

THE DALLAS MORNING NEWS

APRIL 29, 2020

Enjoy the Dallas Museum of Art's exploration of home from the comfort of yours



Alex Da Corte's "Rubber Pencil Devil," a glowing, neon-lined house skeleton, is the single most jaw-dropping piece at the Dallas Museum of Art's "For a Dreamer of Houses" exhibition. (Ben Torres / Special Contributor)

The DMA is offering an online virtual tour of its "For a Dreamer of Houses" exhibition.

What does it mean for a house to be a home?

For one thing, it means that a structure built of inanimate wood and glass can somehow become an anchor for powerful emotional and imaginative experiences — like the smell of a grandmother's kitchen cupboard, or the feel of sinking into a favorite armchair by the fireplace — that are better expressed through the mysterious alchemy of art than by the quantitative measurements of the real estate business.

The house is a metaphor of humanness — this is the basis for French philosopher Gaston Bachelard's 1958 book, *The Poetics of Space*. A dreamer of houses, in Bachelard's terms, is someone who uses poetic means to tap into the deep, pre-conscious and pre-civilizational meanings of the home.

Bachelard's book provides the organizing framework for the exhibition "For a Dreamer of Houses," which opened at the Dallas Museum of Art just a few days before the museum — along with its peers around the world — closed to the public because of the COVID-19 pandemic. (The museum currently is working on plans for reopening, as restrictions gradually loosen.)

A total of 54 works from the museum's contemporary collection in a wide variety of media, including nine recent acquisitions being shown here for the first time, fill the Dallas Museum

of Art's central Barrel Vault and Quadrant Galleries.

Although the museum's physical doors remain closed for the time being, art lovers can now find a detailed, high-resolution, virtual-reality tour of the exhibition online at virtual.dma.org, along with further video and written materials highlighting selected works in the show.

The online viewing experience does provide a wonderful sense of how the artworks all fit together, once you get the hang of navigating the video-game-like 3-D virtual space, although, to be sure, it lacks the totally immersive experience of scale, light, texture and sound that you can get only from an in-person visit. (This technology, by Matterport, is also used by real estate firms to document their construction projects.)

Through the quarantine lens

How, then, does the show hold together? Seeing the artworks during the quarantine, which has turned the typical home into a place of more or less comfortable confinement, does tend to emphasize the sense of captivity, or enclosure, that can make a home feel like a place where the four walls are closing in.

This is especially evident in work by some of the younger artists here, who take a critical, even jaundiced, attitude toward home and hearth, as is the case with the single most jaw-dropping piece, Alex Da Corte's wild *Rubber Pencil Devil* (2018).

Walking into Da Corte's glowing, neon-lined house skeleton, one passes among window boxes with planters and shutters, all seemingly floating in the air. Once inside, one is immediately confronted with an enormous video wall that plays a three-hour montage of clips in which the artist reinterprets TV classics such as *Mister Rogers' Neighborhood* in a madcap spirit.

Is this pulsing, blaring experience a kind of nightmare, the exact opposite of homeyness? On the contrary, it shows how in a post-network TV era, a house full of video-driven fantasies dissolves the distinction between the familial "inside" and the Hollywood "outside." This contrast, or dialectic, is the focus of one section of the show.

Also on the droll side is Pipilotti Rist's *Massachusetts Chandelier* (2010), which is bedecked with countless "previously worn and cleaned" underpants of all sorts — it comes across as an artifact of some American coming-of-age or fertility ritual, most at home in a fraternity or sorority house.

A more serious tone

Along with those works by Rist and Da Corte, the show is anchored by two other large-scale pieces, both of which take a more grave, serious tone. Do Ho Suh's 2016 replica of an entrance to his childhood home in Korea is made entirely of precisely cut and draped transparent polyester fabric over a stainless-steel frame. It looks light enough to pick up and carry away, but intricate enough to study closely for a long while — and to stimulate one's imagination about a kind of dwelling quite unknown in American neighborhoods.

Although from the outside, Francisco Moreno's breathtaking *Chapel* (2016-18) may appear to be simply a minimalist wooden reconstruction of a Romanesque building, one steps inside to discover a mind-bending mural wrapped around the whole interior in a continuous

composition, incorporating motifs from centuries of art history in one grand symphonic montage.

Some of the appliances and fixtures on view didn't seem especially homey to me. For example: a bathroom sink (Margaret Lee), a Maytag washing machine (Olivia Erlanger) and a vacuum cleaner (Rob Pruitt), none of which, in the end, would haunt my house dreams.

Rather, the works that most aroused the "homesick" poetic welling-up of emotion that Bachelard's book so brilliantly evokes were those in the relatively old-fashioned two-dimensional media of painting and photography, such as Maureen Gallace's painting *Cross Hill Road, Winter* (2002), or Misty Keasler's photograph *Green Room (Quarenteen)* Leagnul di Copii, *Tigru Mures*, Romania (2004).

Becoming absorbed in these works, I had a definite sense of home — not my home, to be sure, but someone's home, with all the quirks and irregularities that implies — as in the dolls and toys somewhat poignantly scattered across the rug on the floor of the barren, institutionally painted room in Keasler's photograph.

They certainly seemed much more real than the steady stream of picture-perfect home interiors that flow continuously through Instagram, HGTV and shelter magazines. And they gave me a renewed appreciation for how delicate, even fragile, a home really can be.