



# COWBOYS & INDIANS

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YORAM WOLBERGER

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“Through his whimsical and elegant work, Yoram Wolberger seeks to reveal the life “underneath” everyday objects and to explore how the familiar can be transformed through unexpected interventions. In 2001 he created an engaging body of work motivated by a desire to alter our perception of appliances and furniture, potent and familiar symbols of home and domesticity. In these works he employed a method of slicing ordinary household objects—a refrigerator, a coffee table, and a hutch—into small increments until they collapsed on themselves. While still retaining a unified shape loosely reminiscent of their original form, these objects are dramatic and stunningly beautiful but no longer functional. As a result of the artist's painstaking manipulation, the meaning of these once familiar objects now exists in the murky territory of the uncanny and the surprisingly unfamiliar.

Wolberger is currently working with another group of familiar objects—plastic miniature figurines such as toy army men and farm animals and a bride and groom from atop a wedding cake. Through a process involving 3D digital scanning, he meticulously recreated these dime-store figurines, amplifying them to life size and calling dramatic attention to all their original imperfections and manufacturing defects. His anonymous *Toy Soldier* (2001), for instance, who stands in an aggressive pose aiming his rifle, becomes decidedly unheroic and awkward as his now life-size body, flak helmet, and rifle are outlined by thin, jagged sheets of surplus plastic molding. Even more compelling, perhaps, is *Bride and Groom* (2002), a life-size version of the “perfect” plastic couple typically perched atop wedding cakes. Here, however, the once ideal figures assume a grotesque, horror-movie character, resembling zombies straight out of *Night of the Living Dead*. Stiff and catatonic, with dark black circles around their eyes and red lips whose edges are smeared across their faces. In this series, as in the furniture pieces, Wolberger skillfully manipulates the familiar, exposing that which is hidden or repressed in these banal forms.

Wolberger is not alone in his interest in miniatures. Tiny plastic figurines have been a fertile source for many contemporary artists, among them Laurie Simmons and David Levinthal, who, to varying degrees, exploit the uncanny or hyperreal attributes of plastic toy figures by placing them within pseudodocumentary photo tableaux. But while Simmons and particularly Levinthal often work to suppress the “toyness” of the objects, Wolberger calls attention to their artificiality.

Toys are small symbols imported from the adult world, which, as children, we can control and own. It is through toys that we begin to form a personal identity. We learn to role-play with boy and girl dolls. We experiment with the sounds animals and cars and trucks make, and we even begin to confront the harsh realities of war. In Wolberger's hands, toys are no longer intimate and controllable, but are amplified, deformed and unnerving. He violates the safety and intimacy of childhood toys, inviting us to see beyond the stereotypical and the generalized. As children we play with toys in a state of ignorant bliss. They represent life as simple, accessible, and entertaining, providing a blank slate onto which we can project our fantasies and desires. By magnifying the flaws and irregularities of these objects, Wolberger highlights their artificiality and shatters the myths that we were raised to believe in—the Platonic ideal of the happy couple or the courageous army hero—leaving in their place the harsh realities of adult life.”

*By Kristin Chambers, excerpt from '2002 California Biennial' exhibit catalogue, Orange County Museum of Art, Newport Beach, California.*



2 Top: *Madonna* (2004), Right: *Toy Soldier #1* (2001), Bottom: *Farm Girl* (2002) and *Bride and Groom* (2002). All 3-D Digital Scanning, Digital Enlargement, Polyester Foam, Pigmented Resin.

