While many proclaim crisis at the prospect of a new geologic era in which human activity has radically altered the earth’s morphologic and atmospheric surface, architects have absorbed the premise as a provocation for disciplinary speculation. The fact of human impact on climatic, geomorphic, and ecological systems triggers the architectural impulse to reimagine the terms by which we define our present and future relationship to the environment, challenging binaries such as natural and artificial, inside and outside, subject and object. Architecture is in a unique position to contribute to this process as it “exists as both fiction and reality simultaneously...The actualization of the imaginary into the real is architecture’s fundamental mode.” This process of actualization happens through the act of representation, in the production of drawings and fabrications that are both artifacts in their own right and instructions for the construction of something new.

Our recent installation, *Make an Anthropo-Scene*, explores a mode of architectural representation that we call the “dioramic caricature.” Defined by the continuum that exists between two and three dimensions, the “dioramic caricature” couples the immersive world-making potential of the diorama with techniques associated with caricature—simplification, distortion, exaggeration, and humor. The conventions of both the diorama and the caricature are associated with the representation of life. In the case of the diorama, life is portrayed in situ, depicting a “realistic” context that provides narrative and empathy to the experiences of the individual creature. Alternatively, the caricature depicts life distilled to an essential character, telling a story that privileges an observer’s bias and perspective at the expense of realistic detail and irrelevant background information. As a hybrid condition, *Make an Anthropo-Scene* explores the potential for architecture to operate as both a diorama and a caricature simultaneously—reducing form to a simplified volumetric outline and a slightly erroneous and cartoonish shadow that makes occupiable space within and around a shallow alcove.

Located at the School for the Art Institute of Chicago, the site-specific installation is set within a 30 foot-long alcove along the intersection of the School’s primary circulation paths—a bank of elevators and a wide corridor that connects two sides of the building—and can be approached from three different directions. While the shallow two-foot depth of the alcove is typically used to display drawings and models, it is in fact wide enough to suggest and invite occupation. The installation capitalizes on and highlights these features of the site to create an occupiable destination along a stretch of hallway that is typically a bustling thoroughfare. Passersby are invited to pop their head in, be hugged by, or sit between these creaturely figures—to become a part of the ever-changing scene.

On one hand, the project reads as a line drawing of simple abstracted figures overlapping in elevation. On the other, the surface of the drawing is folded in plan, moving into and out beyond the boundary of the alcove, creating nooks and crannies for occupation and interaction with the characters that frame, cuddle, and speak with users. By leveraging the disciplinary trope of the line drawing in a volumetric way, the project portrays an expanded environment of interaction and companionship, prompting human engagement with overlapping creature-like architectural forms.

The creaturely figures composed within the installation are generated by projecting two-dimensional profiles along the three-dimensionally creased surface. This technique produces a dynamic family of graphic figures that modulate from multiple vantage points, alternating the privilege of the frontal view from the elevator landing with the oblique views elicited while strolling down the corridor. It renders the figures neither purely frontal nor in-the-round, and condenses both pictorial and sculptural perception into a single architectural gesture. The outcome is a flickering legibility that snaps into and out of completion and wholeness. The aggregation of parts is just legible enough to suggest a possible idea or story, yet open enough to invite its audience to fill in gaps or generate alternative scenarios through their participation and invention.

As graphic distillation of an already reduced likeness, shadows often play a particularly important role in the practice of caricature. For example, in the work of the French caricaturist J.J. Grandville, the shadows exhibit uncanny misalignments with the three-dimensional figures from which they are projected. The shadows in fact reveal quirks and oddities about the inner characters of the figures that transform our understanding of their identities. Likewise, in *Make an Anthropo-Scene* the shadows present an alternative version of the three-dimensional characters with which they are associated. With a limb shifted here or a head enlarged there, these shadows serve to reinforce the idea that these identities are fluid and that with a mere shift in perspective, a dinosaur might just as easily identify as a puppy dog.

Set within the cultural milieu of the Anthropocene, the dioramatic caricature can be used to produce a provocative, yet not quite complete image of an alternative world where an animated collective life expands the boundaries of its environment to include various subjectivities of both the non-human and inanimate kind. Through this interaction, our own
subjectivity is augmented and altered by the subjectivity of other creatures and objects, and perhaps rendered a little less singular and self-important. To be clear, the installation does not presume to solve the problem of environmental degradation by the human race. Rather, we intend to make an animate scene and call others to action to join in the making of the scene as well. In the process, we hope to punch a small, cartoon-shaped hole in the fabric of reality in order to suggest that an alternative world is possible.

1 Sam Jacob, *Make it Real: Architecture as Enactment* (Moscow: Strelka Press, 2012).