

Writing Reviews

This is a very basic outline for reviews. There is no exact or rigid framework that we use. Look over the following ARTFORUM Reviews and breakdowns. An additional review has been added for you to breakdown on your own.

The following reviews have the following elements:

- A. Balance, tone and focus of the review comes from a weaving of both general and specific commentary.
- B. 6 Components included in reviews
 1. Description of appearance, materiality and the placement of the single work or exhibition
 2. Analysis of the work's devices, references, and concepts
 3. Comment on relationship to the artists previous work
 4. Relationship within art history and to previous artists
 5. Criticism/ opinion and perception of intent of the artists
 6. An ending statement which expresses the success or failure of the work

Joe Fig PLUS ULTRA

Dollhouses are funny things. Introduced in northern Europe in the seventeenth century, they were originally used by rich women to manage their households, providing a virtual view of the premises. Later, they became more akin to little museums or cabinets of curiosities. More recently, they've become toys with an edge of macabre kitsch. Joe Fig's recent sculpture borrows heavily from the dollhouse idiom, co-opting the God's-eye perspective, the miniaturization, and the implication of a narrative (here, art historical), all played out on a tiny stage in a parallel world that mimics our own.

In the past, Fig has made painstakingly accurate models of artists' studios—Constantin Brancusi's, Willem de Kooning's, Jackson Pollock's—which included little artist figures, further stoking the dollhouse association. For his recent show at Plus Ultra, he narrowed his focus and mostly eschewed the dolls, homing in instead on painters' studio tables. This time the obsessively detailed models, housed in Plexiglas boxes that functioned like tiny vitrines, represent in miniature the work surfaces of Matthew Ritchie, Julie Mehretu, Amy Sillman, Chuck Close, Dana Schutz, Karin Davie, Philip Pearlstein, Barnaby Furnas, and other painters. (Two other works featured the opulent Long Island studios of April Gornik and Eric Fischl, in toto, figures included.) On these tables are the tools of the trade, arranged according to the artists' proclivities. The table becomes a synecdoche for the studio and the work. But, except in the Fischl and Gornik studios, we don't see any actual paintings; Fig's project may tempt some viewers to track those down elsewhere.

Previously, Fig's replica studios, complete with figures caught in the act of artmaking, ran the risk of being too cute (Awww, look at

the little Brancusi!). In the new work, this is still a problem (Look at those tiny paper towels! And the itty-bitty paintbrushes!), but one that Fig partially solves by providing an audio accompaniment in the form of an interview with each artist, relayed via headphones connected to the base of each sculpture. In these discussions, Fig asks each of his subjects a series of questions, from how long they have

been in their current studio to "Please describe a typical day, being as specific as possible." The responses provide a day-in-the-life narrative but also function as shoptalk, as conversations range over the arrangement of the room, preferred brands of paint, how many paintings are worked on at a time, and the ways in which a tool can become a talisman or a fetish. Fig ends with larger questions like "What advice would you give a young artist that is just starting out?" (Ignore the market and be true to yourself is the general line.)

What separates Fig's project from interviews in the Archives of American Art or the *Paris Review* is the visual component, naturally, but also the fact that Fig's exchanges aren't explicitly anthropological or historicizing. Fig's work hinges on the cult of the artist—why else would we care what Dana Schutz does during the day?—but he undercuts the notion that what an artist does is inherently fascinating by showing how the daily life of a painter can be as programmatic and mundane as that of an accountant. For while the painter's table might look to some like the altar where art is consecrated, here it is literally downsized and accompanied by commentaries that bring the process back to earth, resulting in a kind of art for artists that also feels like a public service, or a reminder that art (painting in particular) often begins with just showing up at the studio.

—Martha Schwendener



Joe Fig, *Julie Mehretu: April 18, 2008 (detail)*, mixed media, 11 x 11 x 9 1/2".