## FANTASY AND FORCE: A BRIEF CONSIDERATION OF ARTISTS AND WAR IN THE AMERICAN CENTURY

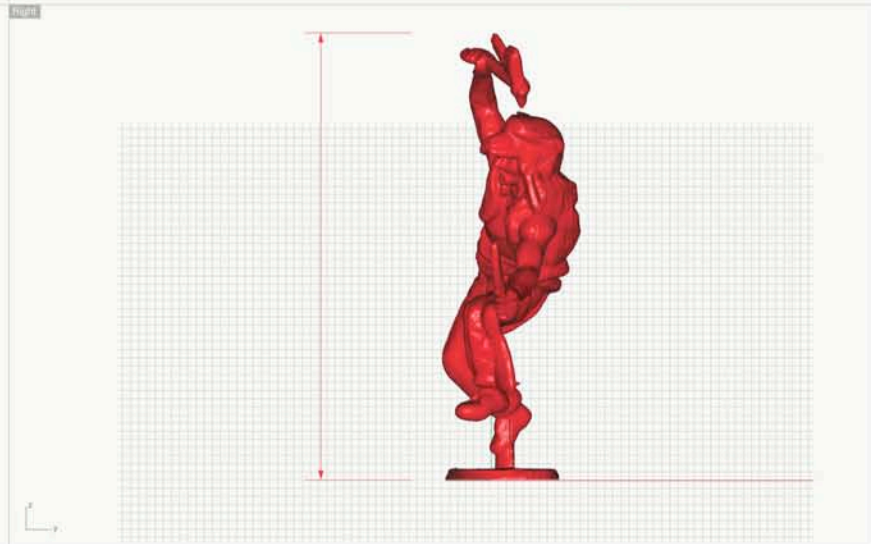
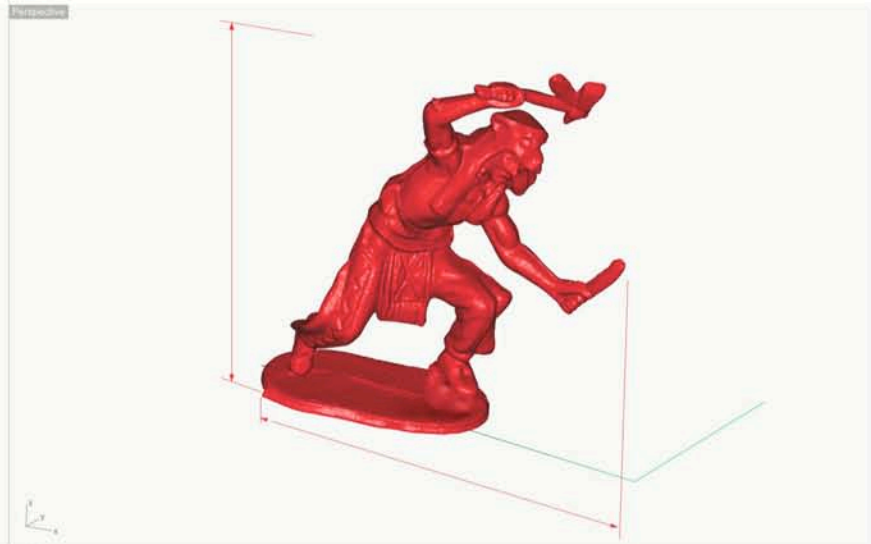
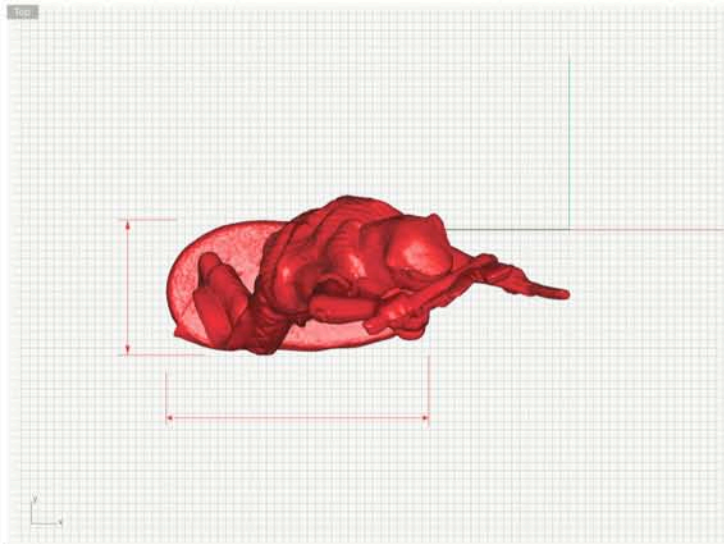
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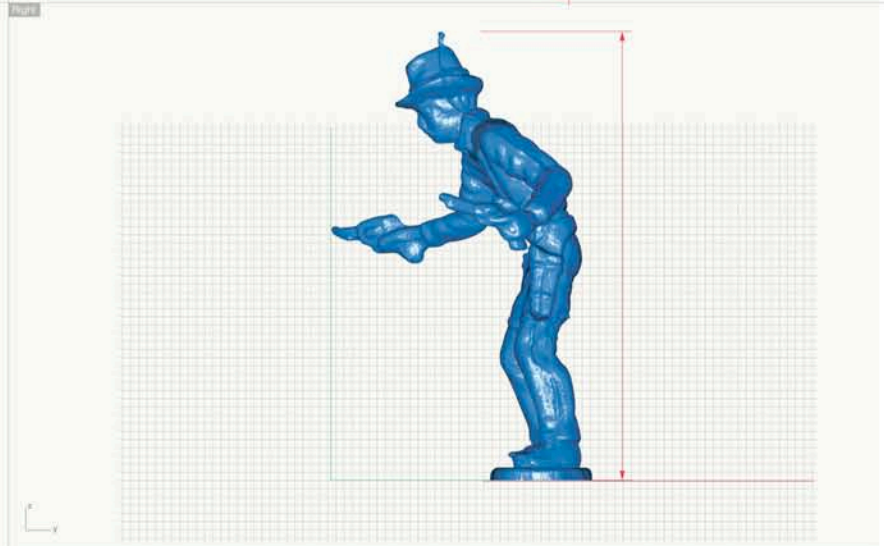
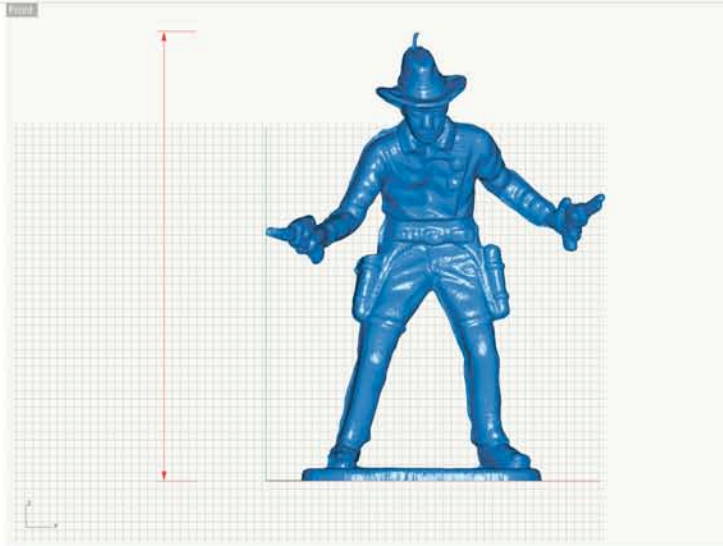
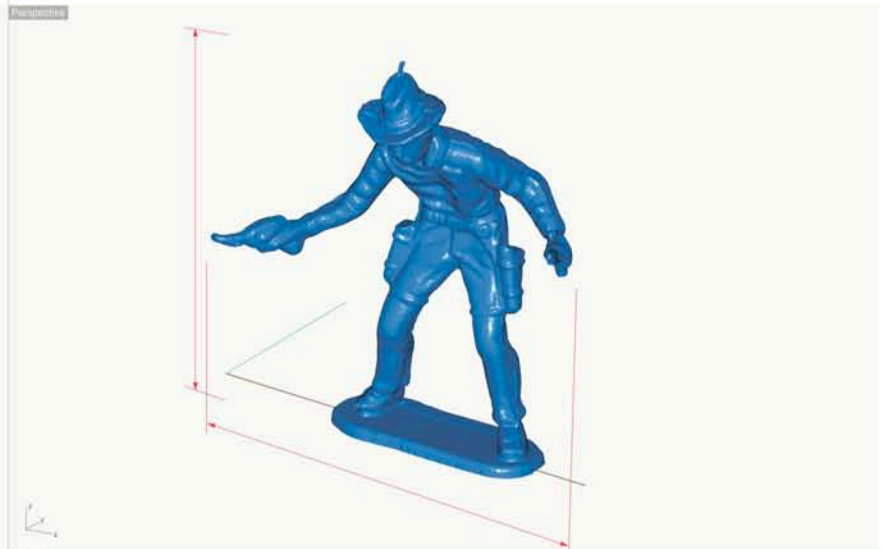
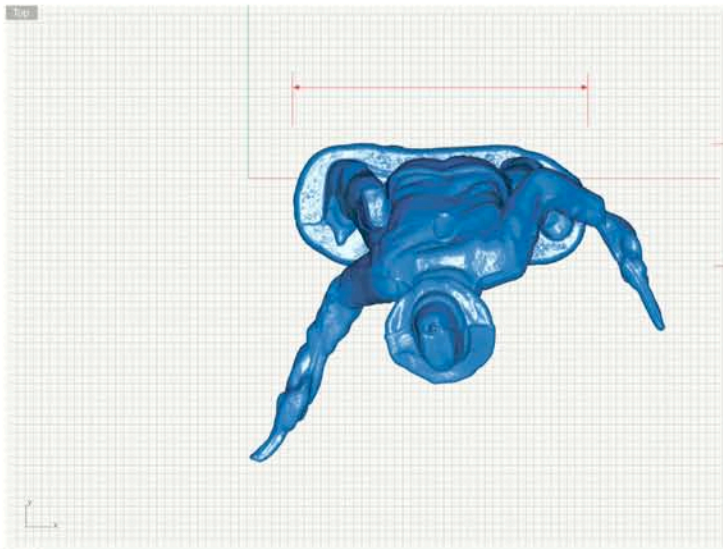
“Walking into the exhibition *War (What Is It Good For?)*, at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago, last spring, viewers were presented with a dramatic confrontation. A life-size, green toy soldier took aim at three machine gun-toting men dressed in camouflage fatigues, the contrast effectively coupling fantasy and force. With vestiges of plastic not yet removed from the seams, Yoram Wolberger's *Toy Soldier* (2001) appeared freshly pulled from its mold, one of perhaps thousands of identical units ready for action.”

