacity for social action through participation.



IMAGE: Community Centre Proposal by Espacio Expresion, Peru

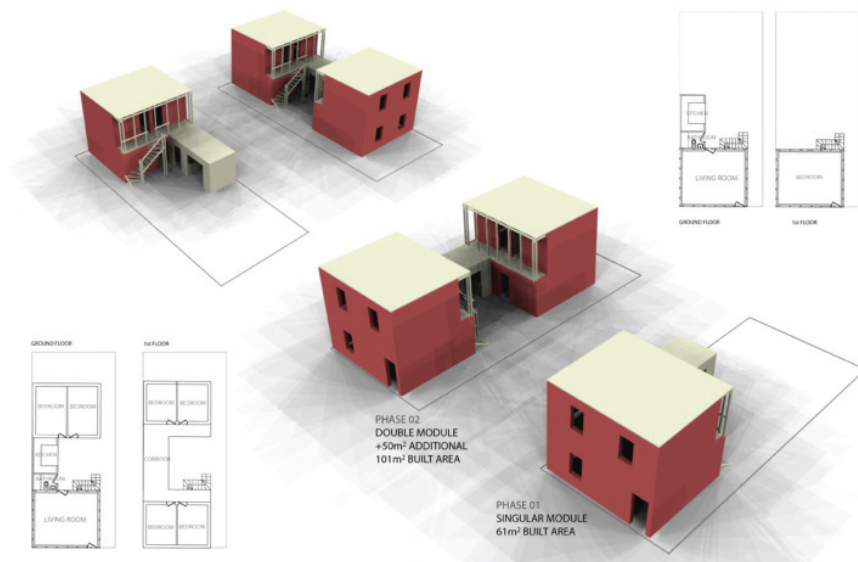


IMAGE: Community Housing Proposal by Espacio Expresion, Peru

Besides its social activist role, *1 House = 1000 Homes* underlines the significance of home to everyone from McMansion to slum dwellers. Shifting geo-political borders that re-define national and social identity, together with the havoc to habitats caused by climate change, have deepened the imperative of people worldwide to have an established home, a base from which to create a structured family life.

The house as a vessel for our dreams and memories is a theme explored by many contemporary artists in recent years. Marina Abramovic's *Dream House*, created for the 2000 Echigo-Tsumari ArtTriennial in Japan, invites guests to sleep over in specially made beds and pyjamas and in the morning record their dreams in a 'Dream Book'. Isabel and Alfredo Aquilizan built for the 2008 Adelaide Biennial a house from gifted household goods, each item redolent with its former owner's life and history, while for the 2006 Gwangju Biennale Song Dong exhibited his mother's Beijing hutong house and contents, revealing the depth of attachment she felt to home.

Conversely, the destruction of neighbourhoods in the name of gentrification is also well documented by artists of today. Ou Ning in Beijing and Squatspace in Sydney, just two examples of many worldwide, have conducted extensive research in the form of photography and video interviews with displaced residents, transient tenants and evicted squatters: the common themes are helplessness and despair, the same feelings experienced by those targeted in the *1 House = 1000 Homes* project.<sup>4</sup>

*1 House = 1000 Homes* foregrounds the importance of having a home. Gallois and his team have chosen not to critique capitalist power, but to harness it in a grassroots, wealth-distribution project that, in contrast to Martin Dean's naïve strategy, has every chance of success. The ultimate public relations opportunity for savvy sponsors in real-estate-obsessed Australia, the project has the potential to help thousands of homeless people overseas while consciousness-raising back in the lucky country.

Felicity Fenner

Senior Curator, Ivan Dougherty Gallery and Deputy Director, Centre for Contemporary Art and Politics at UNSW

<sup>1</sup> Steve Toltz, *A fraction of the whole*, Melbourne: Penguin Group (Australia), 2008, 509.

<sup>2</sup> In a blatant act of censorship to protect the interests of its supporters, the Guggenheim Museum controversially cancelled Haacke's exhibition in which the work was planned to be shown.

<sup>3</sup> Michael Goldberg, *catchingafallingknife: Greed, Fear and Irrational Exuberance – A Game of Financial and Cultural Speculation*, symposium paper delivered at dLux Media *Plaything*, 2003.

<sup>4</sup> See texts by Felicity Fenner, Hou Hanru, Thomas Berghuis and Zanny Begg on the work of A+I Aquilizan, Ou Ning and Squatspace in Fenner (curator/editor), *Concrete Culture*, Sydney: UNSW Ivan Dougherty Gallery, 2008.

