Above and detail: Ellen Driscoll with Rose Heydt, Dianne Hebbert, Megan McLaughlin, and Ponnapa Prakkamakul, *Distant Mirrors*, 2011. Recycled HDPE plastic, Styrofoam, and concrete anchors, 3 elements, 156–384 x 180–204 x 20–30 in. each.

Ellen Driscoll

Distant Mirrors

Providence River, RI

Plastic bottles floating in the river are not a usual source of inspiration, but last fall, Ellen Driscoll and her associates turned this all-too-common sight on its head, floating island sculptures made from recycled water and milk bottles in the Providence River. *Distant Mirrors* consisted of three main islands, one based on a map of Roger Williams's Providence Plantation, divided into 52 separate plots for his followers, and two smaller islands in the shape of the North American landmass and its mirror image, connected to shapes representing the oil fields of Canada, Nigeria, Venezuela, Mexico, and Saudi Arabia (all major U.S. suppliers).

Though Driscoll had already been exploring the concept of floating sculptures for some time, she determined the exact references of the work after choosing a location and realizing the proximity of the Providence River to the Roger Williams National Memorial. A 17th-century English Protestant theologian, Williams was an idealist, a proponent of the separation of church and state and the fair treatment of Native Americans. When Driscoll first set the Providence Plantation island out on the river in September 2011, it was covered by meticulously crafted cabins and huts, like those inhabited by early settlers and the local Narragansett tribe. After two weeks, she replaced the utopian settlement with oil refineries, a McMansion, and a cramped working-class housing project. Similar structures also appeared on the other two islands.

By combining local history with the global problems spawned by oil dependence, Driscoll crafts an unsettling allegorical narrative in which it appears "as if the disappointments of Roger Williams's early 'lively experiment' (as it was called) create reverberations in our own time. His colony was eventually burned to the ground in an act of violence that resulted from increasing tensions between native people and white settlers." In the end, greed and self-interest won out against the ideals of equality. "To me," Driscoll continues, "this has an eerie resemblance to the heedless competition for dwindling resources that we now see on a global scale—in the pursuit of oil, in particular, and in the increasing privatization of water." It is hard to imagine that a project that addresses so many complex and almost universal issues (oil, water, recycling, utopian society, history) could float so serenely in the middle of a small river in Rhode Island.

Mark Reigelman and Jenny Chapman

Manifest Destiny!

San Francisco

Walking down Bush Street in downtown San Francisco, passersby may be surprised to look up and see a wooden cabin jutting from the outer wall of the Hotel des Arts, high above Le Central bistro. The first project created by the "bi-coastal public art collaboration" of Mark Reigelman and Jenny Chapman, *Manifest Destiny!* is scheduled to stay up through the end of October.

Both the artists' working processes and their final product counter-intuitively combine old and new technologies and mindsets. In *Manifest Destiny!*'s planning stages, Chapman investigated possible sites on her bicycle, while Reigelman perused Google Street View from his home in Brooklyn. As Reigelman points out, "Everything we do is digital; from conversations and sketches, to meetings and site visits…We had so many ways of reaching each other, and used them so frequently, it was hard to believe that there was a country between us." New technologies also play a part in the finished work; solar panels on the roof collect power to light the interior of the cabin at night.

Beyond the unexpected spectacle of a high-rise cabin in San Francisco, *Manifest Destiny!* mounts a subtle investigation into the defining U.S. doctrine behind its name. The siding is salvaged from a barn in Ohio (where both artists are from), and the press release is designed to imitate the style of 19th-century print materials. "We embraced the complexity of the subject matter and found inspiration in both the positive and negative connotations," Reigelman explains. "We are critical of Western exceptionalism, and the arrogance of believing in a god-given right to settle territory despite existing occupants. But at the same time,