

## **Home, Saccharine, Home**

A review of the exhibition: *Out of House and Home* at the Parachute Gallery, New Haven, October 2010 to February 2010

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The office cubical is by now a veteran at being the runt of the social critique litter. The non-descript office space is like a character actor- good at playing the part of the mundane locale that soaks up creativity and spits out uniformity. But it can still be fertile ground for the old surrealist technique of taking the familiar and twisting its strands into a knot – making something new and strange out of something staid and familiar.

In the exhibition *Out of House and Home* at the Parachute gallery, Tim Applebee takes an otherwise bland, empty office space and sets it awash in a sea of books. Hardcover and paperbacks fill the room and spill out the door. A desk floats askew in this literary foam. The familiar is remade, becoming improbable, even absurd. A carnivalesque diversion? Not really. The office is, for many, like a second home. To pitch that home off its axis is part and parcel with the larger theme of this show – to question and explore the notions we ascribe to the idea of home.

Rich in associations, the word “home” is one of those terms that we use with frequency but that seems hard to pin down. Is it a singular place, like a house or apartment? Is it a transferable quality – one that is portable to match the increasing portability of jobs, industries, economies, even populations? Is it a constellation of qualities, meanings and associations? Is home a physical setting replete with comforting and familiar objects and mementos of personal associative power?

The artists in *Out of House and Home* approach the idea of home from a number of angles. But the uncertain nature of “home” in an era of foreclosures, bankruptcies, exploding bubbles of fantasy Mc Mansions, sub-prime fiascoes and the plight of the homeless, pervades.

Anne Percoco’s photographs and accompanying book document her project with a group of semi-nomadic people in India who are beset by poverty and the lack of suitable housing. Percoco and her collaborators use consumer detritus (foil food wrappers, cleaned and repurposed) to construct tent canopies that keep out the harsh sun and rain. More NGO-intervention than traditional sculpture, *Weather Shield for a Migrant Dwelling* suggests the contingent nature of home as a mobile, improvised object for immediate and basic protection.

Closer to home, Ron Dunhill and Matt Abbott use photography to document the improvised and ephemeral living spaces of some of New Haven’s 1500 homeless. Set under overpasses, fit into architectural notches, or under scrap wood and tarps, their ad hoc dwellings offer a glimpse into home in its least rooted incarnation.

Thomas Lail contributes two starkly differing types of work. *Dome II* is a hemisphere of interlocked cardboard triangles atop a circular patch of Astroturf. Could this be a model of a quick and easy shelter perfect for a UN refugee camp? Or is this what Buckminster

Fuller, the idiosyncratic creator of the geodesic dome, might have built had he numbered among the homeless of his generation?

Lail's other works, 2D collages of cut and arranged photocopies, are formally striking but evoke notions of home more tangentially. There is a rigid, grid like quality to them, like maps of an abstract logic imposed on an unruly terrain.

The acrylic-on-wood paintings by Roland Becerra have a more traditional, subdued feel. The artist's use of realism, and the muted sepia tones suggest an evocation of tranquility, even nostalgia, but they offer the aftertaste of not all being well. The serene idyll of a summer campground and the gentile suburban street conjure a cloying, off-putting disquiet that disassociates good circumstances with home.

From temporary tents to pre-fab containers, from nostalgia to the icy visage of broken and improvised dwellings, all of the various way that these artists address the matter *Out of House and Home* presents a timely meditation on a problematic noun – itself a complex edifice - that is at the root of what it means to be in a society, to be rooted and sheltered in some meaningful way.