



TRISTAN MANCO

Big Art Small Art

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WITH 288 ILLUSTRATIONS, 257 IN COLOUR

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David DiMichele

— PROFILE P. 153 —



ABOVE *Pseudodocumentation: Apollonian and Dionysian*, 2010. Digital C-print.
107 × 140 cm (42 × 55 in.).

OPPOSITE, ABOVE *Pseudodocumentation: Bark Gestures*, 2011. Digital C-print.
104 × 142 cm (41 × 56 in.).



BELOW
Pseudodocumentation: Broken Glass
2006
Digital C-print
×
102 × 152 cm (40 × 60 in.)

OVERLEAF
Pseudodocumentation: Lightrods
2009
Digital C-print
×
102 × 165 cm (40 × 65 in.)





'I like working with everyday objects because I can immediately effect them and instil my vision. With small scale, it's easier to maintain control. When I have an idea, I get excited and curious to see if I can create what I see in my head. I love the creative challenge of trying to make something that is familiar and seemingly bland feel interesting and new. I hope that my work can inspire others to look closely at the things we seldom think about, to be observant and see that uninteresting things can be interesting.'

Brock Davis

work ethic has almost become a force of habit since he famously took part in an online project called *Make Something Cool Every Day* (2009). Launched by Olly Moss, a friend and fellow designer, the assignment called upon a group of designers and artists to commit to making an artwork every day for a whole year and share their results via a Flickr group. At first thousands of people signed up, but gradually they dropped out as it became impossible to stick to the pledge – all except Davis, who was the only one to complete the challenge.

Finding the time to make 365 artworks was no mean feat, and some were executed at the last moment. 'One time, I had about 20 minutes to go,' says Davis. 'I was pacing around the kitchen, and I saw a pen, so I picked it up and illustrated a Converse-esque shoe on my wife's foot, snapped a shot of it, and uploaded it to the group at about 12.15 am. Things like that happened all the time.' Although Davis considered the project to be a second job, he began to find it quite meditative. It made him notice the smaller things in life, and moments that he might have missed were it not for his creative task. He cites as an example a self-portrait created using his own stubble by drawing with a toothpick in the bathroom sink. 'My favourite pieces are the ones that pull something interesting out of something seemingly bland,' Davis explains. Often the works are visual puns, but rather than being merely jokes, there is a poetry in the simple and elegant way he tells each visual story.

Although he feels his strengths are in drawing and photography, the *Make Something Cool* project pushed him towards miniature sculptures, making original and unusual use of the media that were available to him, from cut vegetables to dead flies. Today, he continues to make work for fun and to amuse his children. While other parents tell their kids not to play with food, Davis meticulously recreates the cover of the classic Joy Division album *Unknown Pleasures* with noodles on a plate or the bombing of Nagasaki using a cunningly photographed cauliflower. In 2012, he used Instagram to make Polaroid-style photographs of carefully observed or cleverly staged moments in his signature witty style. 'I strive to make work that makes people feel something,' he says. 'I want them to get excited and want to talk about what they've seen and share it with their friends.'

David DiMichele

— IMAGES P. 194 —

In a hangar-like gallery space, a precarious installation made up of enormous panels of shattered glass catches the light from above as figures carefully make their way between the broken shards (*Pseudodocumentation: Broken Glass*, 2006). In another, the white walls of a vast pristine gallery are pierced by gigantic lightrods, which penetrate the space floor to ceiling (*Pseudodocumentation: Lightrods*, 2009). Los Angeles-based artist David DiMichele creates imaginary installations that appear to be on an epic scale but are in fact meticulously staged dioramas small enough to sit on a table in the artist's studio. He then turns to his camera to create the finished piece, producing a large-scale photograph of a grandiose installation in a make-believe exhibition space.



David DiMichele, *Pseudodocumentation: Metal Four*, 2009.
Lightjet print, 114 × 165 cm (45 × 65 in.).

Forming part of DiMichele's ongoing *Pseudodocumentation* series, these imposing works combine his background in installation, painting and sculpture with a passion for monumental museum and gallery architecture and a love of abstract form.

He begins by designing and building scale models of gallery spaces, which he then fills with his own original artworks in media such as drawing, painting and sculpture. Within these spaces he also positions miniature gallery visitors to complete the illusion of a real exhibition environment. The end result – the

‘The Pseudodocumentation photographs are a kind of fantasy installation art visualized through the creation of architectural models and photography. I enjoy the shift in scale that happens when the image goes from a tabletop diorama to a large-scale photograph, and the way that the ostensible scale of the fictive installation can be manipulated. The sense of ambiguity of the final photographs (they are sometimes mistaken for documentations of actual installations) is also important to me conceptually. I use this process to try to imagine what sort of projects I would make if there were no logistical or financial constraints: unlike actual installation artists, I am limited only by my imagination.’

