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Review

# “Communal Spaces / Community Places / Common Rooms”

**Institute for Advanced Architecture**, through Jul 20 (see Lower East Side)

If there were an award for communicating the highest-minded concepts with the lowest-key materials, this show would win hands down. It consists of little more than some printed papers mounted on the lobby walls of a down-at-the-heels office building on the Lower East Side. Yet the *raison d'être* of the show—which documents proposals for successful communal, if not utopian living spaces—is the premise that a better future awaits.



Installation View

Photo: Courtesy Common Room

The architectural collective Common Room (located in an office upstairs) has curated with a less-is-more approach. The group simply translated selections from a single 2003 issue of the German political-architectural journal *Architektur* into English, made one or two modifications, and then stuck the results (and related images) to the walls. The text is dense, and the illustrations more so, yet the show is inspiring. We learn about the Danish “freetown” of Christiania, the Wohnhöfe single-building communes of Austria and the Steilshoop social housing project in Germany. Smartly, Common Room also adds two examples of successful LES collectives to *Architektur's* mix; one is arts nonprofit ABC No Rio, the other is a NORC (Naturally Occurring Retirement Community) serving the needs of seniors living in Co-op Village—right outside the lobby's doors.

In this NORC, the seniors take care of themselves. They bring each other food, encourage neighbors to get outside, exercise and stay healthy. They're aging in their apartments, not in nursing homes and in George Bush's America that's practically utopian.

— Sarah Schmerler

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