¶ 1

- Historical outline of the works references
- Description of the artists language

¶ 2

- Specific identification of Artist's past work
- Specific identification of current works

¶ 3

- Opinion / criticism identifying progress from past work and shortcomings
- Discussion of new elements

¶ 4

- Situates the artist work among cultural references
- Exhortium, opinion and conclusion of the works result

Manfred Pernice

REGEN PROJECTS

In his first solo show at Regen Projects since 2002, Berlin-based artist Manfred Pernice continued his ongoing formal investigation with a terraced installation of blocky sculptures. Eight discrete constructions, all titled *exscape* (all works 2006)—which also served as the name of the show—were arranged on several wedge-shaped planes demarcated by a gray vinyl mat and a raised platform covered in gray carpeting. An additional sculpture, titled *ikebana 1*, which effectively recalls the Japanese tradition of flower arranging with a twisted scrap-steel “bouquet” situated on a cylindrical base, occupied another, otherwise empty black platform.

The clunky rectangular and trapezoidal *exscape* sculptures, all made of MDF and some including wooden elements, are painted an uneven white with faceted patterns in unexpectedly cheerful combinations of light blue, aqua, canary yellow, green, and brown. Like much of Pernice’s previous work, they vaguely recall vernacular architecture. Most also act as pedestals for found objects, including small figurines, empty packages, jars containing creepy unknown substances, and plastic badminton paddles. Also on display in this show were a number of handmade objects, including a black glazed ceramic piece in which several vessel-like shapes are crudely grafted onto a platter base with repeated indentations of Pernice’s finger—like ceramic “welds”—emphasizing the artist’s interest in economizing gesture. This piece sat atop a two-tiered base to constitute *exscape 1* and replicated in miniature the larger figure/ground play of the individual sculptures in which the “pedestals” are just slightly more interesting than the objects placed on them. In this sense, *exscape 1* also served as a model for the installation as a whole.

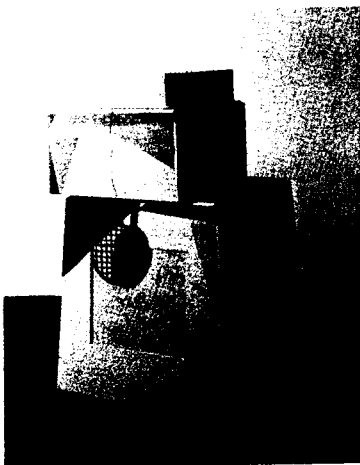
The rough assembly of the structures—at first glance they appeared unfinished or, conversely, ruined—lent the installation an open-ended quality. Most of the *exscape* units are sparsely adorned with pasted images, including calendar pages of *ikebana* arrangements, photographs of public spaces, a “for rent” flyer, and reproductions of paintings by Yves Tanguy. (Two display boards of painted MDF—one hanging on a wall and the other leaning against it—featured arrangements of similar images.) In previous installations, Pernice has slyly embedded his brand of formalism with references to specific historical sites—the *Plattenbau* housing projects, for example—and, by extension, the sociopolitical reality from which they emerged. Here, however, his readily legible codes, from the rarefied tradition of *ikebana* to the design of public spaces to Tanguy’s landscapes, all seem to level cultural and symbolic meaning in favor of a closed circuit of formal self-reference.

With his carefully unkempt installation, Pernice risks falling into the mannerism that eventually plagued Tanguy, whose paintings of imagined forms situated in sublimely vacant landscapes practically define the Surrealist movement’s investment in externalizing the artist’s subconscious: Through repetition, even the most uncanny forms can become familiar, and what once felt unsettling becomes brand identity.

Pernice presumably intended to draw parallels between Tanguy’s biomorphic compositions and his own arrangements of ambiguous (anthropomorphic?) structures, but it is unclear from the objects on hand whether the artist is adopting or rejecting the now regressive Surrealist notion. If Pernice has elsewhere successfully identified the point at which formal sculpture’s self-sufficiency is threatened by an inability to preempt or limit signification, he has responded by successfully pursuing intriguing relationships between his familiar, vernacular forms and the wider social space to which they inevitably relate. But the possibility of moving inward, seemingly suggested here, is fraught with questions from which Pernice, and these inert forms, are unable to, uh, *exscape*.

—Michael Ned Holte

Manfred Pernice.
exscape 3, 2006.
wood, paint, plastic,
and paper, 58 1/4 x
35 1/2 x 35 1/2”.



¶ 1

- Description of artist and the physicality of the exhibit

¶ 2

- A specific description of the work, references, and materials with examples.
- Focus is placed on one work, which encompasses show and is treated with most scrutiny.

