

DOLLHOUSE FUNHOUSE: “Dreamhouse vs. Punk House (+ Cat House)”



Cat House, Dreamhouse, and Punk House. All photos courtesy of Ruben Diaz

DOLLHOUSE FUNHOUSE: “Dreamhouse vs. Punk House (+ Cat House) at [Serious Topics](#), 1207 N. LaBrea Ave., Inglewood CA 90302

Through September 29 (M-F, 2-6 by appointment)

Curated by Kristin Calabrese, Joshua Aster, and Torie Zalben

By **PETER FRANK**, April 2019

Miniature art spaces have long transformed, augmented, and satirized full-scale show venues, even back as far as the Wunderkammer (court artists obliging little princesses with tiny paintings for their dollhouses). With the emergence of the clean white cube as the dominant exhibition format for art, however — and with the quasipseudoscience of museology growing wildly in actual and virtual sophistication since mid-century — small-scale approximations of the art gallery space have appeared with greater and greater frequency, persistence, and variation. James Antonie’s Micro-Gallery, now in its fortieth year, exemplifies the phenomenon: a to-scale white-

cube room, replete with the rubber-parquet floor the Europeans favor, in which scale models of real and, more often, imagined artworks, the work of Antonie or someone else real or imagined, hang and stand.



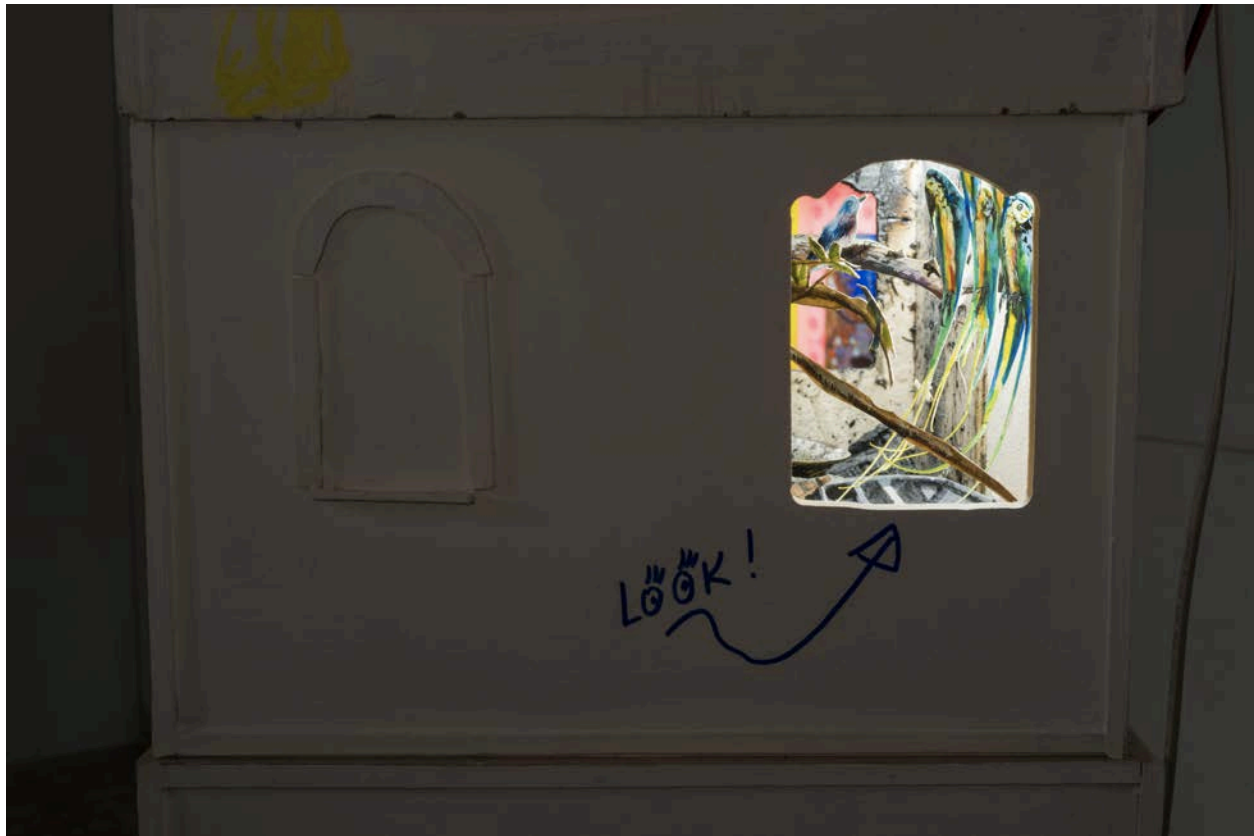
Hieronymus Bosch's Basement, Cat House

“Dreamhouse vs. Punk House (+ Cat House)” proposes a rather more expansive turn on the mini-art-house concept. Conceived as a show for a bona fide dollhouse, the idea appealed to so many of the organizers’ friends and colleagues that the three curators wound up building three towers, each of which stands just under eight feet high and contains six stories, every one brimming with art. The multifarious pieces, contributed by upwards of 200 artists trying (loosely) to keep to a 4-by-four-inch format, crowd and jostle one another, but in a genial, cooperative way, more like crowds at a rave (yeah, House music) than on a rush-hour bus.



