

Close to Home



"The High Anxiety Living Room" by Sally Minker

Organized by Susan Hoeltzel

Essay "Close to Home: An Homage to Hestia" by Patricia J. Thompson

September 4 - October 29, 1996

Lehman College Art Gallery

Introduction

CLOSE TO HOME is an exhibition of large-scale installations and mixed media works inspired by the poetry, labor, romance, and humor of domestic life. It includes the work of Steven Brower, Esperanza Cortes, Taylor Davis, Ellen Driscoll, Lisa Hoke, Nene Humphrey, Sally Minker, Michael Pribich, Rhonda Roland Shearer, Jeanne Tremel, and Bettina Werner.

These artists explore the contents of home as source material, probing the familiar and the mundane. Their art is from everyday life—an art of the personal, the discarded, the overlooked, the outgrown. Nontraditional materials and “found objects”—scouring pads, buttons, blankets, spoons, salt, sofas, beds, and other household items—produce striking results in terms of their formal qualities, combining aesthetic appeal, epistemological insight, and sometimes a wry humor. Sally Minker’s frenetic parody, “The High Anxiety Living Room,” is a life-size, walk-in installation with an octopus-like phone system, flashing VCR, TV on the fritz, and Cubist furnishings, providing a richly detailed look at Americana in the Age of Anxiety. Steven Brower’s replica of Frank Lloyd Wright’s Robie House fashioned from Domino’s Pizza boxes mixes metaphors of Prairie-style suburbia, combining high art and fast food. In another work, Brower creates a miniature construction site, with sheetrock walls in progress inside buckets of joint compound.

There is a sense of irony in the use of the found object in many of these art works. Jeanne Tremel creates two-dimensional works which read at a distance as paintings. Fashioned from powder puffs, scouring pads, dental floss, twist ties, and doilies, her unconventional media is at once quirky and beautiful. Most of the found objects come with a history. Michael Pribich’s blankets, pillows, and mattresses combined with construction materials carry the marks of use and signs of life, something the artist describes as an “inherent presence.” Their decorated surfaces impose the personal on the mass produced. Traces of wear and tear suggest earlier owners and allude to those without homes as well. Lisa Hoke also mines the ordinary. Her installation, “To Tie Knots in the Air,” is a Zen-like meditation weighted by objects—tubes of paint, nails in a

jar, salt shakers, casters, and other “debris” now bracketed out of its daily use and set apart for aesthetic consideration. In another work, Hoke constructs a colorful totem of sleeves. In the work of Taylor Davis, floor sculptures incorporate fragments from home; amid formal compositions door and drawers appear.

Home furnishings—a bed and a table—provide a vehicle to explore memory, choice, and chance in the work of Esperanza Cortes. On a single bed with a patchwork design reminiscent of a chessboard, Cortes has placed milagros/game pieces. They include hearts, torsos, and hands—the emotions, the physical body, and the symbol of action and control—suggesting the permutations of possibilities these factors provide to the one who slumbers here. In “Altar to Those Forgotten,” a table arranged like a traditional home altar and strewn with roses, alludes to lost traditions and broken connections. The furnishings in Ellen Driscoll’s work function as symbol and metaphor. “Passionate Attitudes” is a part of a larger installation; its dreamlike imagery is

based on the work of J. M. Charcot, a 19th-century physician who studied female hysteria. The work includes a small metal table, two chairs back to back, plaster eggs, a glass brain, and a crystal ball containing a photograph of a patient being observed during the study. The work explores issues of collusion and self-deception, which developed between Charcot and his patients during the course of the research.

Nene Humphrey’s works in this exhibition—made up of hundreds of cascading spoons—provide an image connected to nurturing and nourishment. In “Swarm,” spoons are layered with hair-like wires; in “Aether,” spoons hang suspended as if in a flurry of activity. Each spoon is individually cut and hammered into shape from a sheet of copper; its final patina gives the work an appearance of age and a hint of usage. Bettina Werner creates work from salt, a mineral associated with primordial life and the chemistry of the human body as well as a symbol of knowledge and hospitality. Werner’s work in this exhibition consists of a large table which serves as a container for brightly colored salt as well as a functional setting for dinner parties.

Rhonda Roland Shearer takes a distinctly feminist approach to the drawings and bronze sculpture with images of women vacuuming, ironing, and cleaning toilet bowls. Her large-scale sculptures heroically portray the menial tasks of maintaining a home; their outlines are decoratively embellished with floral borders.