¶ 3

- Description of the installations elements
- Reference to the Artists previous work.
- Ranking of the work in comparison with the artists previous work
- Analysis of the works devices / references to previous artists / art history

¶ 4

- Critique and comment on the intent of the artist.
- Exhortium, situating exhibition among larger body of work and commenting on its success

MILAN

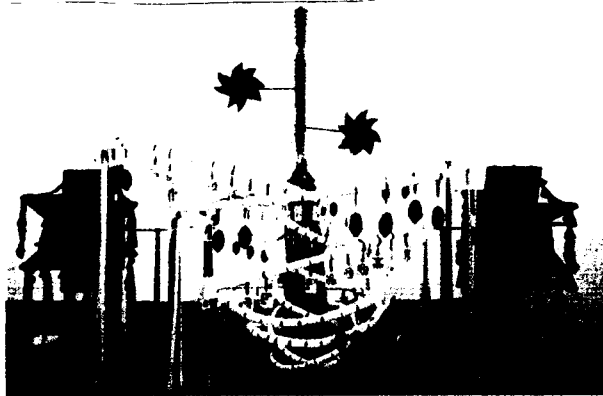
Jennifer Tee

GALLERIA KLERKX

Straddling the boundaries between sculpture, set design, and street furniture, a series of large multicolored objects, made from familiar materials such as metal, painted ceramic, and wood, cluttered the gallery. The overall effect was precarious, as if these were a child's toys, only enlarged; paradoxically, this same displacement of scale was what seemed to call for a mature, practiced eye to plumb the reasons behind the choices of materials and the precariousness of construction of this fragile and colorful world. One felt that Jennifer Tee, the thirty-three-year-old Dutch artist behind this oneiric domain built with a handyman's tools, wanted to shake viewers up, to visually project them into situations that are difficult to categorize, and in which they recognize even themselves only partially.

As its title suggests, Tee's show, "An Outburst of Passion in Limbo," meant to evoke strong feelings along with the idea of a confined and muffled place. Its totems and large chandeliers, and the colorful benches on which viewers could sit, were silk-screened with a series of images (birds, plants, crystals) that may have seemed childlike, although the thought behind them certainly was not. Inspired by Claude Lévi-Strauss's *Tristes Tropiques* (1955), nineteenth-century illustrations from *Un Autre Monde* (1844) by J. J. Grandville, and the Brazilian landscape architect Roberto Burle Marx, with his interest in intimate places within the frenzy of urban settings, Tee arrived at moments of perception and experience completely different from those offered in daily life. She has constructed an enchanted garden for adults, where the interpretive key for every detail can in principle be identified, but only through a cultural and intellectual capacity incompatible with any childlike "outburst." But the artist's message is that the shift into "another" place—limbo, precisely—must be a conscious experience. In other words, once we get past the initial moment of amazement and fascination in the face of the new, everything must be consistent with the whole, and everything must respond to a construction that is initially unknown but potentially knowable, traversable by way of clues that should have something familiar about them.

In the end, Tee's art is a sophisticated form of exoticism, and it is no accident that she travels incessantly, residing in ever-changing locales from which she extracts not so much a series of cultural references as an awareness that there are innumerable possible models for the horizons of life. She does not present her art in the guise of an anthropological study (or vice versa), as is so often the case with younger artists these days; rather, her art constructs a world capable



Jennifer Tee, *Covert Entwined Heart (An Outburst of Passion in Limbo)*, 2004–2006, mixed-media installation, 13' x 9' 10" x 6' 6".

of borrowing its vitality from anywhere, in both time and space. This is why the references she has gathered, all derived from Western culture and therefore, despite appearances, not really exotic, seem so—they become fresh and unfamiliar because they belong to an idea and a project rejected by the present. Limbo does not enjoy great favor today, but it is potentially a place of great interest.

—Marco Meneguzzo

Translated from Italian by Marguerite Shore.

¶ 1

- Situates work within art disciplines, scale and materiality
- Notes projected intent for viewers experience

¶ 2

- Speculation of artists' intent in regards to the exhibition title.
- Brief general to specific description of the appearance of the show and work
- Comparison and references to other artists
- Artists intent in specifics

¶ 3

- General opinion / criticism categorization
- Broad explanation of sources
- Defining the work and its cosmology in a subjective way
- Exhortium, giving a very clear opinion encompassing the work and items discussed in the review