

The Apartment Show

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THE APARTMENT SHOW

by RIDLEY HOWARD ET HOLLY COULIS

Even in the post-postmodern art world of 1999, much is still made of the perceived difference between the sacred realm of high art and all other cultural production. Countless numbers of contemporary artists are said to possess an interest in the banal, kitsch, crafts, popular culture, etc. Such reductions deem the work reactionary (on some level), and are irrevocably attached to irony and deconstruction, as if the legacy of modernist art were a necessary consideration. Within the ethereal white space of a gallery, this discussion is often pushed to the forefront. The setting seems to emphasize what the work is not, locating its value in cultural critique rather than cultural production.

The Apartment Show, curated by Zach Feuer, is a collection of works from more than forty contemporary artists¹, ranging from the well known to the never-before-seen. All these works are displayed in his modest one-bedroom apartment in Boston. Through the clever use of his alternative space, Feuer encourages us to reconsider our relationship with contemporary art and the act of viewing. The show is an invitation to casually view, sit, and discuss the art (or anything else) with Feuer, other artists, and visitors.

He establishes art as a site of social interaction, a humble means of communication and vehicle for discussion. Not only is it made accessible, it is cast as an essential part of our daily routines. Ideally, the (unlabelled) art is encountered through the pace of living. Each piece exists in a moment of recognition, where the line between the made-up and the real becomes apparent. Attention fluctuates

between the consideration of single works and the subtle conceptual threads running through Feuer's collection.

The introduction of art into the daily experience of the viewer/collector mirrors a similar relationship with art production explored by most of the artists in the show. There seems to be a consistently narrow distance between the fleeting thoughts of the artists' imaginations and the finished works of art. Creative thinking is not reserved for processes and materials traditionally associated with art-making; most of the pieces mark idiosyncrasies in the responses to the artists' immediate surroundings.

In the context of Feuer's apartment, there is no hint of irony in such a process; the artists are drawing on experience rather than on an oppositional relationship with "high" art. Visitors are literally surrounded by the manifestations of a wide range of thoughts and experiences, most of which stem from a commonly understood interaction with one's living space.

Holly Coulis' small *Figurines* are an invitation to an intimate world of fantasy and longing. Coulis uses familiar materials (figurines, glitter, pom-poms, paint) with dazzling effect to decorate and glamorize an animated cast of characters. It is as if we were in the middle of a daydream, where a desire for admiration and the promise of overwhelming comfort are found in fictional experiences. Her sculptures allow for a kind of imaginative transcendence found both in the process of making and in continued interaction with the work. While Coulis celebrates

the familiarity of materials and domestic space, her sculptures embody an underlying desire for the glamorous and unfamiliar.

Bill Burke stages a more turbulent relationship with objects of the home. His sculptures are appliances (a toaster, an alarm clock) that he shot with a magnum 45; each is displayed with the bullet by which it was penetrated, like a hunting trophy. The history of his shameless destruction characterizes a need for self-assertion. Burke cleverly exaggerates the relationships we forge with our inanimate cohorts in a glamorized spectacle of violence and sacrifice. Whether anger, boredom, or artistic vision prompted the shootings, Burke has established his dominance in the home.

Similarly, Christine Tobin's crocheted wrapping of a lamp and stool appear to stem from an anxious self-assertion. Her carefully crafted nettings completely engulf their hosts in an extreme personalization of the impersonal. The excessiveness of Tobin's aesthetic gesture is a celebration of frivolous beauty and the self-indulgence of her creative process. Decoration does not simply adorn the functional; it overtakes and redefines it. Her humorous compulsiveness insists upon the grand promises of a beneficial art and the imagination's therapeutic function.

Cynthia Underwood's motion-sensitive *I Love You* begins when you enter the bathroom and ends when you leave. The sound of a voice repeating the familiar phrase persists for the entire visit. This plea/affirmation annoys and interrupts our most private of moments; the collision of

Holly Coulis, *Cowboy*, 1999. 5,08 x 2,54 x 20,32 cm. Ceramic figures, pom-poms, glitter, paint and plastic. Photo: The Apartment Show/Zach Feuer.

Jonathan McIntosh, *Sleeping Soundly*, 1999. Varied dimensions. Video monitor and bed. Photo: The Apartment Show/Zach Feuer.



Bill Burke, *Untitled Performance Document (Harold Eggerton meets Hunter S. Thomson)*, 1999. Varied dimensions. Performance using magnum .45 and TV. Photo: The Apartment Show / Zach Feuer.

Matt Dilling, *I Miss You*, 1999. Varied dimensions. Neon Sign. Photo: The Apartment Show / Zach Feuer.



her words and our business highlights a pathetic neediness in both parties. Underwood explores the interiority of emotional and physical spaces by abruptly making them public.

Jeff Allen's colorful refrigerator magnets dance across the tops of the main room's walls. Made from molds of actual magnets, his parade of birds, turtles, pineapples, flowers, and sharks has freed itself from the refrigerator door. Repression and freedom seem to be intertwined in Allen's reverence for the familiar. The artistic process, akin to tinkering, reflects the undeniable influence of the mass-produced on his more intimate creativity.