Dreamhouse, middle floors

Indeed, the overall effect is of a whole that may or may not be greater than the sum of its parts — your dazzled eye lands on specific pieces, only to pull back to grasp the works nearby clamoring for attention, zooming in on and away from one after another — but is decidedly different. A number of artists contributed micro-installations that eat up swaths of real estate on various floors; these prove some of the most immediately viewable and contextable works, as they articulate spaces into which we can imagine projecting ourselves.



Shiri Mordechay, Untitled (boats, birds and a mouse), 2019, ink on paper (inside window).

By comparison, the more traditionally formatted works are freighted to various extents by their objecthood, especially as that objecthood has been compromised a priori by the restricted size. But this is where things get really interesting. Each artist has responded to the four-by-four rule differently. Some have produced more or less exact miniature examples of what they do full scale. Some others have found or fabricated a little thingy that would seem to have little to do with their makers' styles — but, certainly on closer inspection, advance their makers' sensibilities, or at the very least contribute to the overall sense of fun and alternate-reality license. Still others use the unusual format to experiment with scale and structure, knowing that the viewers are not three (or four, or two) inches high but are supposed to think of themselves as such. The play between different interpretations of "small scale," between artists and viewers, between imaginations and actualities, becomes as multivalent as the housing structures themselves. There is a through-the-looking-glass quality to the three houses, and all of us — artists, curators, viewers — contribute to it.