## THE HOUSING QUESTION

*But one thing is certain: there is already in existence sufficient buildings for dwellings in the big towns to remedy immediately any real "housing shortage," given rational utilisation of them. This can naturally take place by the expropriation of the present owners and by quartering in their houses the homeless or those workers excessively overcrowded in their former houses.*

Frederick Engels *The Housing Question* in *Volksstaat*, 1872 (trans. Zodiac, June 1995)

Outside, before and after the failed experiment of actual existing communism The Housing Question seems omnipresent. Why, in a civilised world of richness and sophistication, a global world, is there a housing shortage? Why does not the hidden hand of the market ensure that this basic necessity is available? Why cannot the United States and their collective multinational organizations ensure a simple roof over everyone's heads? The theses that examine these questions are numerous and voluminous but like Engels Mathieu Gallois's answer is simple: there is already enough housing, the problem is its distribution.

In the more parochial and politically radical times of the 19th century Engels proposed the redistribution within individual cities through appropriation of the large houses and the redistribution of these to the homeless. Even in our own city today such a solution seems logical if we look around at the quantity of space available in the houses of Sydney, but which is unthinkable and naïve (perhaps dangerous and at least illegal) the instant we open our eyes to the realpolitik of house ownership in Australia. This situation that not only represents one of the largest distortions in taxation policy, it also dominates the misunderstanding of monetary policy conveyed in the media such that the Reserves Bank's major instrument (base interest rate setting) is reported simply in terms of its effect on housing repayments.

Today The Housing Question is global and its solution must also be a global one. With the suspension of belief that art allows, Gallois's contention goes beyond politics and argument by presenting us with the simple choice of donating 1 house to provide 1,000 homes. This is an inspiring choice and a tough challenge. Even a single action in response will be an extraordinary victory for art.

With Gallois, Caz Comino and Vesna Trobec have assembled an exhibition that displays the waiting recipients as ready and able. They demonstrate reliability in providing housing in seemingly impossible circumstances. The houses are well constructed, fitting the requirements of their inhabitants and well suited to their neighbourhoods and environments. On close observation you are assured that your single house donation would give rise to a thousand homes more sustainable than your own, each serving more people and filled with light and air.

Working across the world in Asia, Africa and South America their culture difference belies the similarities in methodology. Creating housing in stressed situations in a background of apparent overcrowding, poverty, disease and lack of sanitation.

Amongst some of the individual organisations whose works are displayed, an umbrella group Slum Dwellers International (founded in 1996 with a membership consisting mainly of women) has consolidated processes and provides a network to share information and experiences.





IMAGE: *Children's Drawings* facilitated by Namibia Housing Action Group, Namibia



IMAGE: *Community Workshop* facilitated by Society for Promotion of Area Resource Centre, India

They are a voice of the urban and not a voice for the urban poor (<http://www.sdinet.co.za/about-us/>). Their strategy is founded on strengthening communities. Starting with economics, daily savings and loans schemes build confidence and interdependence through participation, learning and solidarity. With training, dialogue and negotiation and a small group of professionals to provide technical support, communities replan and rebuild. Local people build their own housing and improve sanitation. Partnerships with the state and NGOs increase the durability of these processes and results are outstanding.

Central to this activity is the architecture of the houses and the artistic expression of the participants. In these projects the true worth of these two professions is borne out. From very little, housing becomes the focus for a better life. The houses are modest in size but rich in typological understanding. With this, each community emphasises its individual characteristics in solving this global problem.

The trio of architecture graduates that have assembled this work demonstrate an architectural sensibility in the assembly of the works more worthy than the architects that dominate our professional media with their ever more extreme and self-indulgent pursuit of seemingly unbuildable shapes, exotic materials and obtuse textual explanations.

In this exhibition you can see a future architecture that the world needs and deserves. Housing is the fundamental constituent element of the city. The typology of housing dialectically gives form to each city's morphology. Therefore the individual character of every city comes from the individuality of the housing typology. These housing projects are forming the future of our cities, a future where housing is universally provided.

As you walk around this exhibition you see that The Housing Question has an answer. A thousand answers are available to each of us.

