

Artweek

David Schafer at the Dollhouse Gallery

The Dollhouse Gallery is a gallery inside an old-fashioned dollhouse. Its setting is a domestic space—the miniature house occupies the otherwise empty dining room of a Los Angeles apartment where it is mounted on a pedestal in the center of the room.

David Schafer, who is at his best when creating site-specific, text-based work, has transformed the Dollhouse Gallery into an investigation of the psychological interplay between the dollhouse and its owner. The artist conducted an interview with Jennifer Katell, the director of the gallery, about her relationship to the dollhouse, which was once her childhood toy and muse and is now her latest artistic endeavor. The text of the interview creates a link between the art and the space it occupies. This link fits right into Schafer's long-time interest in how public and private space come into existence and sets the tone for his investigation into the unique relationship between language, space, experience and perception.

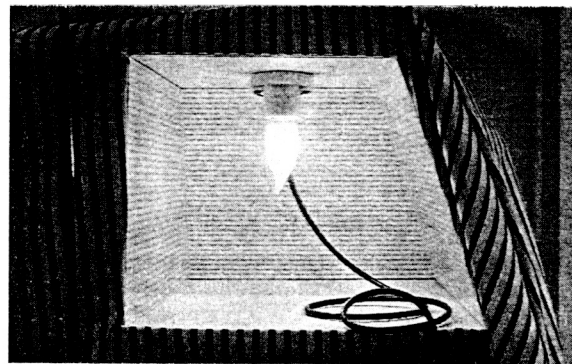
A cloth is draped over the entire structure of the dollhouse concealing what lies beneath. Presented with a cloaked object, one notes that there is something unseen, hidden from view. The viewer is compelled to wonder not only what

is being hidden, but what is being revealed. The clues must be found behind the curtain in the one visible room. This room, according to the interview, functioned for Katell as her pretend

bedroom. Its walls are covered with the text from the interview. The inscription gradually reveals that the dollhouse represents a relationship between Katell, her childhood, and her mother. The text, by invoking real childhood recollections from another time and place, reveals that, in a sense, Katell is still living out of or in the dollhouse.

Formally, the draped dollhouse, dressed up in blue-and-white stripes, acts as a purely aesthetic object of decor to be observed in a similar way that Katell claims to have treated the house as a child; decorating and redecorating it. Its functionality, on the other hand, recalls a tent or childhood fort made to hide a child's secret games—no adults allowed. Here Schafer invokes the mysteries of childhood memories and how they play a part in our lives as adults, strengthening the links between the young girl who played with the dollhouse, and the adult for whom the dollhouse has a seemingly separate meaning and function. The space, once a stage for child's play, is now the site of artistic creativity. Schafer's installation examines how these two functions differ and how they are alike.

Constructing a physical metaphor for the personal relationship between the self and the child-self; the real and the pretend, Schafer sets up a dialectic between the bedroom of the dollhouse and the bedroom in Katell's apartment. The questions from his interview are framed and hang in her real bedroom to reiterate the notion of adult as now and the child as then. Taking cues from the interview, Schafer continues to reinforce this complex relationship and blurs the lines between then and now. Inspired by Katell's mention of the former electric lamps and lighting in the dollhouse, Schafer brings into the miniature room a normal-size light as an act of adult restoration or intrusion into the past. Above the dollhouse is an existing chandelier. A wire is attached to the light socket of the chandelier and extends the bulb into the room of the dollhouse illuminating the room and text. Another wire with a bulb runs down the hall and



David Schafer, detail of *Enterview*, installation, at the Dollhouse Gallery, Los Angeles.

into Katell's bedroom approximately 50 feet away to shed light on the framed interview questions.

Schafer's installation offers an oral history of the site and instills that history with a meaning that is relevant to its present state and function. Schafer has uncovered a hidden narrative that lurks behind the facade of the dollhouse. With a personal account serving as his only source on the past, the piece takes on a voyeuristic nature. Peering into the tiny bedroom in search of answers, then entering a woman's real bedroom, one finds a set of questions. The restoration of the house is left incomplete and the mystery of childhood memories hangs in the air.

—Mary-Kay Lombino

Enterview, an installation by David Schafer closed on June 7 at the Dollhouse Gallery, Los Angeles

Mary-Kay Lombino is a writer and curator based in Los Angeles.