

Working on the Failed Utopia 2005

Christine Tarkowski (American, b. 1967)

Commissioned by the Art in Architecture Program,

State of Illinois Capital Development Board

Collection of the Nathan Manilow Sculpture Park

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Tarkowski, born in Norwich, Connecticut, earned her BFA at Parson's School of Design and an MFA from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago. She lives and works in Chicago.

Working on the Failed Utopia highlights elements of Tarkowski's methodology and points the way to recent installation pieces.

Between 2000 and 2004, she examined the tenuous relationship between "fine" and "applied" art, wrapping buildings in wall paper wrought at a monumental scale. This called attention to decaying inner city structures and shifted perceptions of the potential for wallpaper to transform an object or space into an aesthetic statement.

Working on the Failed Utopia incorporates print technology developed in these earlier works.

Here, instead of transforming an object, it is the "stuff" depicted in her panels which is transformed. Tarkowski photographed the urban detritus near her studio. Through composition and repetition she elevates this garbage (discarded Roman candle tubes, Modelo beer cans, chicken bones, Newport cigarette boxes) to the level of pattern and creates a unifying surface design.

Tarkowski writes, "**Working on the Failed Utopia** is not a dystopia . . . but like all utopias, *failed* even before the first shovel struck dirt . . . doomed from the moment its founder pronounces the capital "U."

In a 2006 exhibition at Chicago's Museum of Contemporary Art, Tarkowski used elements of the geodesic dome structure in **Imitatio dei**, an installation work incorporating wood, concrete, glass, and energy efficient lightbulbs.