

# KATE WERBLE GALLERY

83 VANDAM STREET NEW YORK, NY 10013

## ARTslant

**MINING THE REMNANTS**

**CHEN TAMIR**

**NOVEMBER 15, 2009**

*Erratic Anthropologies*

Rancourt / Yatsuk, Guy Benfield, Shana Moulton

Art in General

79 Walker Street, New York, NY 10013

October 29, 2009 - January 9, 2010



Rancourt/Yatsuk, *Phase IV* (2009), mixed medium site-specific installation.  
Photo by Blaine Davis, courtesy of the artists and Kate Werble Gallery, New York

No visit to SoHo is complete without a stop at Art in General. Its new commissions program offers fresh work by emerging artists who are normally off the beaten track, and hand-picked for their visions. This time they've lined up three ambitious projects. Collectively titled "Erratic Anthropologies," they are "performance installations ...that mine the visual culture of flawed but influential community structures." In essence, the three projects are each ironic, comical looks at the dystopia of our consumer-based society. Revolving around the detritus we create for ourselves as we search for whatever it is we try to find when we buy things, these installations actually take the dialogue of consumer culture deeper by looking at what happens when we try to *sell* things – things people don't want, or no longer want.

In **Justin Rancourt and Chuck Yatsuk's** *Phase IV* the large gallery is transformed into a what looks like the set of a bad movie about a short-sighted realty developer. His name is Don Donavucci and you can pick up his business card if you'd like to give him a call. He seems to be responsible for the half-built home you can walk into, just a few steps from the dark, eerie swamp covered with plastic greenery. It's the kind of cookie-cutter home in every American suburb radiating out of our big cities like beige halos. They are the thin membrane between us and the wild, dark, weird outdoors. Rancourt/Yatsuk's version of the leering swamp is complete with a sunken streetlight hovering just above the swampy lake, glowing in pace with a strange grumbling to be heard all around.

Rancourt and Yatsuk hail from sunny Florida, where real-estate speculation has made the state one of the worst casualties of the economic crisis. Homes were built cheap and are now sitting abandoned in tacky neighborhoods, made of material not too dissimilar to the Astroturf lining this gallery's floor. The house is actually intended as a model home that Don Donavucci hopes will inspire buyers and precipitate an urban sprawl. The crocodile swamps here serve as a double

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metaphor: the predatory lending that has made fools of the likes of Don Donavucci and the dilapidation of our natural resources to make way for homes like the one in mid-construction on view.

Shana Moulton's *The Undiscovered Antique* is an installation of three videos and a few sculptures related to the artist's alter-ego, Cynthia, who is depicted in the main video as a legless, though otherwise run-of-the-mill American. Inspired by the television show, "The Antiques Roadshow," she seeks out to sell what she hopes is an old Native American pot, but it turns out to be an Avon footbath inspired by their ancient designs. The piece is a witty and aesthetically charming exploration of consumer culture's ability to pry on our insecurities and raise our hopes in vain. It also plays on the self-help industry with a happy ending in which Cynthia grows legs by using the supposedly worthless footbath. Moulton cleverly weaves together complex issues of exoticization and commercialization with subcultures of self-help, low-brow spiritualism, and popular culture.

Beautifully connecting Moulton's work to the downstairs installation by Guy Benfield is the motif of pottery. The room has been transformed into a gesamtkunstwerk of sensory overload centered around a white sculpture in the shape of an oven meant to represent a kiln. Colored lights and strobes flicker in the disco oven, echoed by the rest of the shiny room of mirrored wall panels and black vinyl floor. Two flatscreen monitors are included in the installation, one showing a procession of seemingly disconnected photographs, and the other footage of the artist crawling the floor of his studio edited between shots of African masks and other imagery. A strong smoky odor of frankincense fills the room as does extremely loud drone electorock. The combination of smell, noise, and flashing lights makes it hard to pick up on the clay pots and interesting shards laying about the place as haphazardly as everything else. There are strong references to Abstract Expressionism and the Modernist legacy as a whole as well as older performance art pieces. We are told that the installation is meant to represent a series of spaces such as pottery showroom, studio, and storage area, but with the complete assault on the senses, we are left with few incentives to delve in and investigate the work in full.

In the elevator is ArtSlant's very own Hong-An Truong's *Adaptation Fever*. Mounted on a flatscreen monitor, *Adaptation Fever* consists of three black and white videos. Most of the videos consist of a split screen showing mirror imagery of archival footage filmed in French-occupied Viet Nam. The historic footage is carefully edited, some set to Vietnamese versions of classic American pop songs. The most interesting aspect of the works is their subtitles, which are sometimes missing completely or seem too concise to truly translate to English the Vietnamese or French lyrics. This gives the viewer a sense of displacement and inaccessibility common to all immigrants. Like the others in *Erratic Anthropologies*, Truong is mining the modern world and the new-colonial cultural order that it has created.

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