The layered integration of art—close to 100 pieces—into Feuer's apartment is impressive. It is a space where the lines between artist, visitor, collector, and critic become impossible and absurd. *The Apartment Show* pushes art into the realm of domestic and private existence. The location asks for reconsideration and re-interpretation of art's function as a link between the interior spaces of the imagination, the home, and an external culture. ■

RIDLEY HOWARD

For years there has been a sprouting up of alternative spaces within cities.

Perhaps in response to the commercialization of more established galleries or to the under-representation of younger (less bankable) artists, garages, lofts, and storefronts have taken on the role of gallery. Often open on weekends only, as the spaces must be supported by a weekday job. These extra hours are necessary to provide spaces not only for the display of new work, but for the discussion of it. They bring together young artists, critics, and visitors without the often intimidating aura of downtown galleries.

Conversation and comfort are a main impetus for the show curated and hosted by Zach Feuer in Boston. Feuer has offered up his apartment as the weekend viewing site for the exhibit. In his one-bedroom, 2nd-floor apartment, visitors enjoy a comfortable and familiar seating arrangement. Feuer himself is present, along with various artists, to instigate discussion. The idea for this show is especially appealing when the large museum experience is brought to mind. Instead of visiting an expensive and extensive art collection, an opportunity is provided to visit a small, cozy apartment, make yourself at home, and talk about your ideas regarding contemporary art.

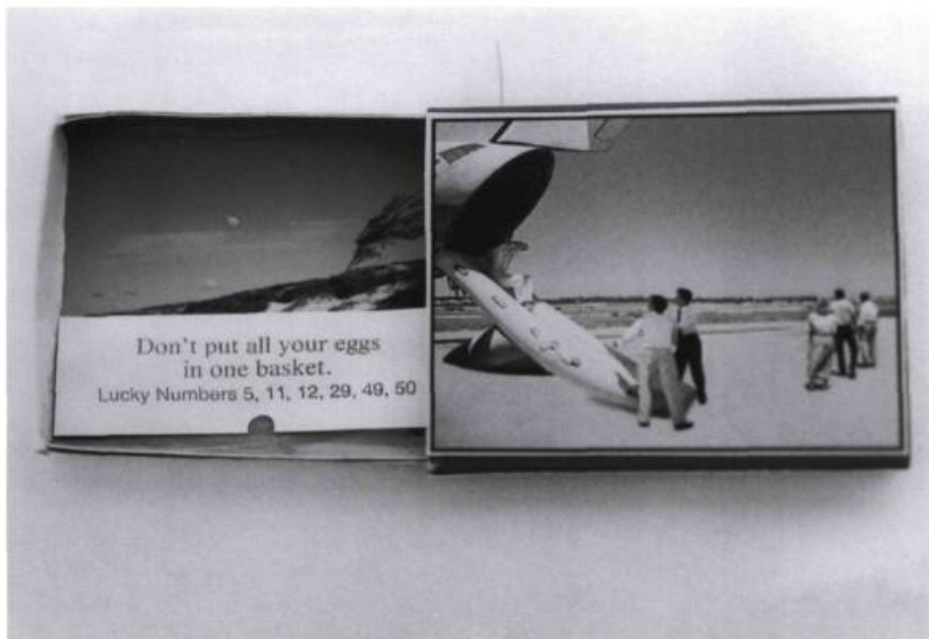
The artwork is integrated into the apartment in a variety of ways. In some instances it is difficult to tell where the art ends and the apartment begins. This blurring of start and finish poses an interesting question regarding the very obvious presentation in galleries. The thing in the art gallery *is* the art. In this show, you may need a bit of extra help. Feuer does not provide wall labels, but instead gives visitors a map on which art sites are marked. The most subtle piece, a crocheted doily by Igor Stevanovic of Serbia, might be difficult to decipher as an

artwork. His piece, which was mailed in a small box, seems especially inconspicuous. It is symmetrical, delicate, small, and well crafted. It is difficult to imagine this piece being made anywhere but in his home. His insistence on having it acknowledged as art, while maintaining its clear relationship to the home and his own personal history speaks for much of the work shown here.

Jeff Allen's refrigerator magnet pins span the circumference of the main room. A cacophony of brightly colored birds, pineapples, turtles, corn ears, lilies, frogs, and sharks create a carnival-like atmosphere. Made from molds of actual fridge magnets, these relocated pieces refer to their once restrictive location. The small works, in their parade around the top of the walls, make a small statement about reverence, as opposed to irony, and a certain tiny freedom.

The too usual (and hasty) assumption that works which do not locate themselves within the modernist traditions of art making are ironic or reactionary, may gain some insight from this show. Situated in a place similar, if not identical to that from which it came—the home—the art acquires the ability to thwart the indignation that may occur when viewing works which use materials or methods not canonized by art history books. The authority of the gallery does not support those conclusions in *The Apartment Show*. In a sense, Feuer has afforded these works a type of escape from the conservatism and formulaic analysis that the perceived safety of some galleries can encourage, despite the critiques that have been launched.

