

artillery

Penelope Gottlieb at Kim Light

May 15, 2009 by Tucker Neel

Originally published in Artillery Magazine May/June 2009 vol 3 issue 5



Penelope Gottlieb Installation

In NO \$ DOWN, Penelope Gottlieb presents visitors with dozens of modestly sized, colored pencil and watercolor, drawings of “homes,” each rendered in a monochrome color, and each inside its own matching brick-a-brac frame. The work is arranged salon-style around a roaring, but completely fake, fireplace, a replica of the hearth from TV’s *Leave It To Beaver*. The installation is intoxicating, and one can’t help but scan the exquisitely crafted drawings and pick a favorite.

In one piece titled Find Your Nest, a pitiful stucco duplex, in purple, is photographed from the street and conspicuously obscured by two parked cars. An acid-yellow tract home, surrounded by fledgling Cyprus trees, is titled Better Than New! Gottlieb's selection of quintessentially heterogeneous Californian dwellings: craftsman bungalows, mid-century split-levels, Tuscan-style McMansions, and dingbat boxes, feels familiar. So it's no surprise to find that the images, and their concomitant titles, come directly from real estate ads the artist mined over the past ten years from The LA Times.



Gottlieb's Spanish Doll House

In sourcing her images from The LA Times, and not, say, creating them as a plein-air painter, and packaging her appropriated images in a candy colored “pick your favorite” display, around a wholly decorative fireplace, Gottlieb creates a situation that questions not just “The American Dream” of home ownership and its bastardized nightmarish present, but also proposes a larger critique of how that very dream (or business proposition, investment, or gamble) is sold, pictured, and packaged to our consumer society. This critique doubles back on

itself when one considers how strange the situation becomes when Gottlieb's work actually sells, when someone buys her work and hangs it on their wall, putting a picture of someone else's house, an anonymous house, in their own home. When activated as part of this exchange, the work is not about the physical veracity of a specific house, or even style of house, but about the mystique surrounding the image's source, its point of origin, where the image, and the work of art, came from, and the conditions that facilitated its creation.



Gottlieb has created a meditative tableau, fireplace and all, which allows viewers to contemplate the unseen forces that shape their desires and predilections, a place to reflect on the barbiturates that seek to keep America dreaming.

-Tucker Neel