

STRUCTURE AND ITS AMBIGUITIES

Four artists singularize orderliness in an exhibition at SITE131

by terri provencal



Zsofia Schweger, *Library #2*, 2017, acrylic on canvas, 59 x 51 in., Cristina Velásquez, *Written on the Land*, white paper and thread, 15 x 12., Richard Tuschman, *Green Bedroom (Morning)*, 2013, archival pigment print, 30 x 24 in., Anne Damgaard, *Up #2* (installation view), 2018, nylon, 24 x 23 x 70in.

A group show featuring four artists living in different parts of the globe and working in diverse disciplines define *Structured*, on view through December at Site131. About the show, gallerist and curator Joan Davidow says, “I began with the idea of presenting an exhibition of more representational artwork. Zsofia Schweger was the first artist selected. Her cubist environments, ‘architectural orderliness’ in muted tones, sets an engaging stage. Then Richard Tuschman’s reinvented interiors added figures to the conversation.”

Schweger, who grew up in Hungary, first studied abroad in the US when she was 16. “Living away from my native country has been a significant influence on all of my adult life,” she says. Distinguished by her application of paint in a reductive and flat manner, Schweger says her work, hints at a sense of alienation, “In my Sandorfalva, Hungary paintings, I painted the domestic interiors of my childhood home.” Her family still owns the house but doesn’t visit much since relocating to London. “Most of our old furniture and belongings are still in place there. For now, the house looks frozen in time. In these paintings, I was interested in depicting a home where I didn’t belong anymore.”

A feeling of finally being settled prompted Schweger to begin engaging with other types of interior spaces, including two *Library* paintings found in *Structured*. She’s drawn to libraries for their systems and order, “and the infinite quietness we associate with them, as well as their basic function of supporting one’s learning and the general cultivation of thought, especially in a political climate where fact-based expertise might be less valued.” The artist developed a painterly language she says works well with libraries, “which are not only typically quiet and still but have an air of permanence. And permanence is certainly something I value after a decade of moving often.”

Richard Tuschman’s photographs of rooms, moody protagonists, and tousled bedsheets may convey disorder, but closer investigation reveals that the order lies in the artist’s calculated planning. “My plan was to recreate photographically certain Edward Hopper paintings that spoke to me, like *Hotel by A Railroad*,” Tuschman

explains. Feeling constrained, he later developed an “inspired by” series titled *Hopper Meditations*. To achieve these, Tuschman, who splits time between New York and Europe, designed a miniature set in 1:12 scale (one foot-one inch), which, he notes, is the standard scale for dollhouses. “The set’s walls were derived from half-inch foam insulation sheets. I painted them in acrylic, using whatever acrylic mediums and manipulation was required to obtain the desired ‘distressed’ plaster wall appearance.”

A few standard dollhouse pieces, along with Tuschman’s hand-built furniture of balsa wood or cardboard, enhance the set. “The windows I had to create myself from balsa wood strips and Plexiglas to match the windows in the paintings.” Diorama complete, Tuschman experimented with small wood mannequins as stand-ins for live models in order to visualize how the real models should be lit. He worked out the lighting by using small off-camera flash units as light sources to photograph the dioramas. He then photographed live models in the studio against a plain backdrop, “carefully transposing the lighting from the miniature set.” The resulting Hopper-esque image were stitched in Photoshop combining the photographs of the live models with those of the miniature set.

Following Tuschman, Davidow discovered Denmark’s Anne Damgaard, whose sculptural fashions display as objets d’art not intended for wear. A persuasive Davidow, however, gained permission for ballerinas to model each of the seven pieces at the opening. “Her fabrics, flowing and gauzy, add a new dimension to structure. And in concept, they are clearly structured for the female form,” Davidow says. To create much of her work, Damgaard buys high-tech Japanese synthetic fabrics, sometimes laser cut or pleated. “You can work more precisely with the shape and draping,” says Damgaard. The garments’ function is not important to her. “The function,” the artist describes, “is how it moves.”

The final artist selected for the exhibition, Cristina Velásquez, combines photography with weaving in collaged works on paper that are first to greet the viewer. “Cristina’s paper works are layered, much like her life in now two different cultures,” says Davidow. “She’s layering her experiences using paper to define her new language and new life conditions; that is, moving from her native Colombia to living in Houston. It’s a poetic way to describe new orderly conditions, much like Schweger’s life changes impacted her painting style.”

The show’s through line is each artist’s examination of the human relationship to space and belonging. “I have only realized recently that order—both seeking and depicting it—is crucial to me. A sense of order can sometimes provide respite from feelings of doubt and uncertainty, and perhaps that is the reason I’ve been so drawn to it,” Schweger sums up.