



# SHOTGUN

Atelier Bow-Wow in collaboration with  
Assistant Professor Jesús Vassallo  
and students of the Rice School of Architecture  
course "Learning from Houston"

**30 January – 15 March 2015**

## SUPPORT AND SPONSORSHIP

Rice Gallery exhibitions and programs receive major support from the Rice University Art Gallery Patrons. Additional support comes from Rice Gallery Members; the Mid-America Arts Alliance, the Robert J. Card, M.D. and Karol Kreymmer Catalogue Endowment; and the Leslie and Brad Bucher Artist Residency Endowment. The Gallery receives partial operating support from the City of Houston; KUHF-FM and Saint Arnold Brewing Company provide in-kind contributions.

This exhibition has received major support from the Graham Foundation for Advanced Studies in Fine Arts. Additional support comes from Rice University's Office of the Provost's Arts Initiative and Rice University's Center for Engaged Research and Collaborative Learning (CERCL). This exhibition would not have been possible without the support and collaboration of Dean Sarah Whiting, Professor Jesús Vassallo and the students of the Rice School of Architecture.

## HOURS

Rice Gallery is open Tuesday through Saturday, 11:00 – 5:00, Thursday until 7:00, and Sunday, noon to 5:00.

GALLERY ADMISSION IS FREE

**Rice Gallery**  
ricegallery.org



At the center of Rice Gallery sits *SHOTGUN*, a house-like structure inspired by Houston's historic row houses. The title for the installation comes from the row house's common nickname "shotgun," a term coined to describe its corridor-like layout that allows a clear path or "shot" from front to back door. This deceptively simple form of architecture, comprised of understated geometry (an elongated box with a pitched roof) and basic construction, was often passed down without formal plans or drawings and made from scrap wood or inexpensive lumber. Principals Yoshiharu Tsukamoto and Momoyo Kaijima of Tokyo-based architecture studio Atelier Bow-Wow collaborated with Rice School of Architecture (RSA) Assistant Professor Jesús Vassallo and students of the Rice School of Architecture to dig far beneath the surface of this assumed simplicity and to celebrate the row house's ingenuity. Over the fall semester of 2014, Atelier Bow-Wow and Jesús Vassallo taught the course "Learning from Houston" to intensively study the row house's history and contemporary condition and to simultaneously use this research to design and build a new site-specific installation for Rice Gallery. In its interdisciplinary focus, the project is a continuation of Rice Gallery's approach to installation art which embraces experimentation across disciplines from interior design (White Webb) to product design (Karim Rashid) to architecture (Shigeru Ban, Ball-Nogues Studio).

In *SHOTGUN*, five row houses merge into one another at the center of the gallery to create a space that visitors can enter and walk through. Nearly a 1:1 scale prototype of a distorted row house, each wing of the asterisk-shaped structure suggests a domestic space with seating and shelving that contains a different research project done by a student group. The last of these spaces features a selection of the students' individual proposals that imagine new possibilities for the row house's design and use. The installation's distortion of the row house is a metaphor for a semester of work where the row house as a basic form was pulled apart to understand all its incarnations and uses. In the final installation, these threads of study are brought back together in a singular structure that is whole yet remains open and multi-faceted with multiple entry and exit points.

Atelier Bow-Wow have an international reputation for an idiosyncratic and radically interdisciplinary approach to studying forms of vernacular or everyday architecture. It is no surprise then that the row house was chosen as the focus for the Rice seminar and gallery installation, especially considering Bow-Wow's particular interest in the study of small buildings. In their seminal book *Pet Architecture* (2001), the architects analyze how a neighborhood corner store or motorbike shop seemingly grows out of the cracks of the city. With space at a premium in urban Tokyo, retail and domestic spaces occupy small and irregularly sized lots. Their look and function is a result of a complex web of economic and social conditions, as well as by the user's unpredictable license to reshape a building physically and functionally. This holistic research into often overlooked and understudied architecture then informs Bow-Wow's own architectural designs. For instance, their famous Machiya homes built in Japan fit in tight, narrow spaces, akin to the "pet" architecture they have closely studied. Such designs by Bow-Wow do not only meet closely observed conditions of urban life, but also hope to provoke new ways we might relate to one another and our built environment, whether in private homes or public spaces. Examples of their innovative projects also include their series of art installations called "micro public spaces," like *Monkey Way* (2006), *Life Tunnel* (2008), and *Rendez-vous* (2010), that are intended for visitors to use, occupy, climb, traverse, and activate.

