

Playing architect

In a fascinating new show, artists design buildings in ways that stretch the imagination

By DAVID JAGER

Buildings That Spin at the P/M Gallery (1159 Dundas East, #149), to August 26. 416-937-3862. Rating: NNNN

It's fitting that Toronto's current architectural explosion is complemented by a show about imaginary or hypothetical buildings with innovative structural designs. Six artist/architects have submitted nearly realized project plans, images of hypothetical buildings and sculptures that play with the limits of architectural imagination.

Curators Malka Greene and Eve Townsend take the word "spin" as their starting point. The idea originated from an actual 11-storey condo tower in Curitiba, Brazil, whose rotating floors allow all residents to enjoy the view, but it became a metaphor for buildings that push limits.

Dieter Janssen's sleek ultra-contemporary Iceland House is a series of cylinders that were almost built on the volcanic rock bluffs of Iceland. Their interiors contain no walls but can be reconfigured with the use of white felt curtains. Robert Osborne's plans for Africville: Place Of Memory, a community centre in the razed Halifax Afro-Canadian neighbourhood, suggest ways in which negative space and the evocation of ancient structures can serve as a touchstone for collective memory and cultural renewal.

Sara Graham's clean hand-painted diagrams marry the meticulousness of technical drafting with outlandish imaginings. Her Rube Goldberg designs are part engine diagram, part cybernetic fantasy.

Kim Adams continues his love affair with model-building kits and found objects, providing two sculptures that are part Kinder Surprise toy, part Mack truck. His whimsical Fishing Unit is a model of a fishing pond that mounts on an 18-wheeler flatbed, providing a conveniently movable vacation/fishing spot.

In a more conceptual vein, Christopher Allen's handsome series of deteriorating photographs evokes timelessness and decay as limits in the architectural process, while Grace Chan provides a simple set of instructions for making any room spin.

This show underscores how the buildings we live in are products of the constant tension between the imagined and the actual, between our dream homes and the ones we manage to build.