

ARTINFO

CalArts 2010 MFA Exhibition

Charlie James Gallery, Cottage Home, The Company, POVevolving, Dan Graham, and Actual Size, Los Angeles

Through July 9, 2010

Over the past few years, L.A.'s Chinatown has become an increasingly popular home base for smaller galleries that don't have the same commercial aspirations as, say, Blum & Poe. Six galleries in the neighborhood play host to "Box Scheme," the CalArts 2010 MFA exhibition curated by Ana Vejovic Sharp, former director of David Kordansky Gallery and China Art Objects.

At the more promising end of the spectrum are two works at Charlie James Gallery. **Patricia Fernandez's** *Sculpture for Copies*, a bookcase filled with both originals and copies of familial artifacts under glass, highlights the ambiguity and specificity of remembering. Steve Kado's *The Grand Table* is comprised of a long, low wooden table stacked with newspaper-like sheets of paper and a large magnifying glass. Each of the sheets contains excerpts, in exceedingly small type, from a novel about the adventures of a man traveling around the world. The artists create personal fictions, to varying degrees; we're being lied to, but we're in on the deceit.

At Actual Size, Zach Kleyn's *The Rapture, Remembered: Episode 2: The Gingerbread Lesson* is reminiscent of the manic Ryan Trecartin. In this video, a teenage girl from the late 1980s fondly recounts a lesson on the Rapture her grandmother gave her while they were baking gingerbread cookies together. The entire video is dubbed in a man's voice, making the old woman's use of phrases like "the beast" and "the mark" all the more confoundingly entertaining and once again highlighting the strange way in which the human brain processes the past. Cody Trepte's work at Dan Graham Gallery also plays with memory by pairing pristine photographs with degraded silkscreens of similar images. At Cottage Home, Bjarki Bragason's work draws parallels between an Icelandic reporter embedded in Iraq and the artist himself. *Epilogue Letters (her withdrawal)* pairs a video of the Iraqi countryside with a voice-over reading of a letter from that journalist. "In many ways, I made the whole thing up," the reporter confesses, speaking of a need to bend the truth in order to earn respect from her military hosts. Bragason uses the war reporter's angst to spotlight his own frailty and the possibility of being exposed as a fraud: the common nightmare of the practicing artist.

Unfortunately, these few mature works are not an entirely accurate representation of the sprawling MFA show in its totality. Many say that this young generation is one without a movement, but if the graduating crop from CalArts is any indication, tomorrow's artists share a predilection for Day-Glo colors and rambling statements-as-titles: Margaret Haines' *My Friend Once Told Me The Best Way To Say Fuck You In Los Angeles Is Trust Me*; Orlando Tirado Amador's *When He Makes a Beast of Herself She Forgets the Woes of Being A Man*. Still, there were a number of interesting ideas to be found in these six spaces, and CalArts provided a new reason to visit this burgeoning Chinatown art scene — itself a work-in-progress, considering that many of these galleries have been open for the same amount of time the artists have just spent in grad school.