

Dollhouses: A View from Washington to Baltimore

Fine Arts Gallery
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Baltimore County
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I felt very proud to be able to introduce a friend of mine to the Baltimore art scene by taking her to this exhibition, titled "Dollhouses: A View from Washington to Baltimore," Curator Gary Kachadourian asked 22 artists from the area to produce works of art along the theme of the dollhouse. The resulting works represented the best of that segment of the art scene which likes to fly fairly close to the ground. With only a few examples of self-mockery—expected, given the dollhouse theme—the works were surprisingly sincere and thoughtful, some even bitter-sweet.

Jennifer Lynn Stewart Watson's sculpture *Series 8: #162*, of four stainless-steel swings stacked with long sheets of flatbread, is a powerfully simple work. With three swings in a row and one in front, the work's form suggests a family grouping. The swings and the bread are comforting, but the slightly industrial quality of the former and the excessiveness of the latter prevents the work from falling neatly into a domestic sensibility. It

seems to belong to the generation of recent post-Minimalist art, like that of Mona Hatoum and Claudia Matzko, which suffuses the formal repetition of like elements with strong, substantive evocations. Neither an autonomous object nor a strongly relational one, the complex status of this simple work elevates it to among the best of that genre.

Peter Walsh's sculpture *I Love You* features four video monitors on pedestals, facing each other corner-to-corner, so that the viewer needs to stand, ridiculously, on a generic kitchen stool and lean in to watch the videos. Each of the monitors shows a different domestic scene of Walsh engaged in a household chore: washing dishes, sweeping the floor, doing laundry, taking out the trash. These videos are a remarkable portrayal of the strange comfort one finds in the simple regularity of household work. Except for the awkward position demanded of the viewer to see the videos, all sense of desire seems evacuated from the piece. There is no impulse to attain a goal, no need to impress someone else. Unfortunately, this quality suggests a problem with the

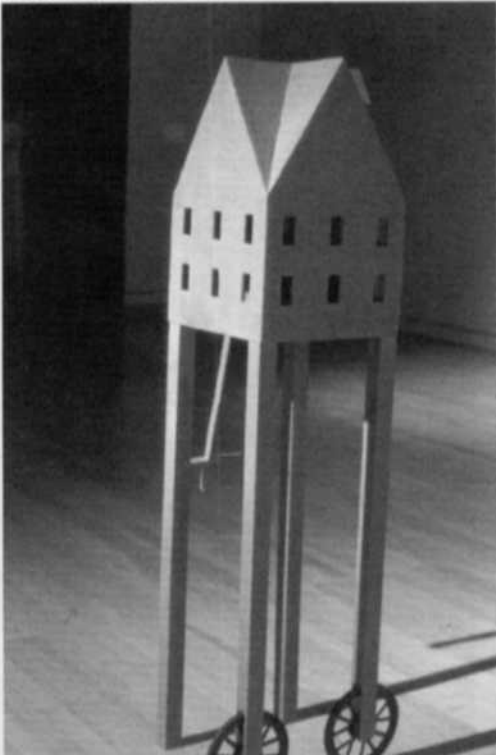
title, because there is nothing relational in the work. It appears entirely self-contained.

Maria Karametou's *Abandoned* is a little stone-like house in gray plaster with no door. The colorful image of a young Victorian-looking woman appears in the house's only window. Holding tight to a bunch of flowers, the woman seems forlorn over the lone blossom that has fallen to the ground and lies at the base of the small house, like an offering left at a graveside. The emotive power of this work is similar to Ewa Phol's *Luggage*, an institutional-looking house resting on a stand with wheels that are set in the opposite direction of its handle, so it can only be moved with difficulty. Equally poignant is Stephen Lee's *Buttress*, a small mortar wall supported by ghostly, distant male and female figures, sharing the effort. These artists all succeed by embodying the pathos of struggle and loss in simple forms, producing works which are strong but not schmaltzy.

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Ewa Phol

Luggage, 1998, from "Dollhouses: A View from Washington to Baltimore," Wax, 52" x 18" x 18".



, from "Color Me Mine." Polyurethane
plaster, and acrylic, 144" x 192" x 96".
Los Angeles Contemporary Exhibitions.