Peter John Cantrill

Director, Tzannes Associates

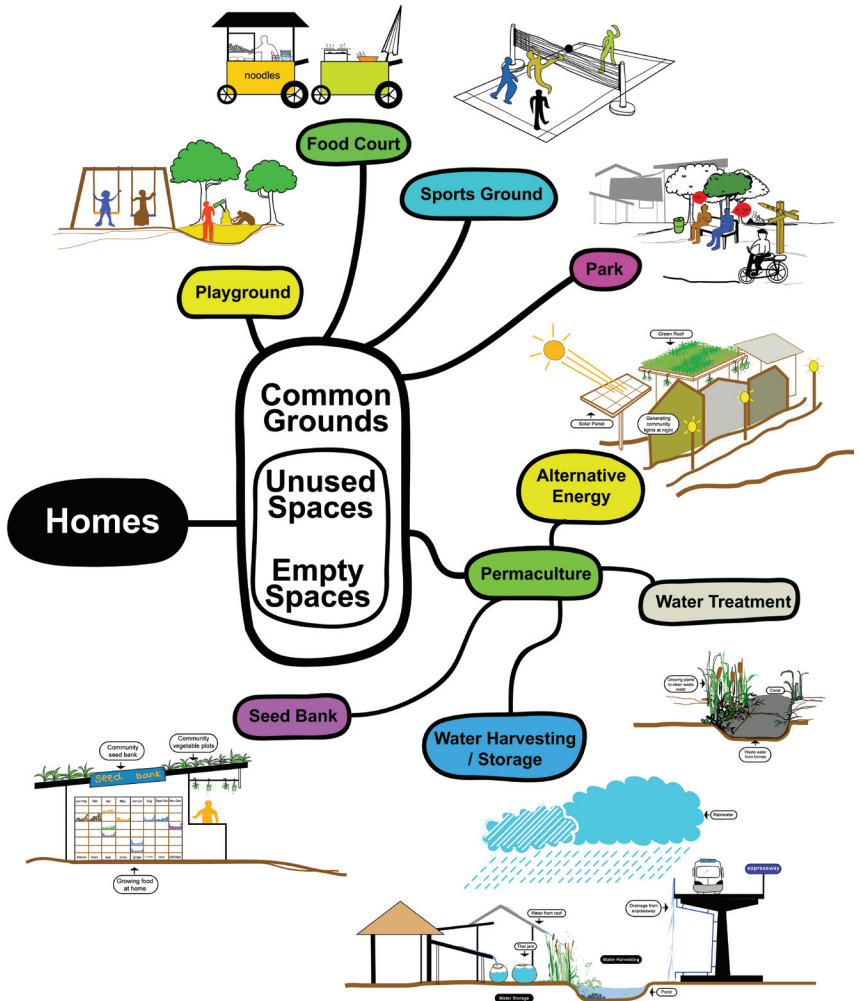


IMAGE: Project Diagram by Openspace, Thailand



## PERFORMANCE SPACE

**Board** Clare Petre, Kate Barnett, Clark Butler,  
Susan Donnelly, Ian Enright, John Gillies, Jann Kohlman,  
Jane McDermott

**Director** Daniel Brine

**General Manager** Julieanne Campbell

**Associate Director** Bec Dean

**Associate Director** Rebecca Conroy

**Dance Producer** Rosalind Richards

**Public Programs** Georgie Meagher

**Indigelab Project Manager** Alison Murphy-Oates

**Production Manager** Tristan Ellis-Windsor

**Technical Manager** Richard Manner

**Media Officer** Di Smith

**Audience Development Officer** Talya Rubin

**Giving Manager** Sandy Saxon

**Accounts Officer** Rhanda Mansour

**Project Administrator** Kristal Maher

**Administrator** Shuxia Chen

## PROJECT SUPPORT

**1 HOUSE = 1000 HOMES**



## PROJECT PARTNERS



## PROGRAM SUPPORT



## SPONSORED BY



[www.1house=1000homes.com](http://www.1house=1000homes.com)

COVER IMAGE: *Documentation of Flooding by Technical Assistance Organisation, Manila.* Photo by: Arlene Christie Luserio  
BACK IMAGE: *1 House = 1000 Homes, building in progress by Caz Comino, Mathieu Gallois and Vesna Trobec.* Photo by Bec Dean

ISBN 978-0-9806742-5-5

Published by Performance Space, Sydney 2009

Copyright © Mat Gallois, Vesna Trobec, Caz Comino,  
Felicity Fenner, Peter John Cantrill and Bec Dean

performance space at carriageworks  
245 wilson st eveleigh  
po box 461 newtown nsw 2042 australia  
t =61 2 8571 9111  
f =61 2 8571 9118  
[www.performancespace.com.au](http://www.performancespace.com.au)