Throughout the course "Learning from Houston," Atelier Bow-Wow, Jesús Vassallo, and the RSA students' study of the row house applied these complex methodologies to the city of Houston to contribute to scholarly discussions in the fields of art, architecture, urban studies, sociology and politics of sustainability, affordable and smaller housing, vernacular architecture, humanitarian design, and public space. Dividing into groups for the seminar, student teams studied different aspects of the row house to present as part of the final installation. One group's "actor

network" researches the chronologic evolution of the social, economic, and environmental forces that enabled the row house's historical emergence as a form of housing generated and primarily used by African-American communities. This historical study seeks to pose the question of what conditions would allow for the row house's re-emergence today. Extensive research has also been carried out in the form of a documentary photography survey, mapping the current condition of the surviving shotguns in the third and fifth wards of Houston. In addition to its value as a snapshot of the current condition of this architectural heritage, the survey also portrays the small public spaces created by the clusters of houses and the type of shared life that they foster. Similarly, another team of students traced the genealogy of the architectural type, through the changes in its plan configuration, linking those changes to economic and social parameters, such as building codes, tax breaks, or dynamics of development. Finally, another student group created Ikea-like diagrams to outline the construction techniques and materials used to construct shotgun homes. Throughout this study of building technology, special attention was given to the connections to the forestry and lumber industries that situate the small row houses at the center of larger economic, infrastructural, and logistical relationships.

After developing these different research approaches, and as a form of conclusion, the students then put forward their own individual design proposals for the future of the row house. Student Yutian He's *Interdependent House* project, for instance, salvages a number of derelict row houses across the Fifth Ward and regroups them in a networked pattern in a new site, in order to create a school campus. Kerry Joyce's *Retirement Shotgun* seeks to enhance the intimate common spaces created by these groups of houses, conjoining the front porches to create a stronger whole in the design of a small retirement community. A final example, Pablo Ruiz Otaolaurruchi's *Ghosted Shotgun*, refurbishes two twin shotguns to accommodate a large flexible space and a series of smaller services in a radical yet restrained project for a neighborhood community center.

After being forgotten and neglected for most of the second half of the twentieth century, the row house has recently become the focus of a renaissance. Institutions like Project Row Houses and Rice Building Workshop have pioneered groundbreaking efforts to preserve the row house, both as a symbol of community life and a form for contemporary affordable housing. This project hopes to pay homage to the work already done and to open the conversation up even further to new possibilities and ideas. It encourages us to try to imagine the conditions that may allow for this efficient and essential architecture to thrive again.

#### ABOUT ATELIER BOW-WOW

Since their founding in 1992, Tokyo-based firm Atelier Bow-Wow have designed over 40 private homes throughout Japan and numerous public buildings, such as the Hanamidori Cultural Center, Towada Art Center, and Ikushima Library. Their publications include *Echo of Space/Space of Echo* (2009), *Graphic Anatomy* (2007), *Pet Architecture* (2001), and *Made In Tokyo* (2001). Their work was the subject of *The Architecture of Atelier Bow-Wow: Behaviorology* (2010, Rizzoli). They have exhibited internationally, including the 12th Venice Architecture Biennale (2010), Liverpool Biennale (2008), Venice Biennale (2008), and 27th Sao Paulo Biennale (2006).

#### ABOUT JESUS VASSALLO

Jesús Vassallo is an architect and writer from Madrid, Spain. He studied architecture at Harvard University, and Escuela Técnica Superior de Arquitectura de Madrid. For years he practiced as a project architect in the firm Mansilla + Tuñón, before moving to Houston in 2012 to become part of the Rice School of Architecture faculty. His design and research revolve around the idea of realism in architecture, with an emphasis on the connections between the aesthetic and political components of the problem. His writings on the topic have been published in numerous international publications such as *AA Files*, *Harvard Design Magazine*, *Domus*, or *Arquitectura Viva*. Since 2011 he is also editor of *Circo* magazine.

#### STUDENTS

Bader Albader, Jacob Andrew, Amanda Chang, Ningxin Cheng, June Deng, Edison Ding, Yutian He, George Hewitt, Joshua Howard, Sara Jacinto, Kerry Joyce, Yi-chiao Lee, Priscilla Leung, Joey Liang, Eleanor Ma, Marcel Merwin, Jaime Pagés Sánchez, David Richmond, Pablo Ruiz Otaolaurruchi, Chris Yuan.