

ARTFORUM

APRIL 2005

I N T E R N A T I O N A L



ARTIST CURATES
T. J. WILCOX

MOSCOW BIENNALE

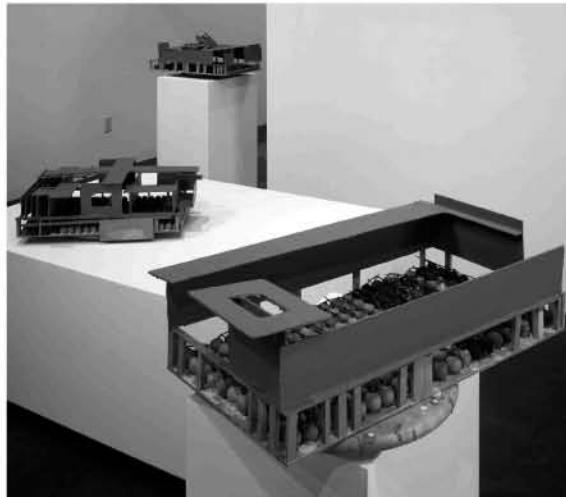
KELLEY WALKER

\$8.00





Amir Zaki, *Untitled (OH_04X)*, 2004, digital C-print, 69½ x 88½".



Pauline Stella Sanchez, *Gone Mad Blue/Color Vaccine Architecture or 3 state sculpture: before the event, during the event, and after the event. Seen here in before the event stage, 2004*, mixed media, dimensions variable.

side, but except for its bottom edge all bark is painted in lush purple swashes; three nails affix a black slat to the base to support an elegant piece of mouse-gray dried seaweed that curls out to suspend an empty plastic-net produce bag. Caughey avails herself of biomorphic flourishes, but the references invariably slide toward the (Barthesian) obtuse. Is the bag a creature's nest or a piece of human litter? Is it the *informe* that crowns nature's form? What are the questions we should be asking?

Walnut-shell halves, painted coconut shells, string: There's nothing inherently exotic about any of these things, yet they become strange and referentially rich in Caughey's work. She allows materials to remain what they are while also spinning off into the imaginary. In *Pecking Order*, white-painted rope coiled on a stumpy log becomes the very tree rings it hides but also, through proximity and referential rhyming, lends to the elegant stem rising from its center a rope-trick levity. At its top, this rope-become-reed bursts into a snowball-white coconut shell from which a lattice/stamen of hot pink string unfurls.

Various components of Caughey's hypnotic wall works suggest a lifesaver buoy, a jellyfish, and an aureole. The mobile elements spin and twirl in the air, the inanimate materials beginning a life of their own volition. How refreshing in the current sculptural climate of representational dillydallying and uninterrogated bravado to find an artist serenely questioning whether things can ever remain just what they are and wondering what that would possibly mean.

—BH

AMIR ZAKI

ROBERTS & TILTON/
MAK CENTER FOR ART AND
ARCHITECTURE

To point a camera at a house is a somewhat tautological operation, as both comprise rooms—the term *camera* denotes an enclosed, interior space—with windows, or apertures, opening out. Among all fabricated things, the house is the camera's closest kin and shares its most salient associations; above all, to the psyche, whether perceiving, remembering, imagining, dreaming. In *The Poetics of Space*, Gaston Bachelard famously described “the chief benefit of the house” in relation to this last function: “the house protects the dreamer, the house allows one to dream in peace.”

In Amir Zaki's recent work this same set of correspondences—between architecture, mediation, and mind—is simultaneously reinforced and undermined. Three discrete but obviously interrelated photographic suites describe exteriors of houses, interiors of houses, and exteriors seen *from* houses. The pictures range in size between medium and large and were recently dispersed between two venues that partly mirror their own aesthetic configurations. The first of these, the project room of Roberts & Tilton, represents “white cube” enclosure in extremis. Next came the notoriously difficult space of the MAK Schindler House that, in comparison, becomes the epitome of open-plan permeability, a state between inside and out.

Appropriately, the photographs at MAK run the gamut from architectural to landscape to still life, whose various conventions Zaki largely embraces but only to uncannily twist. The houses he shoots all conform to a classically LA model of the modernist hilltop home, but observed, as here, from below, they seem to jut precariously over sheer drops. This anxiety-provoking effect is further augmented by Zaki's digital erasure of the cantilevered supports that would normally hold the dwellings in place. Clichés of the SoCal high life, they are thus nudged from the everyday into a J. G. Ballard-style realm of eroto-apocalyptic sci-fi.

In sharp contrast to the heroic upward sweep of the architectural photographs, Zaki shoots his landscapes from above, as though leaning out of an overhead window and looking down (sometimes into backyard pools). The opposite orientation of these two perspectives is carried through to their objects which, taken together, stage a Freudian debate between “outies” and “innies.” Zaki's symbolism is crude—the interior views of stopped-up fireplaces in particular are almost too much—but, considering the myriad psychosexual readings that come with the territory, also perfectly justified.

Such emphatic yet seamless (read: Hollywood) F/X are by now recognizably Zaki's stock in trade. At Roberts & Tilton he directly acknowledged his debt to the realm of sheer spectacle; it was also here that his ambivalence reached a crescendo. Again, a house is shown teetering over a sharp slope, though in a sequence of three separate photographs.

These are identical, save for a tiny airplane that appears in the upper-left-hand corner of one image, then glides nonchalantly through the rest until it reaches the other side. It generates the sort of “visual noise” that belongs more to documentary veracity than dramatic verisimilitude, but whether it emphasizes or obscures the artifice of the image is unclear, and this is largely the point. One marvels at Zaki's mastery while shuddering at the implications of these spaces that not only no longer protect but now actively obstruct and antagonize the dreamer. What happens to the primal hut when its walls are replaced with flat-screen TVs? What happens when our “theaters of memory” go digital? Zaki's photographs are ultimately about the horror of a house that does all your dreaming for you.

—Jan Tumlir

PAULINE STELLA SANCHEZ

ROSAMUND FELSEN GALLERY

There's a moment in every thriller when the protagonists realize they've entered a bad situation, having stumbled on an illicit drug factory, a mad dictator's WMD program, or a mother alien's nest full of eggs. In this exhibition, Pauline Stella Sanchez conjured the anxiety of such moments with all the craft of Martha Stewart.

The center of Sanchez's show at Rosamund Felsen Gallery was a series of seven small wood-and-vinyl structures that resembled a display of architectural models. Each was drenched in sky blue paint, mounted on a turntable, and perched atop a pedestal. Collectively titled *Gone Mad Blue/Color Vaccine Architecture or 3 state sculpture: before the event, during the event, and after the event. Seen here in before the event stage, 2004*, the mini modernist buildings have elaborate, perhaps retractable, roofs lined with small, variously colored balls linked by a network of strings that suggest wires or conduits. Like case-study houses for the apocalyptically inclined, these places seem part of something bigger that one might be happier not knowing much about. Made of what the artist lists as “dominant cinema notes,” “neo-plastic memories,” and “meta-allegory of architecture as body,” as well as the more easily discernable wood, vinyl, resin, glue, and aforementioned balls (actually smoke bombs), these outwardly tasteful yet somehow troubling maquettes reveal Sanchez's pen-