



THE INDEPENDENT

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Pride Of Ownership

Penelope Gottlieb's Realty Renderings at The Contemporary Arts Forum

To some of us living in the brave, new economy, real estate may seem like the Holy Grail – a noble, though possibly unobtainable lifetime quest. To others, however, like the artist Penelope Gottlieb, it probably seems a lot more like Shangri-la Personified, or, in less auspicious moods, at least and worst, an Entertainer's Dream.

"I'm interested in how we commodify our happiness," explained Gottlieb, whose manner neatly negotiates a serious choice of words and a capricious cast of eye, "how realtors package domestic bliss". To that end, Gottlieb has been scouring the Sunday L.A. *Times* for the last year, carefully culling the nice, though amateurish illustrations of suburban castles on the hot marketplace. ("I don't like the shots done by the real professionals, where they wet down the driveway and use a lot of tricks to draw you in," she confessed.) She then cuts out her favorite snaps and puts them in a little loose-leafed notebook, each bearing the snappy titles assigned to them by real estate professionals. Titles that range from the ridiculous – "RV Owner's Paradise" reads one home with a huge concrete pad – to the sublime reaches of enigmatic poetry like "Paradise Unleashed" or the Asian-styled track home simply underlined with "Exceptional Feng Shui."

Lest this sound scolding, know that neither Gottlieb's beautifully rendered work nor her intentions permit much acidity. "I'm not trying to be mean, and I'm not really trying to make a critique," said Gottlieb as we toured the small gallery at Contemporary Arts Forum where the fruits of her last year's labor are now on

display. (As such they make an almost perfect complement to the big gallery's acerbic/attractive wonders of Dustin Shuler's gentle assault on the world of transportation.) Proof of her benign intentions comes first from the delicate manner in which she re-renders her cassia portraits in pencil and airbrush, and, places them in matching reworked thrift store frames. (The titles, of course, come from the bards of realty.) More important, perhaps, are the reactions she's gotten to the show. "There are more than a couple of ways to interpret the works, and so far I've heard only the good ones," she said smiling.

That kind of duality perhaps exudes from her genetic material and training. Born in Los Angeles, the daughter of architect Burt Brown, she grew up in a canyon famously invaded by thematic tract development; a place with street names like Zeus Drive and Apollo Lane, as she put it. ("It really pissed my father off," she laughed.) Gottlieb attended Chouinard and Art Center and for a long time made her work as a commercial artist working in the movies and television, where she won an Emmy for title design. (She married producer Andy Gottlieb, who made the James Coburn film originally titled *Atticus* here last year.) With her husband she admits to being a little house-obsessed: "Let me see now, this is our ninth home, and where I live is very important to me."

Perhaps more germane, however, is the delicacy of her drawing hand and the depth of her involvement in the contemporary scene. Her work is both hip and pretty. She won't dismiss the famous John Baldessari dictum that too many objects exist, and not enough concepts – thus leading to the furious abstraction of so much of the last two decades, and is trying – rather successfully – to straddle both worlds. "Just rendering without a concept leaves you very little to chew on. Trying to be both works for me. But then," she quickly adds, "who knows what I'll be doing next."

In the meantime, this show offers perfect yeast to those who're dragged down by the oppressiveness of modern-day unaffordable housing, and a nice jolt of aesthetics for those jaded with art world ironies. And the message, she insists, is an objective kind of vision. "I'm mostly trying to re-appreciate something that is commonplace around us. These houses really reflect us. They reflect our class and our world. I think you can read a society by driving down the street. And by reading the want ads you can find out a lot about America."

-- D.J. Palladino