

Adam Shiu–Yang Shaw & Viktor Fordell *placeholders*

September 04 – October 11, 2025



Towards is pleased to present *placeholders*, a two-person exhibition by Adam Shiu–Yang Shaw & Viktor Fordell.

An exhibition text by Alex Turgeon follows:

Urban infrastructure maps the contours of our subjectivity, formed by the residual spaces created by how land is defined, divided and allocated. Civilization operates along this boundary, tracing tensions produced by self-imposed demarcations. What emerges as a result is a cartography of thresholds that are simultaneously connective and divisive, binding together as much as they hold space apart. Within the interstitial zones that constitute the lines of our civic environments, areas that buffer the edges of constructed worlds, a spectrum emerges. Here, cityscapes transition along a series of graduating scale shifts, moving from vertical density of the city centre to the long drawn out horizontality of manufacture. Highways and freeways frame the shape of the periphery, drawing out a linearity of positions between surplus and detritus.

The work of Adam Shiu–Yang Shaw and Viktor Fordell explores these terrains through a process of refraction. Navigating such locations, both artists reconstitute the materiality of their environments through the layering and warping of images. By enacting a kind of flaneurship, sites are recorded and replayed as symbols—or placeholders—that form grounds for intricate compositions. From the anonymity of infrastructural forms, designed to recede into landscape, a formal language is extracted and repopulated back into the topographies vacated by speculative development. Architecture becomes both anchor point and inverted paradigm abstracted through artistic processes, folding itself into dreamlike knots ad infinitum.

While cities are on the move, their circumferential sites fuel cycles of civic renewal and collapse, erection and erasure, eventually serving as tombs for the dried-up husk of capital. Sociologist AbdouMaliq Simone articulates the “surrounds” as a kind of companionship where the built environment accompanies every aspect of human activity. This accompaniment “pays attention to our practices; it bears witness to our travails and attainments. There is always something not used or partially used, something that remains out of reach, something barely noticeable or deemed irrelevant that accompanies all that is standard operating procedure.”¹ Through this framing, the overlooked infrastructural margins are an integral aspect of our humanity, a constant site of authorless influence, attending to everything that we do, make and create.

This kind of relation articulates the interconnectedness of world systems, like a microcosm reflecting its own surrounds as an endless mise en abyme. Its architecture buttresses these relations, functioning both as a backdrop and as substrate from which we fashion our worlds. The city and its margins may not be interchangeable, but they remain interdependent. Their relationship produces familiar patterns, echoing environmental systems: smoke plumes mimic cloud form while influencing weather cycles. Extraction that once flowed like rivers that narrow into quiet streamlets. Rust builds in the residual pools of excavated lots. As civilizations continue to rise and fall, the world becomes evaporated and condensed over and over, eventually falling back to the ground, renewing itself again and again as droplets of rain.

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1. AbdouMaliq Simone, *The Surrounds: Urban Life within and beyond Capture*, Duke University Press, 2022.