“Wolberger's use of a toy soldier targets childhood play as the psychic staging ground for state-sanctioned violence, a theme commonly addressed by writers and artists in the past century. Initially designed for those royal offspring who in time would lead actual armies, toy soldiers helped boys assimilate the military ethos of absolute allegiance to authority and unthinking duty on the battlefield. The first half of the twentieth century witnessed a booming market for tin and lead soldiers, sold largely to the middle and working classes. After the war, plastics and movable parts provided a degree of verisimilitude previously unmatched. Such toys made warfare a central part of childhood fantasy, helping to mold expectations about duty to one's country, while also reproducing gender stereotypes. Several writers noted that toys were preparation for the adult world, in that they "reveal the list of all the things the adult does not find unusual," as Roland Barthes asserted. Throughout the 1950s and 1960s American artists used toy soldiers to connect childhood fantasy with adult retrospection, while suggesting a direct connection between play and combat. The veteran H. C. Westermann placed toy soldiers of World War I vintage in several sculptures, including *Mad House* (1958; in the collection of the Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago), to evoke his own youth in the 1920s and 1930s, while also intimating that the toy—as substitute for the man—was inadequate before the sublime forces of the postwar, nuclear world. Ed Kienholz strapped a small soldier to the base of his installation *The Portable War Memorial* (1968, Museum Ludwig, Cologne). The soldier's presence suggests the dramatic disparity in scale between individuals and the power of the modern state in waging global war.