David DiMichele

large-scale photograph – blurs the lines between fact and fiction, playing on our ideas of scale and perception, and encouraging us to re-examine how we view and experience art.

DiMichele came up with the idea for the series when he was going through the process of

documenting his own projects and began to consider the role of photography in the documentation of art. The majority of people experience contemporary art through photographs rather than first-hand. For instance, artists such as American sculptor Richard Serra rely on photography to interpret the spectacle of their large-scale works in real life. Unlike most installation photographs, however, DiMichele’s documentations are themselves artworks. He has denied that his photographs are a parody, arguing that they pay homage to both large-scale art and the supersized contemporary art spaces that are becoming prevalent today, such as Tate Modern in London, by imagining abstract installations without limits. Working in this way, and by controlling the lighting and viewpoint of the photograph, he can create an installation scene that would be impossible in real life.

The small scale of the dioramas allows the artist to imagine at a gigantic scale, use extravagant materials and place his subjects in dramatic situations – encircled by towers of melting ice, for example. These powerful scenes share the shock and awe of supersized works, but without the huge teams of workers, large budgets and expensive fabrication. The result: small art dreams with a big art impact.

Thomas Doyle

– IMAGES P. 198 –

American artist Thomas Doyle creates intricate worlds encased under glass domes or bell jars, as if captured by a collector. Crafted at a scale of 1:43 – sometimes smaller – these scenes are somehow familiar, depicting the suburban landscapes we are accustomed to seeing in Hollywood movies, with white picket fences and immaculate lawns, but in those moments after catastrophe has struck. There is an air of science fiction or post-apocalyptic dystopia

to these otherwise everyday worlds that have been transformed by extraordinary events and brought to life by the cast of small characters who act within them. Buildings are inverted or vast chasms appear between them to create surreal scenes that are designed to evoke transformational moments in a person’s life or sensations triggered by a muddle of memories. As Doyle describes, ‘In much the way the mind recalls events through the fog of time, the works distort reality through a warped and dreamlike lens.’

‘I’ve always been interested in smaller scales due to their potential for wonder. Smaller works, especially those that attempt to create worlds and environments, not only allow us a place to escape to momentarily; they transform the mundane into something extraordinary. The materials themselves, be they from kits or taken straight from the trashcan, come together in unexpected ways to effect detailed miniature worlds. There’s an element of magic there.’

Thomas Doyle

Doyle created his first diorama at the tender age of three, using wood, Play-Doh and a plastic penguin to depict a snow and sea scene. He was soon hooked and spent much of his childhood creating models and shoebox dioramas. After studying fine art at Humboldt State University in California, he began a period of painting and printmaking but found himself returning to what had made him happiest as a child. His approach to creating models as a trained artist was more sophisticated, but no less absorbing. Describing the process as meditative, Doyle can spend months

working on each piece, from the initial sketch to the gradual sculpting with plaster, foam, wood and plastic, to the finishing process of weathering and modifying the work until it mimics reality as closely as possible.

The miniature narratives in their glass bubbles remind us of the fragile world we live in – and the delicate balance with nature and each other. As viewers looking down on the scenes below, we are placed in a position of great power: we see every aspect of the dark landscapes that threaten the figures trapped within. The radically reduced scale gives these snapshots of life a private intensity that draws us in, in a similar way to a doll’s house. The characters also play out the scenes of chaos and destruction with little emotion, inviting us to lose ourselves in these worlds and all the feelings and memories that they stir up.

Having long been fascinated with the dioramas at the American Museum of Natural History in New York, Doyle uses the same visual language to surprise the viewer with exhibits that are not of this world. ‘By sealing the works in this fashion,’ he says, ‘I hope to distil the debris of human experience down to single, fragile moments. Like blackboxes bobbing in the flotsam, these works wait for discovery, each an indelible record of human memory.’

Lorenzo Manuel Durán

– IMAGES P. 202 –

After observing a caterpillar munching its way through a leaf, Spanish artist Lorenzo Manuel Durán had a flash of inspiration: he wondered whether he might be able to use the same material to create works of art, in a similar technique to paper cutting. Unable to find any information on ‘leaf-cutting art’, he set about a process