

David DiMichele

James Scarborough

Ah, yes, art's cannibalistic side. That's the truest thing you can say about art; that it devours its young, its contemporaries, sometimes even itself, and then becomes something new. In so doing, it extends the boundaries of what constitutes the grist of art. Think Gauguin, the aesthetic cannibal extraordinaire. Think Juan Gris, picking up and reconfiguring the pieces of Braque's and Picasso's analysis. And think "Pseudo Documentation," David DiMichele's photography show at the Paul Kopeikin Gallery, the triumph of the viral over the sensual and the intellectual. Descartes who? Now it's log-on, ergo sum.

It's an attractive show, formally: well-crafted and engaging. These six large photographs compel the viewer with their taut compositions and intriguing narratives, which ostensibly document conditions for an aesthetic experience. Whatever other content these art world dioramas broach—and they do, tons—visually, these pieces are studies in black and white at heart, just as was Whistler's *Mother*, just as were certain photographs of Robert Mapplethorpe. Visually, they offer a treat, a trove, a trip.

Here, we feast on their process of construction. DiMichele fabricates miniature galleries for which he creates art, populates it, lights

it and then documents it. The effect is seamless. It testifies to the ability of the artist to create *trompe-l'oeil* environments that brim and resonate with ideas; not the least of which has to be every art student's wet dream, the artist-as-god: create the space, create the art, create the installation, create the viewers. The only thing to which he doesn't refer is the commercial and critical reception, but that's not within the ambit of this god-dom. Nuts.

DiMichele wants us to experience the exclusion of the viewer from the work. This he does on a number of levels, and this attests both to the work's formal keenness, as well as to its intellectual depth.

At first glance, it's a comic show. Through discrepancies of scale, DiMichele mocks the tendency of the tropes of modern art—monumentality, danger, spectacle, organic versus geometry, man-made objects versus natural landscape—to remove the figures from the main drama of the narrative.

What each piece has in common is that each figure must navigate some manner of art that, if not life-threatening, at least constitutes a nuisance to the experience of its viewing.

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David DiMichele, *Pseudodocumentation: Broken Glass*, 2006. Lightjet Print, 42" x 60".

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One piece shows figures in a room dwarfed by stacked ice cubes that allude to a Frigidaire Stonehenge. Another gallery shows glass shards capable, think Richard Serra, of maim and mayhem. Another gallery shows a man and a woman at opposite ends of an empty gallery with geometric lines with the expectation of a spectacle. Another gallery shows vines that contrast nicely with the Brian Doherty-esque geometric White Cube of the enclosure. Another shows people almost engulfed like ants in an ant farm. And another shows three man-made domes set close to the ground inside a people-less space whose picture windows show desert landscape.

But what gives the work its particular relevance is the contribution it makes to current debates on simulation. Not the beta egghead version simulation broached by French philosophers twenty years ago but the sort that computer simulation has enabled and made, via computer games and simulated environments, a household phenomena. Especially in the incarnation of Second Life, a 3-D virtual world in which users (as of this writing, almost 4 million, worldwide) create an online, digital civilization supported by market forces and enhanced by creative forces.

Forget that the figures in DiMichele's work resemble some of the avatars in Second Life. That some of the compositions are both melodramatic and indifferent. Important here to note is that his work epitomizes, in its exclusion of the viewer from the experience of art, a new iteration of the shifting dichotomies of modernist culture. Man on one side of the coin, nature on the other side. Then it was man and nature on one side of the coin, art on the other side. Now it's man, nature, and art on one side of the coin, and simulation on the other. The new dichotomy is the Living and the Viral. Not of the Frankenstein variety, but you get the idea.

With it's sophisticated, timely, and legible spoof on modern art's tendency to broach an Us and Them sensibility (Sound familiar? It should. It's our current foreign policy), and our culture's parallel universe of virtual reality, DiMichele's work presents a neat solution to art's ongoing question: What's for dinner?

The show runs until March 10. The Gallery is located at 6150 Wilshire Boulevard, Los Angeles, CA. For more information call (323) 937-0765 or visit www.paulkopeikinalgallery.com.