

ART VOICES

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DAN CAMERON

MARCEL WISZNIA
THE PINK PROJECT
THE HARD EIGHT
KIRSHA KAECHLE

KK Projects: Group Installations
St. Roch Neighborhood

The installations that comprise the current exhibit, *A Course in Minerals*, co-curated by Kirsha Kaechele and Koan Jeff Baysa of New York, represent different approaches to excavating a space and revealing something previously unseen. The artists featured have adapted to the idiosyncracies of each gallery by working with a broad range of materials – from the heavy and earth-based, as with casts of huge mammalian bones or dirt, to the light and airy, like bits of string or strands of beads, down to something as intangible as light.

In the most renovated of the block's galleries, delicate sculptures add a sense of lightness and fragility to the more formal gallery environment. The Old Bakery features organic sculptures by San Francisco-based artist, Erica Gangsei. Crafted of humble materials like yarn and wire, her sculptures are subtle gestures within the space, hanging from the ceiling and peeking out of irregularities in the walls. A horizontal line of crocheted lace suspended from the gallery's ceiling seems slight and insignificant at first glance, but the hard shadow of a water line that it casts onto the gallery walls lends the piece greater weight. Small assemblages of fabric and found materials mounted on the opposite wall create the sense of strange and diffident little creatures revealing themselves for the first time. In the Derelict Cottage, Japanese artist Natsu has created an installation of webs made of wires, sequins, and beads seductive both for its beauty and for the disconcerting sense that it has been crafted to ensnare on a human scale. The sculpture will be especially impressive to local bead-weary audiences for its sophisticated use of the material, by which strands of plastic and sequins are transformed into webs spun seemingly of precious jewels and light.

The galleries across the street, all dilapidated houses, are more complicated places to install work – physically, aesthetically, conceptually. Art on display in a collapsing house is complicit with the building's decay; but it is also instrumental in the structure's metamorphosis. Because just like thousands of others in the city, these buildings that are sinking and crumbling under the weight of vines are certainly on their way to becoming something else – maybe characters in a horror film; the storytelling sages of the future; islands? Though it's maybe still too early to tell, these artists have begun making some predictions. Whereas the other installations are based on fragility and a sense of the ephemeral, the artists featured here have a more aggressive relationship with the spaces, using heavy materials, and evoking a sense of history and time past. Janet Bellatto, an artist from Dubai, has taken the most direct and playful interpretation of the idea of excavating a space and inventing its history. In the Whitehouse exhibition space, she has suspended part of a whale's skeleton from the ceiling, creating a fossilized archway. As we pass through the animal's shell, history becomes architecture, and architecture is created out of history. A group of three young artists collaborating in the Derelict Cottage III have created a sort of hodgepodge playground for the kids of Gordon Matta Clark out of an abandoned house. The installation began after one of the artists, hired to fix the gallery's door, decided to keep working in the space and, renegade style, took it over for this installation just days before the opening. New passageways have been cut through closets where clothes still hang. We are invited to crawl up ladders, sneak into the attic, and commune with the tangled thicket in the backyard. Drawings and artifacts of the previous resident are on display, allowing us to imagine what past lives the space has led. Next door, *LightHouse*, an installation by Norwegian artist Anne Senstad with the support of the Office of Contemporary Art Oslo, is a consideration of what is lost to a neighborhood when its houses are no longer "alive," or illuminated. Numerous industrial office lights installed alongside crumbling walls and piles of rubble fill the abandoned shotgun house with light, which spills out of it like a giant jack-o-lantern glowing for the block. Margaret Evangeline's *America* installation in Derelict Cottage II has taken the remains of a damaged house and covered its floors completely in earth. Part performance art, the piece began with a crew of illegal workers hired to create the entire installation, from pouring the dirt to painting the façade. In her statement, Evangeline aims to convey a message of hope. However, the juxtaposition of the house's façade, "*America*" painted in superhero-esque primary colors, with the dismal scene inside of a dirt-covered home, a kind of deconstruction carried out by construction workers, comes across as a cynical, heavy-handed depiction of a once superpower that can no longer hold back decay from crossing its threshold.

The ground floor of the Arts House includes two artists with interactive photo projects. Gayle Laird has turned part of the space into a camera obscura, piercing the wall of the building to create a projection of the outside street in the gallery darkroom. A project by New Orleans native Lisa Lozano, who is now based in San Francisco, moves in the opposite direction, bringing her photographic contraption out to the street in the form of a traveling photo booth. What keeps her mini portrait studio fresh and interesting is the picture window cut out of the back of the booth revealing a slice of neighborhood as the backdrop to the portrait. As a result, a photographic form usually reserved for the universal and anonymous, the ubiquitous photo booth portrait is grounded in a time and a place, allowing it to be as much a portrait of the neighborhood as it is a portrait of the individuals who are a part of it.

This collection of exhibits suggests that, now more than ever, space should be thought of as a flexible resource that will bend under the force of a sledgehammer or a feather. Though spaces have been defined and demarcated by those who came before us, the artist as alchemist has the power and the responsibility to re-invent them. *Catherine Burke*

