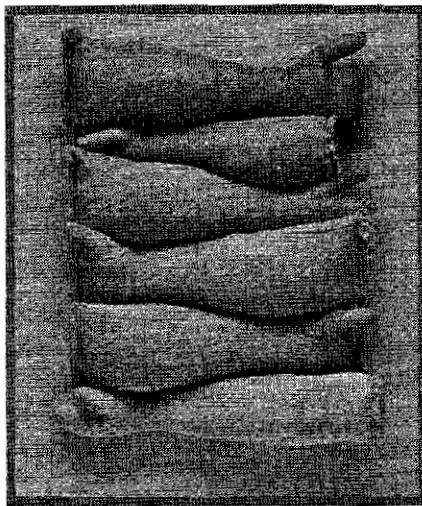


Reviews



Victoria May, *Like so many sand bags*, 2008, burlap, silk, stuffing, at Don Soker Contemporary Art, San Francisco.

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ry (2008), d objects—led ironing red cloth, ese have a e aerial liberately nce, such as m (2008) thread is gends for and the rip-hore. *Like so* different

recent floods, hurricanes and natural disasters. Here a series of arms made of stuffed burlap are stacked in an alternating and interlinking pattern to form a surrogate wall of arms against impending disaster. As these arms are arranged in a simple pattern of quiet stasis upon the wall, their usefulness is clearly a matter of human conjecture and also a projection of human futility.

Evidence from all the works in this show, their titles and monochromatic palette—where beige, brown, drab olive and pale rose pervade—suggests that May is describing a world in defeat, remaindered and depleted, a place where nothing is left but detritus and a sketchy, vague residue of what once was full-bodied and wholly corporeal. Such a world view on the face of it would seem to be pessimistic and fatalistic, as if there were no alternative or positive solutions. This is not, however, the lasting and final effect of her creations. Through an odd paradox of artistic creation and conceptualization—the products of her imagination, skill and masterful execution and control of materials—May herself overcomes and defers—even defeats—this fatalism.

—Frank Cebulski

Victoria May: *Residuum* closed in September at Don Soker Contemporary Art, San Francisco.

Frank Cebulski is a contributing editor to *Artweek*.

Jeremy Mora at Mark Wolfe Contemporary Art

A s mortgage meltdown, bank failure, foreclosure and eviction—not to mention global warming and flooding—threaten our national economic foundations, *Waiting for the Water* is a fitting title for an exhibition of Jeremy Mora's sculptures of miniature houses, ramshackle and jerry-rigged, tottering on precariously balanced layers of various substrates and crowned by teeny-tiny people. After all, he once described "the rising tide that will someday force many of us coastal dwellers to either get a floating house or build everything up

a moneybag on a pedestal (which should be our national mascot) and a gag lunchbag, wired for quick removal, presumably by gagster free-market ideologues.

But casting the Los Angeles

sculptor as a new Jeremiah (or Noah) would be overreaching; these tiny tableaux could just as well be interpreted as jokes about homeowner-bandyman ineptitude—like villain Gene Hackman's laughable carpentry skills in *Unforgiven*. Although Mora is aware of how badly the neocons have swung their hammers, these habitats for art viewers are not political per se as much as funny and absurdist, reflective of the artist's varied interests in engineering, psychology, oddball landscapes and philosophical/aesthetic musings. His small works, sitting on wall-mounted shelves or brackets or resting directly on the floor, ironically re-imagine familiar full-scale environments, less designed—or even up to code—and surely more ad hoc or improvised than we would like to believe our communities to be. (Some Mora-esque motifs in my neighborhood: a small dusty potted shrub sitting inside a barred cage and a sprig of foliage erupting from a hacked and otherwise moribund tree trunk.)

What makes Mora's work so witty and satisfying is his delight in unorthodox materials, including bricks, plaster, Styrofoam, putty, cast paper, piano wire, canned expandable foam, Sculpey, pourstone, mechanical pencil lead, moss, styrene, tile, concrete, lichen, twigs, pomegranate, tissue paper, plastic pots, asphalt, found lenses, dried flowers, horsehair, plastic plants, tiny model railroad figures, miniature cinder block and found plywood—also such wryly stated ingredients as "trash," "misc. junk," "ground paper," "clowns" and "3 friars." *Elevated Trash*, the title of an older piece, describes his aesthetic *modus operandi* perfectly.



Jeremy Mora, *Welcome Home*, 2008, mixed media, 31" x 10" x 6", at Mark Wolfe Contemporary Art, San Francisco.

mental assemblage of columns, stacks, slabs and slag heaps that culminates in a decrepit modernist house on pillars, seemingly quake-damaged, surmounted by miniature palm trees, one of which is enclosed in a circular palisade. *Mark My Words* is more stable-looking, composed of layers of foam, cardboard and concrete that support a small statue of a knight in armor, but this island peak is un-scaleable (though some tourists approach the top): Boulders are collapsing the fencing, and the scaffolding at the base is missing its hillboard—and words. *Welcome Home* shows a small cabin set in a treetop, encircled by branches, a dog sitting philosophically in the corner of a small, rectangular lawn. *Grand Opening* sets a slab of earth atop a column of glued-together stones, slabs and poured concrete; two leafless trees support a string of triangular pennants. *Comrades* features a trio of houses atop a disk of concrete that rises from a pile of stacked Homasote; rising above the houses is a pole bearing three stadium lighting fixtures—a paranoid beacon. *Above It* shows a house perched atop a peak as if placed there by a tornado while below it the rock weeps tears or stalactites onto the ruins of another structure.

Mora's work can be characterized as simultaneously utopian and dystopian. While the miniature scale of the work

suggests Charles Simonds and Michael C. McMillen, among others, its respect for the ordinary stuff of life and its satirical view of human foibles link it to the paintings of Chester Arnold, who also finds awkward grace and absurdist humor in serious matters—like, for example, human arrogance on a crowded and perhaps exhaustible planet. Both make entropic comedy, but with a serious undertone. It may have been endearing and heroic when

Courhet saluted the Mediterranean as an equal in 1854, but it's time we saw our corporate gangsters, unmoored from reality, with Brobdingnagian egos, as the presumptuous Lilliputians that they always were. Downsize them.

DeWitt Cheng

Jeremy Mora: *Waiting for the Water* closes November 1 at Mark Wolfe Contemporary Art, 49 Geary, Ste. 202, San Francisco.