

FOCUS

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DAVID DIMICHELE: PSEUDO DOCUMENTATION

PAUL KOPEIKIN GALLERY

David DiMichele's color photographs of fake gallery installations, complete with bantam museum-goers standing dwarfed by gigantic mounds of rock salt or Stonehenge-inspired columns of ice cubes, induce smirks, chuckles and wide-eyed strolls up to the surface of the pictures to figure out what the heck is going on. They are surprisingly amusing—the wine and Brie equivalent of a great Bill Murray movie.

It's just difficult to know what to make of them. Is he satirizing the pretensions of artists and museums that stage such abstract and grandiose installations? Is he lampooning himself for recreating something

so outlandish? Is he poking fun at us for examining photos of his faux art show rather than venturing to some museum to experience the artistic extravaganza itself? Or, woe to many a modernist curator, is he needling us for not opting to skip the entire folly altogether to spend our art-time communing with the likes of Manet's *Le déjeuner sur l'herbe*?

The answer depends on how you feel about navigating a colossal gallery like the Dia: Beacon in upstate New York that has been littered with shattered panes of glass, clusters of axed tree branches, or mountains of oily asphalt. DiMichele simulates all of these installations by constructing three-dimensional models of the massive gallery space, adorning them with heaps of raw commodities and then photographing the entire diorama to impersonate the scale of the real thing.

Excepting my experience with Richard Serra's awesome twisting ribbons of steel, I delighted in DiMichele's intricate fantasy photographs of such monumental installations far more than I ever did while surveying the actual efforts in actual museums. Too often these projects come off self-conscious, brutal and inane. Here, DiMichele virtually salvages the tradition. His unabashed drollery combined with the shrinking of scale onto a 3 x 6' wall-hanging frame, which provides an omniscient point of view that is simply unavailable in the midst of a real gallery, allows these photos to shimmer with a sense of purpose as well as a sneaky kind of charm. They deliver both an intellectual challenge and a winking aura of whimsy that such museum exhibitions

rarely muster. DiMichele obviously harbors a passion for modernist in-gallery abstractions, a form he himself has played with throughout his career. His scrupulous attention to the details of architecture, materials and design as he constructed his simulacrum testify to that reverence for the genre. But in these explorations of how best to document such a transient art form—galleries must inevitably destroy the work to clear space for the incoming show—he just might have mined something better. And saved museum cleaning crews many a day of arduous lifting and scrubbing.

David DiMichele, *Glass*; © David DiMichele, Courtesy the Paul Kopeikin Gallery, Los Angeles.