Wolberger's toy differs from that of preceding artists in its presence and placement. Rendered life size, it is uncannily human. Even the evidence of molding cannot fully detract from its identity as surrogate. Without a framing narrative, the soldier becomes a universal everyman, ever ready for war. Though directing the viewer's attention in the exhibition, it could easily be pointed elsewhere, a perhaps haunting reminder of the ease with which men and women can be deployed for nation and money. Like the ubiquitous Union infantry, Southern rebels, and World War I doughboys found in dozens of cities and towns throughout the United States, *Toy Soldier* is a production-line memorial ready to take his place in a long line of statues.”

*By David McCarthy, Excerpt from Fantasy and Force: A Brief Consideration of Artists and War in the American Century, Art Journal, Winter, 2003.*







*Red Indian #1 (Chief)* 2005. 94 in. x 80 in x 26 in. Collection of William Kreysler and Jacquelyn Giuffré.  
Photography: Terri Garneau









Right: *Blue Cowboy #1 (Gunslinger)*, 2006. 80 in. x 70 in. x 22 in. "No Reservations" exhibit at the Aldrich Contemporary Art Museum, Ridgefield, CT, 2006  
Photography: Terri Garneau





Left: *Red Indian #4 (Spearman)*, 2008, 101 in x 120 in x 49 in.

Right: Installing *Blue Cowboy #2 (Rifleman)*, 2007, Privet collection, New York and *Cowboy #3 (Dbl. Gunslinger)*, 2007, Privet collection Montana.



*Blue Cowboy #3 (Dbl. Gunslinger)*, 2007; 75 in x 75 in x 22 in; Privet Collection, Montana.  
Photography: Wouter Dreutter









## NO RESERVATIONS

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"Wolberger moved to San Francisco in 1993 and made his first sculpture based on a military toy in 2001. The first "Indian", based on his childhood experience, was made in 2005 by taking a cheap, brightly-colored injection-molded figure that was one and one half inches tall and blowing it up to life size. Wolberger's process involves first making a three-dimensional scan of the toy, which is then dropped into a computer program that drives a CNC milling machine which carves the enlarged toy out of Styrofoam. A mold is made, which is then coated with layers of fiberglass. Wolberger's interest in this process is based on a simple but profound observation: the small toy Indian is innocent and relatively benign, blowing it up reveals its true nature as a grotesquely-distorted stereotype. The artist is careful to leave all the flashing and other details from the original, for these "flaws" get to the heart of his concern about the continuation of toy cowboys and Indians as children's role models in our supposedly socially-enlightened time."

*By Richard Klein, excerpt from 'No Reservations, Native American History and Culture in Contemporary Art' exhibit's catalogue, The Aldrich Contemporary Art Museum, Ridgefield, CT, 2006.*



*Red Indian #2 (Bowman)*, 2007; 97 in x 67 in x 33 in; Privet collection, Carmel, CA.  
Photography: Paul Dyer









Left: *Red Indian #2 (Bowman)*, 2007. Right: *Blue Cowboy #3 (Dbl. Gunslinger)*, 2007. Privet Collection, Montana  
Photography: Wouter Dreutter

## BIOGRAPHY

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### SELECTED SOLO EXHIBITIONS

- 2010 Benrimon Contemporary, New York, NY
- 2006 *A Survey of work from 1998 - 2005*, Center for Contemporary Art, Sacramento, CA
- 2004 Mark Moore Gallery, Santa Monica, CA
- 2002 *Parting Lines*, New Langton Arts, San Francisco, CA
- 2001 *Introductions 2001*, Catharine Clark Gallery, San Francisco, CA

### SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS

- 2010 *New Art for a New Century: Contemporary Acquisitions 2000-2010*, Orange County Museum of Art, Newport Beach, CA
- Child's Play*, Institute of Art, Design and Interactive Media CCBC, Baltimore, MD
- 2009 *American Identities*, Brooklyn Museum of Art, Brooklyn, NY
- DeCordova Sculpture Park and Museum, Lincoln, MA
- Syzygy*, The Lab, San Francisco, CA
- NY Pulse*, with Mark Moore Gallery, New York, NY
- 2008 *Group Exhibition*, Scott White Contemporary Art, San Diego, CA
- From the Permanent Collection*, Brooklyn Museum, Brooklyn, NY
- 2007 *California Art: Selection from the Fredrick R. Weisman Art Foundation*, American Jewish University, Bel Air, CA
- Made in California: Contemporary California Art from the Fredric R. Weisman Foundation*, Fredric R. Weisman Museum of Art, Pepperdine University, Malibu, CA
- Model Behavior*, organisms, Portland, OR
- 2006 *No Reservations*, The Aldrich Contemporary Art Museum, Ridgefield, CT
- Through the Rabbit Hole*, 21C Museum, Louisville, Kentucky
- See Jane Run*, The Bedford Gallery, Walnut Creek, CA
- 2005 *Summer Pleasure*, Mark Moore Gallery, Santa Monica, CA
- Social Insecurity: The Future Ain't What It Used to Be*, Catharine Clark Gallery, San Francisco, CA
- 2004 *Overt/Covert*, Aidekman Arts Center, Tufts University Gallery, Medford, MA
- Domestic Odyssey*, San Jose Museum of Art, San Jose, CA

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- The Armory Show* with Henry Urbach Architecture, New York, NY  
*Hard Candy*, the San Jose Institute of Contemporary Art (ICA), San Jose, CA  
*Just One Word: Plastics*, Square Blue Gallery, Costa Mesa, CA  
 2003 *Art on Site 2: officespace*, Tel Aviv, Israel  
*Sprout*, Catharine Clark Gallery, San Francisco, CA  
*realUNREAL*, Sheppard Fine Arts Gallery, University of Reno, NV  
*War (What Is It Good For?)*, Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago, IL  
*A Beautiful Day in the Neighborhood*, Sun Valley Center for the Arts, Sun Valley, ID  
 2002 *2002 California Biennial*, Orange County Museum of Art, Newport Beach, CA  
*Portrait Obscured*, the San Jose Institute of Contemporary Art (ICA), San Jose, CA  
*Pro Arts' Juried Annual 2001-2002*, Pro Arts Gallery, Oakland, CA  
 2001 *Present/Tense*, University Art Gallery, Sonoma State University, Sonoma, CA  
*Introductions South 2001*, the San Jose Institute of Contemporary Art (ICA), San Jose, CA  
*By Appointment*, Refusalon, San Francisco, CA  
 Jernigan Wicker Fine Arts Gallery, San Francisco, CA  
*About Body and Space*, Diego Rivera Gallery, San Francisco, CA  
*Installation, Annual Mystery Ball*, Headlands Center for the Arts, Sausalito, CA  
 2000 *OpenHouse; Art on Site 1*, San Francisco, CA  
*Bay Area Student Sculpture Biennial*, San Francisco, CA  
*Limited Situations*, curated by "Los Carpenteros" and Toni Labat, San Francisco, CA  
 1993 *The Week of the Young Artist*, The Schrieber Gallery, Tel Aviv, Israel  
 1992 Gallery 13, Jaffa, Israel  
*The Week of the Young Artist*, The Israeli Museum of Modern Art, Ramat Gan, Israel  
 1991 Tel Aviv Museum of Modern Art, Tel Aviv, Israel

#### EDUCATION

- 2001 MFA, New Genres Department, San Francisco Art Institute, San Francisco, CA  
 1992 BA in Design, Bezalel Academy of Art and Design, Jerusalem, Israel



