

MATTHEW RITCHIE

Matthew Ritchie engages vast bodies of knowledge with a proliferation of media and approaches. Cosmologies, myths of origin, the Big Bang, the role of dark matter, and other unknowable conditions extrapolated from trusted evidence are but a few of the sources that Ritchie explores through layered installations that include painting, drawing, sound, projected images, tarot cards, and sculptural environments. His work demands that the language of rational deduction be subverted to suggest understandings that can be arrived at only through specific, embodied, and contingent experience. Within this array of references and possibilities, the architectural imaginary is an important leitmotif. *Stare Decisis*, 2006, and *The Iron City*, 2007, are two of his works that demonstrate Ritchie's exploration of the architectural imaginary. In one, architecture literally provides an armature for Ritchie's visual vocabulary, while in the other, a hybrid city is proposed as the site of multiple apocalyptic trajectories.

Ritchie's *Stare Decisis* is a series of indoor and outdoor installations created in dialogue with the Wayne Lyman Morse United States Courthouse in Eugene, Oregon, designed by Thom Mayne (pp. 120–21). Mayne's design features curving ribbons of metallic walls to house the judiciary. *Stare Decisis*, the title for Ritchie's series of courthouse installations, is a Latin legal term meaning "to stand by things decided." With its endorsement of a static position, the slogan appears to be in conflict with the fluidity suggested by the building's undulating walls. Yet the slogan as title functions merely as one element in Ritchie's work rather than as an overall description of the project. Inspired by the Willamette river system that is a geographical highlight of the region as well as by Mayne's design, Ritchie created a panoramic lightbox for the building's interior. Double helixes, mountain ranges, and cartographic references all rendered in Ritchie's loose drawing style glow from backlit lenticular glass. The work snakes around corners and extends beyond what one can see from any fixed viewpoint. For Mayne,

Ritchie's installation, "like the architecture that houses it, employs a conceptual strategy that reinforces both the necessity of persistence and the openness and freedom afforded to law and architecture by interpretation."¹

Similarly, *The Iron City* is a three-dimensionally rendered environment with which viewers interact. It features motion tracking software and a processing program that translates physical movement into layers of sound. Pulling from a wide range of sources and time periods, the artist conflated aspects of two actual cities and others that he imagined. Through a round aperture evoking the porthole of a ship or the lens of a camera, the viewer experiences a post-apocalyptic environment awash in ocean waves and sepia tones. Collapsing bridges and decaying piers are glimpsed from below. A lulling narrative—the sequence of which is determined by viewer movement in the gallery—accompanies the imagery and alludes to scenarios that may have caused the entropic conditions rendered in the film. The *Iron City*'s soundtrack includes recordings of the earth's magnetic fields, a piece of music entitled "The City Didn't Sleep," and an anonymous recording of the spiritual "Ezekiel Saw a Wheel." This work draws on the time Ritchie spent living close to the abandoned docks and waterfronts of London and New York. Embedded in *The Iron City* is Ritchie's experience of violence and disaster in both cities (IRA attacks in London, the bombing of the World Trade Center), but from these specific references the broader theme of cyclical urban decline and renewal emerges.

1. Thom Mayne in Klaus Kertess et al., *Matthew Ritchie* (New York: Rizzoli International Publications, 2008), unpaginated.