

FOREST CITIES:

The Amazon Between Ruins and Resilience

The 20th century brought a developmentalist model to the Amazon, introducing external economic growth plans that reshaped the forest. In this context, dozens of cities emerged, inspired by diverse concepts. These ranged from cities designed by enterprises from the Global North to serve as company-towns for extractive industries, to experimental models with architecture adapted to the tropical climate, and agro-villages rooted in the ideal of rural urbanism. These urban networks, driven by the expansion of the global commodity market, left an indelible legacy on modern Amazonia, influencing its geopolitical, cultural, and ecological landscapes.

These technocratic utopias triggered agrarian conflicts, deforestation, and human rights violations, as the imposition of the so-called technosphere replaced Indigenous land-use practices and cosmologies. Many of these cities were eventually abandoned, becoming wastelands surrounded by industrial ruins. Others persisted as hubs of contemporary extractivism.

This photography exhibition examines the ruins of extractive cities in the Amazon from both human and more-than-human perspectives. It focuses on two cities that were pivotal during the final stages of the rubber boom: Velho Airão and Fordlândia. Velho Airão, a colonial city founded in 1694, became a center for latex extraction in the early 20th century, but did not survive the end of the rubber era. Today, it lies abandoned, its human-made structures slowly reclaimed by Amazonian flora. Fordlândia, by contrast, was established by the Ford Motor Company in 1927 to extract and process rubber for the automotive industry. Some of its industrial structures have been repurposed by the local population.

The ruins of latex extraction tell a tale of urban areas created as transient tools for natural resource exploitation, now standing as Anthropocenic ghosts. They also foreshadow the future of an increasing number of regions in the Amazon and around the world if humanity continues to pursue unbridled extractivism that enriches a few, while neglecting both human and more-than-human communities. At the same time, these sites inspire reflection on counter-narratives of abandonment, the resilience of social and ecological systems, and the way forward for these forest-cities.



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