Cynthia Underwood's *I Love You* couldn't exist in the rich way that it does outside of Feuer's setting. This motion-sensitive piece begins when you enter the bathroom and ends when you leave. The sound of a voice repeating the words



"I love you" lasts for the entire bathroom visit. Coupled with the bodily functions carried out here, Underwood's plea/affirmation annoys and interrupts. The perfunctory visit takes on an aspect of emotional turmoil/intimacy in a place where our culturally most private affairs occur. The work becomes a private experience in a sense, an embarrassing moment in someone else's home.

Allison Paisley's work also encapsulates an invasion of sorts by creating a fantastic life force in the refrigerator. Her *Spores* fill the bottom shelf of the fridge. They grow up and out, like a nauseatingly familiar mold. Encased within the box, the oval pods on wiry stems are humorous, but a little too well placed to be cute. Lengthy and absent-minded icebox visits are called to mind, as are the nasty bacteria, etc., sharing our living quarters. Paisley's nasty, dream-like, and humorous *Spores* are a homage to interiority.

The on-going interactive nature of this show deepens its celebratory, homemade fun. Taro Nettleton's *Spy* piece consists of a hidden video camera, which records the activities of Feuer's neighbors. In addition, Nettleton provides up-to-the-minute research on who these people are. Kelly Taxter's record of ambient noises, collected from the apartment and manipulated so that their sound waves correspond to various imagery, plays constantly during gallery hours. Kitty Reals' *Untitled* consists of a humidifier hidden within a shiny and shapely malemite box. The visitor only witnesses the fine mist escaping from the vent. The familiarity of these noises and events is comforting and re-affirms that our private lives and mundane experiences aren't so unremarkable after all. Or if they are, that's OK too.

Feur's incorporation of works dependent on his apartment as their site

(or that seem to be so), calls to mind the premise of the home. These pieces belong here. Their site-specificity denies the possibility for existing in a neutral space. The location has been considered and is part of the piece. The two inform each other. The cramped apartment, filled with apartment art becomes a statement about contemporary living conditions for at least some part of the population. It also speaks of the impulse to make a room into a home, to decorate and personalize, to give life to the lifeless, to give a power to the everyday and familiar. ■

HOLLY COULIS

The Apartment Show
March 20-May 9, 1999
Boston, USA

NOTE

1. Jeff Allen, Art Club 2000, Rand Borden, Bill Burke, David Bliss, Holly Coulis, Matt Dilling, John Drury, Angelo Filomeno, Jim Fosset, Matthew Geller & Diana Kingsley, Jim Hamlyn, Terence Hammonds, Margret Shaw Jannino, Chad Joiner, Rob Kalin, Tom Kehn, Lisa Kereszi, Justin King, Kitty Reals, Pam Larson-Kaneb, Lisa Levy, Ken Linhan, Sarah Malakoff, Mike Mandel, Jonathan McIntosh, Amy Morell, Mr. Nash, Taro Nettleton, Alexandra Opie, Allison Paisly, Jesse Reed, Zarya Rowland, Yasuda Sanae, Sandy Stark, Igor Stevanovic, Kelly Taxter, Christine Tobin, Mark Todd, Cynthia Underwood, Debbie Verhoff, Dave Webber, Luke Walker, Jeff Warmouth.

Même en cette ère postmoderne, on continue de creuser un fossé entre des formes d'art dites «majeures» et «mineures». L'événement The Apartment Show, élaboré par Zach Feuer, questionne cette distinction en présentant une centaine d'œuvres d'une quarantaine d'artistes dans le modeste appartement du commissaire de l'exposition, à Boston. Ce faisant, Feuer nous incite à reconsidérer notre rapport à l'art contemporain et la façon de l'appréhender, plusieurs des œuvres jouant sur la frontière ténue entre ce qui «est» de l'art et ce qui n'en est pas. Non seulement les œuvres se font-elles plus accessibles, mais elles s'inscrivent au cœur même de nos gestes quotidiens. Devenue lieu d'échange et de rencontre, la manifestation permet d'amenuiser l'écart qui existe habituellement entre l'artiste, le visiteur, le collectionneur et le critique. En outre, une telle expérience confère à l'art une nouvelle fonction, soit de proposer une alternative aux lieux de diffusion traditionnels, d'instaurer une connivence entre les territoires secrets de l'imaginaire, le lieu de résidence et une culture qui, elle, se déploie à «l'extérieur».

Lisa Kereszi, *Don't put all your eggs in one basket*, 1999. 2,54 x 5,08 x 12,7 cm. Photographs, match book and fortune. Photo: The Apartment Show/Zach Feuer.

Jesse Reed, *Welcome Mat*, 1999. 40,64 x 60,96 cm. Silkscreen on door mat. Photo: The Apartment Show/Zach Feuer.

