

Dream House

Essay by Maggie Haas

"A house constitutes a body of images that give mankind proofs or illusions of stability. We are constantly re-imagining its reality. To distinguish all these images would be to describe the soul of the house..."

—Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, 1958

What are the buildings we build in our minds? How does the imagination wander when space is constrained, when our surroundings are of necessity more than of choice?

It's easy to project yourself into other people's spaces as you walk through San Francisco, a city of beautiful buildings gripped by an affordable housing shortage. The inhabitant of a cramped, rent-controlled studio could be forgiven for constructing a mental home with an extra bedroom and a south-facing bay window. Another might daydream of replacing all her roommate's furniture. Even someone with a comfortable, spacious home might dream of empty rooms and clear floors, with the clutter, light switches and heating vents magically absent. A blank space for the eye to roam and rest.

I'm particularly prone to building houses in my mind. It seems to be the preoccupation of a lot of artists. *Cut from the Left* at tmoro projects explores the work of three artists who've found ways to make work that is well suited for mental inhabitation. Rebekah Goldstein, Dana Hemenway and Mayuko Kono situate architectural sensibilities alongside delicate materials and colors. Their work makes space for the sort of structural dreaming that gives us relief when our daily surroundings hem us in.

Dana Hemenway's sculptural practice ties neatly to the theme of architecture; she has been building works from construction materials like drywall and extension cords for a number of years. Recently, she's begun to explore clay forms. Clay can be as dusty and delicate as the gypsum drywall she's used for years, and it is a natural extension of her sheetrock work. Here, perforated ceramic sheets are interwoven with a variety of extension cords and colored light bulbs. Conflating the utilitarian with the decorative, her sculptures pay homage to materials that are usually hidden or temporary. The extension cord, the cable tie, bare drywall... they're all materials we encounter when a structure is being made, but not when it's complete.

Balancing Hemenway's playful sensibility, the fragility of clay and bare light bulbs feels slightly hazardous. Her pieces make intuitive sense in the mind, the simple over-under of weaving and knotting objects that resemble rope, or resemble grids. Realized in clay and cords, their instability reveals the gap between the simplicity of what we imagine and the messiness of what actually is.

Mayuko Kono's four sculptures are part of her ongoing *Models* series. Her practice often includes

found materials, and for *Models*, she collects, alters and combines existing wire structure pieces, like file holders and dish racks. Covering the whole, amalgamated piece in pastel paper mache, the original format and use of the structure is almost entirely obscured. Instead, they seem like sweet, brutalist miniatures, with the decorative color gently competing for attention with the utility of the original object.

Kono is aware of the complexities of creating clean, almost-modernist forms from cast-offs. Of her models series, she wrote to me, "I started the rack series by spotting them so regularly at thrift stores. I became curious about their design tendencies, which suggests pure efficiency and no frills. But when they are not in use, they are very clumsy, awkward objects that simply take up space. I'm interested in this kind of contradictory nature of what we produce as a society." Nevertheless, the works exude optimism. They aren't actually brutalist, in that they have no practical purpose at all, and are quite fragile. Instead, they're tiny utopian cityscapes in miniature, created by tinting paper pulp and patting it, carefully and by hand, into an intuitive, nonsensical form.

Rebekah Goldstein works in painting and sculpture. In her colorful paintings, forms are all intersecting lines and planes—not masses. She shows her hand and her brushwork, but her shapes are never lumps, but are more like tangles, slices, vectors. Many of her images have the frankness of a collage: setting fields of color over, behind and beside other fields. As she's extended into making painted paper mache sculptures, the sense of layered planes persists. Smothered in painterly surface treatments, the sculptures swerve like arches and branch like pipes.

Buildings are formed from planes and openings, walls and floors, doors and windows. The planes shelter us and hide us, providing warmth and privacy, while the openings offer us movement and illumination. *Cut from the Left* is marked by repeated gestures of opening and enclosing. Hemenway perforates slabs of clay, Kono envelopes forms in paper mache pulp, and Goldstein sculpts pieces full of empty space. In Goldstein's painting, the one two-dimensional work in the show, black marks like cuts intersect the light colored planes that obscure much of the depth of the space in the painting. Hung on the backyard fence, Hemenway's fired drywall fragments mark the physical boundary of the exhibition, and bring the eye to the gaps and knotholes: openings to other, inaccessible spaces.

Despite the tensions of fragile materials, the work invites dream-inhabitation. It's a gesture of welcome—an invitation to step over a conceptual threshold. The canny use of inexpensive materials is more than an act of making-do, or a comment on the surfeit of junk in our lives. Crafted, cut and transformed: paper, electrical cord and racks all can hold the fascination of a dollhouse or a real estate ad. The viewer steps inside, looks around, and dreams herself at home.

This essay was produced for the exhibition, Cut From the Left, which was which originally exhibited February through March of 2017 at tmoro projects in Santa Clara, CA. A continuation of the exhibition, entitled Dream House will be presented at Eleanor Harwood Gallery, June 23 - July 29, 2017.