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Martha Rosler interview
Are art prizes useful?
City report: Istanbul



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Mary Goldman Gallery, Los Angeles, USA

Dan Graham's 1967 magazine article 'Homes for America' mapped out a domestic reality increasingly defined by corporate entities, while also predicting future dwellings further managed by multinational bodies. Graham espoused a domesticity prefabricated to suit your desires, a new age when residential spaces could be delimited in a series of 'permutational possibilities'. Choose your exterior and interior colours, your façade, your 'model' of choice (The Serenade, The Ballet, among others), and you arrived at a perfectly suited, though hardly unique, home. Lacking anything like Graham's appropriated industry-speak (or the pre-Power Point aesthetic of his related slide show), Dike Blair's most recent exhibition was strictly interested in the surfaces of the corporate domestic. Blair gets to his subject through a balance of emotive referents. Where Graham named systematic plans, Blair resorts to materiality, employing objects and images that invoke the preordained, synthetic aspects of banal residences.

Four paintings (all *Untitled*, 2005) of a sliding glass door, depicting a view from an interior looking onto a blank exterior, and four paintings of flowers - two of poppies, two of hydrangeas - were hung casually on either side of Blair's distinctive sculpture (*to want to*, 2005), a work that illuminates Blair's indexical knowledge of industrially manufactured trimmings for contemporary corporate and domestic interiors. This

compound object sprawled from a long, low-hung light-box out onto the floor via two rows of square green and pink carpet samples. Each of these fields ended in a short, square plinth concealing a fluorescent light. A rubber mat (a carpet runner) unfurled outward from the plinth to the left and folded back onto itself after a few feet, its underside revealing a written code - '4 29 04' - like a mysterious date of birth. The light-box hid artificial light behind grey, blank rectangles, an inertness offset by the exclamatory photographic punctuation marks at either end of the object: tulips, photographed at day and night respectively. With its barren feeling of fluorescence illuminating mass-fabricated flooring, the sculpture is suggestive of bland, quotidian interiors. The title reads as a phrase of motivational speaking, perhaps the slogan of a brand whose signage will fill that blank commercial box of light.

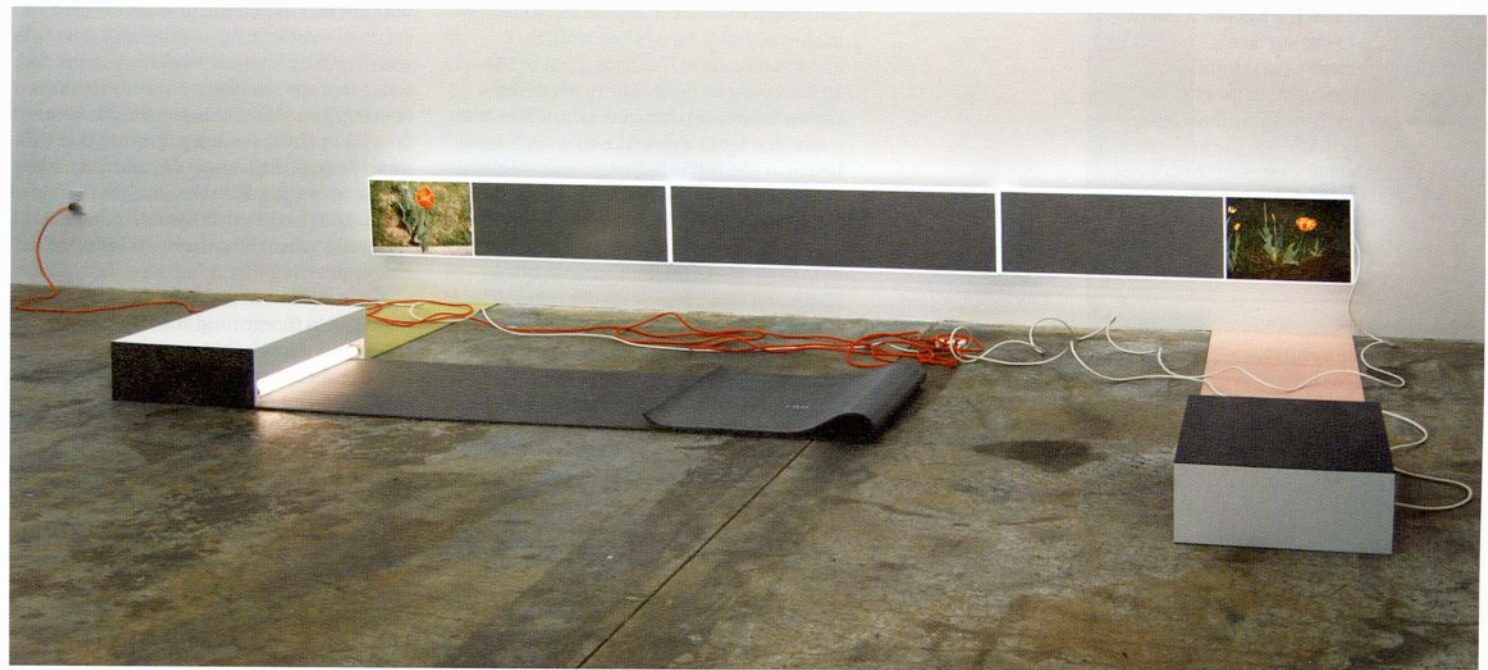
The sterility of Blair's sculpture is calming, as if you have been transported to a place of central air-conditioned realities reverberating with water-cooler murmurs. A mysterious space is created between the object on the floor and the images on the wall. Engaging these related elements is the appeal of Blair's art; they always work together but never wholly make sense, and this seems part of the artist's abstract strategy (literally an abstract, offering a primer on possible vernacular experiences). Blair's gouaches were painted from snapshots taken by the artist at his home in upstate New York. Paired images of a sliding glass

Dike Blair
to want to
2005
Mixed media
58x381x234 cm

door each captured the upper left corner of a windowpane, a wedge of the out-of-doors darkened by night and an interior thrown into deep shadow. Opposite these hung two quite similar images, although this time the exterior disappeared behind glass made opaque and reflective by a richly lit, white interior. These gouaches (pictures of picture windows) suggest a sense of binary perception, a perhaps misleading feeling of enclosure. Even Blair's near Photorealistic renderings of poppies and hydrangeas impart aspects of the domestic that cannot escape, nor survive without, containment.

Blair is interested in the binding elements of an enclosure (specifically that of domestic space). Seeking accurate affect rather than special effect, the artist approaches his subjects with discreteness. Maintaining control of a work scattering outward, the artist's sculpture becomes its own container, delivering a sense for the interior that leaves the viewer on the outside. It's just as well that Blair's scenes through a glass window never truly invite us inward; there is something else in there already, the ghost of inhabitation itself. This melancholic mood, of home-as-haunt as much as cold, ex-urban boredom, is the strongest impression imparted by this recent work. With his seemingly incidental combinations translating particular stimulations and sensations, Blair allows the modestly forgettable elements of our domestic being to engage with the codes of residential entrapment.

Chris Balaschak



Dike Blair

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