

"Jorge Pardo" artUS issue 23, Summer 2008, pp. 22-23.

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The *NY Times* headline accompanying Jori Finkel's December 2 preview of "House," Jorge Pardo's mid-career survey, says it all: "Here's the Show, The Works Are Elsewhere," producing a clever run of double entendres. Reported from Los Angeles and accompanied by photographs of Pardo's 4166 Sea View Lane house, built as his 1998 MOCA solo exhibition, "Here's the Show" suggests that the bona fide exhibit is his L.A. house, while "The Works," as in kit and caboodle, are on view elsewhere (North Miami). Alternatively, the "Show" means his North Miami survey, while "The Works" references Pardo's experiential environments such as his house, the Munster pier, Mountain Bar, the Aventura Mall, Dia's lobby, and the German Bundestag restaurant.

To say that this headline "says it all" is an exaggeration of course, but it brings up a crucial point. How can museums capture or convey art experiences that are not transportable via 18-wheelers or jumbo jets? This is not a question that seems to bother architecture curators, who routinely exhibit models, drawings, and studies in expectation that scholars will gain special insight and ordinary citizens will seek out the buildings. But art functions differently. We don't view the intermediary parts as non-art, the way architects separate studies from buildings. In time, ephemera such as posters, invitations, brochures, notes, and studies gain appreciation as art. There is no doubt that seeing a picture of the 1997 *Pier* pales in comparison to traipsing about to explore its fluctuation between sculpture and park amenity. However, it's illogical to propose a hierarchy between experiences and objects, as if one were discussing fakes and forgeries, or art-versus-design. One can prefer objects to experiences or one can argue that experiences have greater aesthetic attributes and political implications, but to propose that either is superior is simply dogmatic.

What Pardo's North Miami "Show" tells us is that his approach to art making is primarily centered around inhabited spaces. His art investigates what it means to live with art, day in, day out. How can art impact people's lives? Early in his career, I sarcastically summarized the Pardo principle as "it looks like a 'this,' but it's really a 'that.' " It looks like a baseball bat or a wooden dish rack or an Eames, but it's really a sculpture he crafted himself. It looks like a bookshelf, but it's really a *Portrait of George Pocari* (1995). A kind of tweaked Duchampian scheme where not everything is ready-made, though everything is made to look found, a number of such works appear here. Those that reflect this past policy include *Ladder* (1980), *Shop Plywood* (1989), *Le Corbusier Chair* and *Le Corbusier Sofa* (both 1990), *Pallate* (1990), *Fucking Shoes* (1990), *Untitled* (1998) (resembling modernist furniture), and *Drawing of some of my furniture* (1993). It's unfortunate that his leaning bookcases with horizontal shelves weren't around, since their irregularity is quite striking.

The Pardo principle, which he outgrew a decade ago (as evidenced by *Vince Robbins* (1997), the mutable, yellow Velcro screens made with Tobias Rehberger), pops into my head whenever collectors forbid viewers to experience his tables and chairs. I want to know what it's like to bounce (ever so lightly) on one of his unusually shaped bentwood chairs that populate the many *Halley's Ikeya-Seki*, *Encke's* (1996) chairs, tables, and sometimes lamp ensembles. In their "look-but-don't-touch" mode, they are objects alluding to potential experiences that are currently off-limits, like Joseph Cornell boxes. I

wish there were at least a statement from their owners describing how these seats delight their guests. Perhaps no one has ever sat on one: they are sculptures, after all.

While spectacular to behold, Pardo's earlier colorful clusters of hanging lamps recall conventional modernist forms (again, made to look found). More recent designs, however, such as three hand-blown globes, 38 cutout shades that cast yellow splashes and form a horizontal X-chromosome, ten orange lamps resembling insect legs, and 21 of Mountain Bar's Chinese-lantern-like lamps, exhibit increasingly fantastical forms, enabling them to radiate splashes of colored light and unexpected shadows. Newer objects, such as a free-standing chandelier, a touchable walnut dining room set, an exquisitely carved honey-comb-patterned walnut dresser, a wacky transparent blue espresso machine, a handsome walnut-finish wine credenza, and a gorgeous lacquered opium bed, are exemplary of a new phase, whereby nothing looks found. In fact, their forms are so spectacular that it hardly matters whether Pardo has crafted these otherworldly objects himself.

As mentioned above, artists who prefer to treat viewers to unpredictable events are left with a conundrum when it comes time to portray their remote environments. For "House," Pardo and curator Bonnie Clearwater have opted to display eleven giant photomurals of Pardo's faraway places as backdrops for each of this exhibition's eight domestic spaces ("Office," "Front Garden," "Living Room," "Bedroom," "Mountain Bar," "Courtyard," "Dining Room," and "Kitchen"). "House," the exhibition, offers more than four times the square footage of his original house, which is fitting since he presents more furniture/sculpture than most houses could accommodate: several sleeping arrangements, a couple of bedroom sets, multiple chair and table sets, loads of lamps, as well as plenty of paintings/ wall decorations. His most recent paintings, *Untitled* (2007), entail polyester Shantung leis draping canvases silk-screened with octagons and horizontal X's (again), interacting with inkjet flower prints. Given the Sea View Lane house's focus on its Arcadian courtyard, these paintings, as well as several other floating floral plaques placed over photomurals, relocate the garden indoors, just as his photomurals transport viewers to distant locales.

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While it's clear that Clearwater and Pardo wanted "House" to evoke an event, akin to his earlier experiential works, the result is still a show where one encounters superb objects as art, rather than an open-ended experience where one sees simply "what happens," Pardo's personal explanation for his house's status "as art." Were people allowed to do more than just look, more would have happened. This is not to slight this "Show," since it's wonderful to witness both Pardo's progress under one roof and the combined efforts to contextualize "The Works." My main regret is moving away from Los Angeles just weeks before his house opened to the public.

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