

Will Corwin's Tanis: Welthauptstadt at Chashama

by Rebecca Brunn, [The Abe's Penny Blog](#)
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You're strolling along 37th St by 8th Avenue—maybe you just got out of work, maybe you're paying a visit to the Empire State Building—when you happen upon a tiny, whited-out storefront under the name Chashama. You don't think much of it, a new store is probably opening, or maybe a new cafe. But something is amiss. You notice that the glass is not entirely concealed, that there are minuscule holes in the paint that allow you, upon pressing your eye to the glass, to peek into the store. Intrigued, you look into the peepholes one by one. The peepholes reveal fractions of a model city, though whether it's brand new or already destroyed, you cannot tell.



The enigmatic storefront is Will Corwin's new installation entitled [Tanis: Welthauptstadt](#). Tanis refers to the ancient Egyptian city as depicted in *Raiders of The Lost Ark*, while Welthauptstadt represents Hitler's redesign of Berlin as the World's Capital. Corwin, at the opening of the installation, explained his inspiration further:

"It seems diametrically opposed because it's George Lucas and Steven Spielberg and the Ark of The Covenant, but then you also have the Nazis. It was just one of those weird art connections that you can make visually but doesn't really exist philosophically. Both of them are white cities made out of plaster or clay that reference some kind of magical idea, one is incredibly evil and the other is very mystical."



The installation itself is indeed a model city, or rather a mutation of it. Taking up about three quarters of the inside space, the model is currently composed of equal parts completed, intact structures and crumbling, shattered debris. But that doesn't mean that's how it's going to stay.

“The whole idea is that while I build it, it falls down. So over the next couple days I think I will keep adding to it so that by Friday it'll be more of a mess, and it really does look like this archaeological ruin...I see that as the opposite of the architectural master plan, which is the reality, which is things falling apart.”

Yet the evolution and inevitable devolution of the city as a whole is beyond the common viewer. The vast majority of those who view the installation will see it as the artist intended, which is solely through the peepholes. This curious method is itself the piece's most affecting aspect, as it manages to convey the complexity of the artist's statement without allowing its viewers to ever see the art.

“It fits in with the fascism too, of not being able to do anything, so you have this peephole and you know there's something really big and fantastic through the peephole but you can only see a little tiny bit of it”

The peepholes are also an homage to the pivotal scene in *Raiders of The Lost Ark* where in the map room, Indiana Jones is led to the Book of Souls by a guiding beam of light emanating from the jewel. The focused points of view created by the peepholes mimic the beam of light, suggesting that there is something of import to be found in those places. This concept turns the “ideal city” notion on its head. Rather than being a frustrating obstacle that prevents the viewer from seeing the whole, the peepholes are tools the viewer can use to observe the significant areas. The view from the peephole becomes the whole. Perhaps more importantly, when observed within the Indiana Jones frame of mind, the model city takes on a whole new life: a discovered archaeological ruin. Hence the initial question, Is it a plan for a new city or remnant of an old one? It is certainly both, an impossible city that is always being built while always being destroyed.

This eternal perpetuity of creation and destruction (in theory anyway, since the installation comes down on Monday) gives the installation a doomsday tint, and Corwin himself exists as the city's blithe architect of destruction. His role is to build structures engineered to collapse. How could a city like this survive? It can't, and no ideal city for the most part has. Corwin's city, though, unlike the plans for new Berlin, exists outside the boundaries of time, using the city itself as a metaphor. He, as dictator of the Chashama storefront, built a city and preempted the inevitable overthrow by building destruction into its design.

“No one really ever makes models of collapsed buildings because it seems pointless. But on the other hand, most of the time you make models of buildings that never actually are built. So everyone wants to design this city of the future, but the real city is usually bombed or destroyed or it decays over time, so it’s really like building the reality of the city of the future which is that it’s dug up 5,000 years from now and there’s nothing left of it.”

Tanis: Welthauptstadt is on display until Monday at 266 West 37th St. Whether the peepholes will reveal a taller grander plaster city or a pile of rubble only the architect knows.