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- Choquette, Marc, "Simplicity Makes Wolberger's Piece Very Intriguing", Pepperdine University The Graphic, November 26, 2007
- Genocchio, Ben, "Visions of Native Americans in Today's World", The New York Times, December 3, 2006
- Cowan, Alison L., "A Pile of Blankets, With Personal History Woven Into the Fabric", The New York Times, August 25, 2006
- Dalkey, Victoria, "Out of the ordinary", The Sacramento Bee, April 2, 2006
- Joanne Silver, "'Overt' forces look at aggression", Boston Herald, October 22, 2004
- Sapina-Kerkhove, Mari, "Domestic Pains And Gains On Display", Spartan Daily, April 19, 2004
- Sullivan, James, "A Love Affair with Appliances Only Keeps Us in the Kitchen", San Francisco Chronicle, March 25, 2004
- Gant, Michael S., "House Unbound", Silicon Valley Metro, March 17-24, 2004
- Hayes, Holly, "Domesticity goes for a spin" San Jose Mercury News, Mar. 13, 2004
- Gordon, A.L., "Out and About", The New York Sun, March 15, 2004
- Hayes, Holly, "What's in the fridge? Art", San Jose Mercury News, Mar. 05, 2004
- Fischer, Jack, "Twisted Visions of Youth", San Jose Mercury News, February 1, 2004
- Baker, Kenneth, "California Artists Take the Traditional Still-Life in Wild New Directions," San Francisco Chronicle, January 31, 2004
- Woods, Casey, "Alternative to Exhibit Space", Miami Herald (Neighbors), December 7, 2003
- McCarthy, David, "Fantasy and Force: A Brief Consideration of Artists and War in the American Century", Art Journal, December 2003
- Shefi, Smadar, "Executives Games", Haaretz, May 27, 2003
- Director, Ruth, "Velvet Underground", Ha-ir, May 15, 2003
- Kantor, Sharon, "Another Day at The Office", Ha-ir, May 15, 2003
- Gilerman, Dana, "New Life to a Deserted Office", Haaretz, May 8, 2003
- Hieggelke, Brian, "When Hawks Cry" NewCityChicago Online Magazine, March 26, 2003
- Hawkins, Margaret, "WAR, Exhibit Cry Out for Peace," Chicago Sun-Times, January 24, 2003
- Tanous, Adam, "Center Exhibit Examines the Concepts of Home," Express, December 18, 2002
- Frank, Peter, "2002 California Biennial," LA Weekly, August 30-September 5, 2002
- Chang, Young, "Strange Beauty," Daily Pilot, May 25, 2002
- Pincus, Robert L., "Ordinary Strangeness," The San Diego Union -Tribune, June 20, 2002
- Walsh, Daniella, "Exhibition Two Years Young," The Orange County Register, June 2, 2002
- Mendenhall, Lauri, "A Multi-layered Debut," Coast, June 2002

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Goldner, Liz, "Provocative Summer Shows, from Warhol to Edge of the World, Post-pop, Multimedia Extremism," OC Metro, 2002  
Walsh, Danielle, "Avant Art," Riviera Magazine, May-June 2002  
Fisher, Jack, "About Face," The Mercury News, March 28, 2002  
Baker, Kenneth, "Yoram Wolberger," San Francisco Chronicle, January 12, 2002  
Baker, Kenneth, "Toying with the Human Form," San Francisco Chronicle, July 28, 2001  
Betsky, Aaron, "Tangerine Dream," Interiors, May 2001  
Novakov, Anna, "Open House: Art on Site 1," Vistaview Journal of Contemporary and New Media Art, March 25, 2001  
Baker, Kenneth, "Rooms with a View," The San Francisco Chronicle, June 10, 2000

#### CATALOGUES

2007 Klien, Richard, No Reservations, The Aldrich Contemporary Art Museum, Ridgefield, CT  
2004 Northrup, JoAnne, Domestic Odyssey, San Jose Museum of Art, San Jose, CA  
2002 Armstrong, Elizabeth and Hofman, Irene, 2002 California Biennial, Orange County Museum of Art, Newport Beach, CA

#### RELATED ACTIVITIES

2003 Co-curator of group show installation in a vacant office space: *Art on Site 2: officespace*, Tel Aviv, Israel  
2000 Co-curator of group show installation in a vacant Victorian house, *Art on Site 1: OpenHouse*, San Francisco, CA

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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The one-and-only Miguel Ambriz.

My supportive wife, Orit Wolberger Mouilly, and my dear family.



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