This exhibition was made possible by many people. I would like to thank Professor Patricia J. Thompson for her essay, which contextualizes the work in this exhibition within the field of feminist theory. This publication has been produced, in large part, through the ingenuity of Anne Perryman, to whom I am very grateful. The artists have been extremely generous with their time—installing the work and sharing their thoughts on the exhibition. I am particularly thankful to them. As always, the time, patience, and good cheer of the gallery staff has insured the success of this project, and I wish to thank Mary Ann Siano, Phillip Kautz, and Denise Mediavilla.

—Susan Hoeltzel
Director

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Exhibition Checklist

Steven Brower

You Are What You Eat, 1995

plastic, paper

6" x 30" x 15"

Courtesy of Lombard/Freid Fine Arts

Even With All These Gifts He

Still Felt Dissatisfied, 1995

mixed media

40" x 12" x 12"

Courtesy of Lombard/Freid Fine Arts

Instant Facade, 1995

chalkboard, paint roller, plastic, chalk

26" x 26" x 2"

Courtesy of Lombard/Freid Fine Arts

Esperanza Cortes

The Wedding Suite

mixed media

8' x 8' x 16"

Courtesy of the artist

Altar to Those Forgotten

table, rug, clay roses

6' x 4' x 30"

Courtesy of the artist

Taylor Davis

Barrow, 1995

wood, paint, and liquid asphalt

7 1/2" x 17 1/2" x 39"

Courtesy of the artist

Ellen Driscoll

Untitled

steel bed, horse hair, vandyke

bronze portions

10' x 40" x 36"

Courtesy of the artist

Untitled (excerpt from

Passionate Attitudes)

steel chairs, glass sphere, glass

brain, cast iron & plaster eggs

9' x 55" x 16"

Courtesy of the artist

Lisa Hoke

To Tie Knots in the Air

1992

mixed media

10' x 8'

Courtesy of the artist

Dweller, 1994

shirtsleeves, wax, tulle, & pins

2 1/2' x 2' x 1'

Courtesy of the artist

Lifeline, 1992

shirtsleeves, wax, & rope

10'x2'x2'

Courtesy of the artist

Nene Humphrey

Aether, 1994

wire steel rod & hammered copper

26" x 45" x 42"

Courtesy of the artist

Swarm, 1995

hammered copper, steel, & wire

40" x 38" x 18"

Courtesy of the artist

Lifeline 2, 1995

hammered copper, chain

11'

Courtesy of the artist

Sally Minker

The High Anxiety Living Room, 1995

mixed media

8' x 10' x 12'

Courtesy of the artist

Michael Pribich

Imperial, 1992

mixed media

81" x 36" x 44"

Courtesy of the artist

Untitled, 1992-4

mixed media with wheel

64 1/2" x 26" x 29"

Courtesy of the artist

Rhonda Roland Shearer

Doll Series: Girl Action Figures

(Vacuum, floor model), 1993

bronze (lost wax fabrication), red,

violet, aqua patina

27 1/4" x 20 1/2" x 11 3/4"

Courtesy of the artist

Doll Series: Girl Action Figures

(Shopping cart), 1993

bronze (lost wax fabrication)

aqua, purple, blue patina

26 1/4" x 22 1/2" x 13"

Courtesy of the artist

Untitled, 1992

oil on paper

30" x 22 1/2"

Courtesy of the artist

Untitled, 1992

oil on paper

30" x 22 1/2"

Courtesy of the artist

Untitled, 1992

oil on paper

30" x 22 1/2"

Courtesy of the artist

Jeanne Tremel

Quilt, 1996

scouring and cosmetic pads, dental

floss, steel wool, foam, & twist ties

Courtesy of the artist

Quadruple, 1996

scouring and cosmetic pads, dental

& embroidery floss, steel wool,

foam, & twist ties

Courtesy of the artist

Untitled

1996

mixed media on shelf paper

13" x 12"

Courtesy of the artist

Untitled

1996

linen tablecloth, plastic doily, waist

band hooks, fabric, foam scrubbing

pads, & ink

10" x 14"

Courtesy of the artist

Bettina Werner

wereisbetty, 1995

patented technique of colored salt

91" x 91" x 20"

Courtesy of the artist