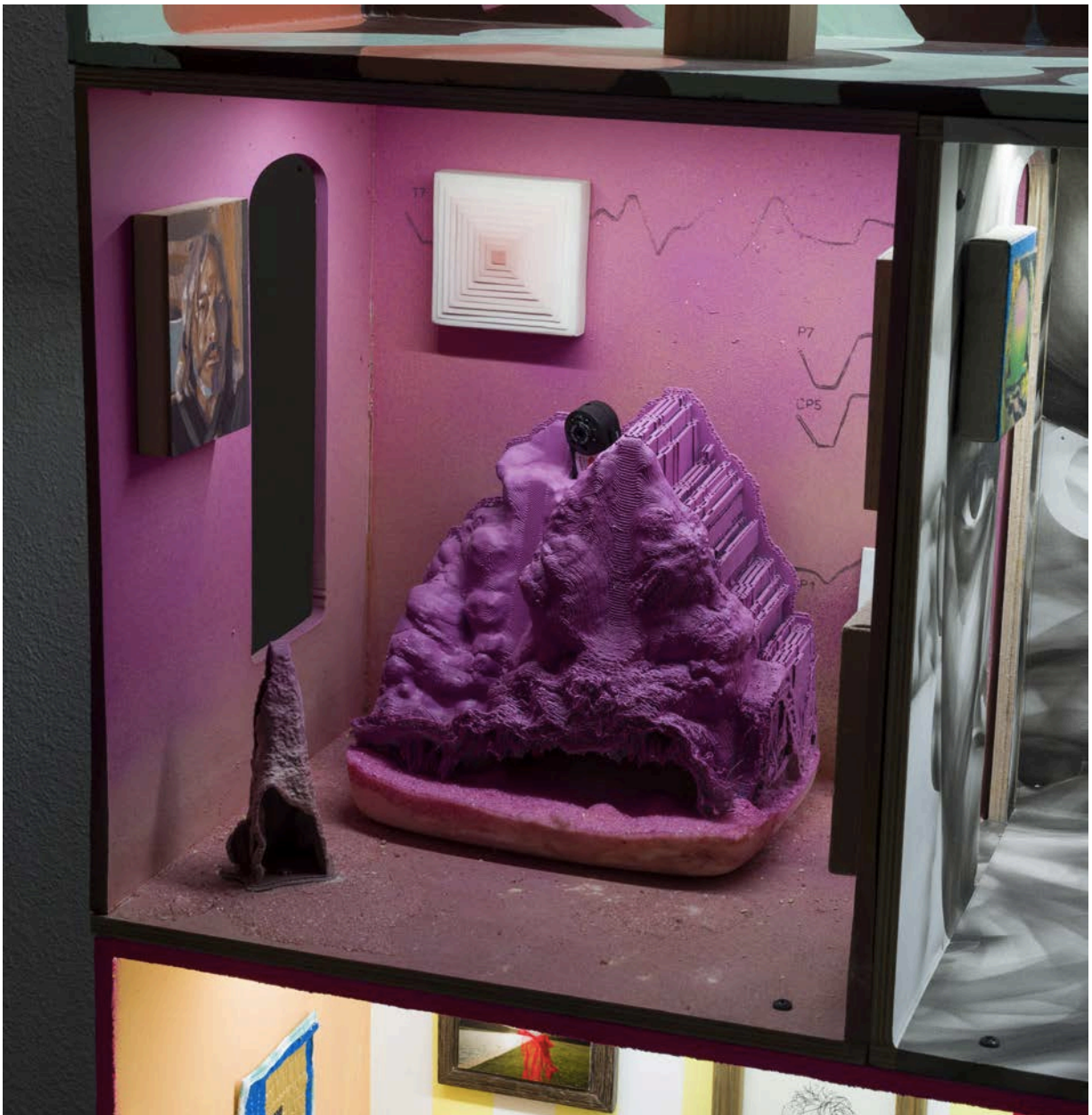
Flowers in the Attic, Cat House

The three curators, Kristin Calabrese, Joshua Aster, and Torie Zalben, have included themselves in the show, and seem each to be responsible for one of the houses. The houses, in turn, strive to establish overall identities (the Cat House is lit mostly blue and is topped with a black cat, the Punk House ranges from pink to green, the slightly-nightmarish Dreamhouse ranges from pink to green), but at this level, the sum of the parts predominates over the whole. As mentioned, you keep zooming in and out of focus, your appreciation of one floor's "hanging" suddenly giving way to your discovery of a work by an old friend or new Instagram followee on the next floor down. This giddy instability is more like a visit to an art fair than to a museum, but that's a good thing — finally, mini-you gets to run around like a kid at a carnival without exhausting yourself or pretending to be serious.



Top of Punk House

The triple towers, then, are as much funhouse as dollhouse. And it's clear that pretty much every artist involved not only got that from the git-go, but made sure their art was going to sustain the party atmosphere. Maybe the bumper artworks, certainly in the minority, just get lost in the shuffle; but you come away from the viewing — the zooming in and out — at least slightly exhilarated, as much by what you saw as by how you saw it. The show includes plenty of high-profile artists, folks like Henry Taylor, Kenny Scharf, Alice Könitz, Brenna Youngblood, Stephen Westfall, Salomon Huerta, Dave Muller, Andy Moses, Shana Lutker, Lucas Reiner, Lisa Adams, Keith Mayerson, and Georganne Deen, and, while heavy on the Los Angeles peeps, casts its net around the country. The roster almost doesn't matter, at least if you're in a whole-over-sum-of-parts frame of mind. If you're up for shopping, however, every little thing has its asking price.



Katie Grinnan, Scenic View, 2019, 3D printed fragments of 5 seconds of dreaming, borax, security camera, spray paint, pencil drawing of data from 5 seconds of dreaming, 5 x 5 x 2 inches (room box and pink sculpture).

From these observations, you might think it a shame to break up the ant-size apartment complex, unique and unified as it is. This is no theme show for the ages, however, but, again, a kind of wild and woolly art fair — or art fair as rock fest, maybe the maquette for the Great Group Show of Burning Man 50. This is a temporary exhibition, and a commercial one whose components are selling off even as I write. All the better. In 2119, our great grandchildren will labor to track down as many of the eentsy artworks as they can find, bent on reconstructing the Dreamhouse, the Punk House, and the Cat House the way we have been about reconstructing the 1913 Armory Show and Kurt Schwitters' Merzbau. "Dreamhouse vs. Punk House (+ Cat House)" is a genuinely big deal about little things, and is designed to resonate well past its shelf date. **WM**