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WASHINGTON, D.C.

Mark Bennett at the Corcoran

Memories offer emotionally convincing yet untrustworthy evidence of the past. When presented with the blueprint of a home familiar since childhood, how would one reconcile subjective memories with an objective floor plan? What if those familiar rooms belonged to imaginary homes most baby-boomers visited repeatedly as they were growing up? Drawing with pencil and ink on vellum at a 1/4 inch = 1 foot scale, Mark Bennett plays on the tensions between memory and fact as he precisely lays out the homes of TV families such as the Cleavers, Bradys and Addamses. He renders TV's imagined spaces in detail, noting even the location of furnishings. His campy humor mingles with a frustrated childish desire for wish fulfillment: why isn't my family like those on TV?

The floor plans are typically based on credible housing configurations. The magical suburban home from "Bewitched" is suitably nondescript, and the Ricardos' apartment from "I Love Lucy" is believably of the Manhattan prewar apartment type. Others require more adaptation to make TV's spatial liberties conform to the concrete world. So while "The Addams Family" enjoyed the bizarre rooms of their rambling house-as-a-museum without thought of practicality, Bennett does his best to confine them to a plausible Victorian floor plan.

Bennett tends to be absurdly literal, as when he dutifully situates "Laverne and Shirley"'s couch facing a blank wall—the stage designer's invisible fourth wall. Closets and toilets are carefully delineated, and while it's hard to think that sitcom characters might have bodily functions, such minutiae can underscore family hierarchies. For example, the architect father on "The Brady Bunch" designed a home

in which his six children were confined to two tiny cells sharing one toilet, while he possessed an imposing master bedroom and private den.

Bennett claims it has been years since he last watched TV. Yet he once so avidly studied reruns that he recalls details such as Rob Petrie's ottoman on "The Dick Van Dyke Show" and Oscar Madison's heaps of dirty laundry on "The Odd Couple." His blueprints are achingly familiar to those who grew up in the early days of television. Still, his drawings have little meaning for the uninitiated. One based on an unfamiliar show was lost on me, suggesting that connecting with viewers' memories is necessary to provide meaning for his joke of treating these fantasy worlds as mundane realities.

Also on view was a recent collage series, "The Effect of Fords on Barbara" (as in Billingsly, the actress who played June Cleaver on "Leave It To Beaver"). Products culled from postwar ads are featured in disjointed pictorial narratives as Barbara moves compulsively from one situation to the next, dissatisfied with the offerings of suburbia. As Bennett's alter-ego, Barbara is spoiled and cynical, as if soured on TV's optimism. While the collage series lacks the shock of recognition afforded by the floor plans, Bennett remains the most earnest of his generation of West Coast artists drawing on popular culture. —Grady T. Turner

HOUSTON

McKay Otto at the Jung Center

This Houston-based sculptor embarked on a new phase of his career with a solo exhibition at Houston's Barbara Davis Gallery last January. The period following that show witnessed Otto's rapid and final shedding of the overlay of Assemblage, Dada and Surrealism that had dominated the first decade of his work. A recent exhibition at the Jung Center signaled the emergence of Otto's mature and powerful voice.

Otto transmutes mundane objects such as chairs, globes and gym weights into elemental shapes and pure forms. He applies gesso or graphite to most of his components, veiling their identities; his surfaces lend an air of mystery to each work, estab-

lishing a tension between the known and the unknown. Also part of Otto's vocabulary is a very 20th-century material—panty hose. Otto employs a stretched nylon membrane as a formal device to sculpt space and encapsulate the "air" within individual sculptures.

Many of the works in this exhibition (all untitled, but given numerical designations) are conceived in series. Several pieces explore the concept of equilibrium, featuring groupings of 19th-century English gymnast's balances, vertically poised on the wall and enshrouded by velvety black nylon. Another interrelated group utilizes early 20th-century wooden barbells, coated with graphite and wrapped in nylon. Arranged in sets of three or four barbells, these compact wall sculptures recall molecular structures and exude a sense of tightly bundled dynamic energy.

While the majority of the 20 sculptures presented were wall mounted, the artist's freestanding offerings were also beautifully realized. A spiraling column of twisting clothespins, *Untitled, No. 0820*, shows Otto working with the sparsest ingredients to achieve the maximum effect. This work conjures up associations from Brancusi's *Endless Column* to the translucency of a branch of leaves fluttering in the wind. Also incorporating multilayered references, *Untitled, No. 0828* stood out for its amalgamation of traditional domestic objects (irons, spools of thread) into a figural sculpture. The artist transformed a variety of items into an abstracted "woman" by connecting iron-shaped "feet" to a stack of gessoed thread spools to make the "body" of the sculpture. *Untitled, Nos. 0833 and 0834* feature facing bentwood chairs which cradle graphite-coated globes where the merged seats once were.

Another piece, the most metaphoric work in the show, presented an unforgettable poetic image as it hovered at the entrance of the gallery. Composed of buggy springs, a graphite-covered globe, black nylon and an elongated wooden stand, it resembled a giant eye with the planet Earth as its pupil. By distilling his sculptures into their simplest and purest forms, Otto achieves the spirituality and universalism that have long been his esthetic goal.

—Catherine D. Ansporn



Mark Bennett: *The Effects of Fords on Barbara, #73, 1994*, collage, 43 by 22 inches; at the Corcoran.

SANTA FE

Tasha Ostrander at the Museum of Fine Arts

Tasha Ostrander is an artist from New York who has been living and working in New Mexico for many years now, and has shown her work mostly in Albuquerque and Santa Fe. The austerity and lyricism of her installation at the Museum of Fine Arts imposed themselves immediately upon the viewer. The one-room exhibition consisted of four parts: two desks (positioned diagonally and parallel to one another off the

McKay Otto: *Untitled, No. 0834, 1997*, wood, graphite, globe, 36 by 25 1/2 by 16 inches; at the Jung Center.

