Olivia Erlanger,
Press

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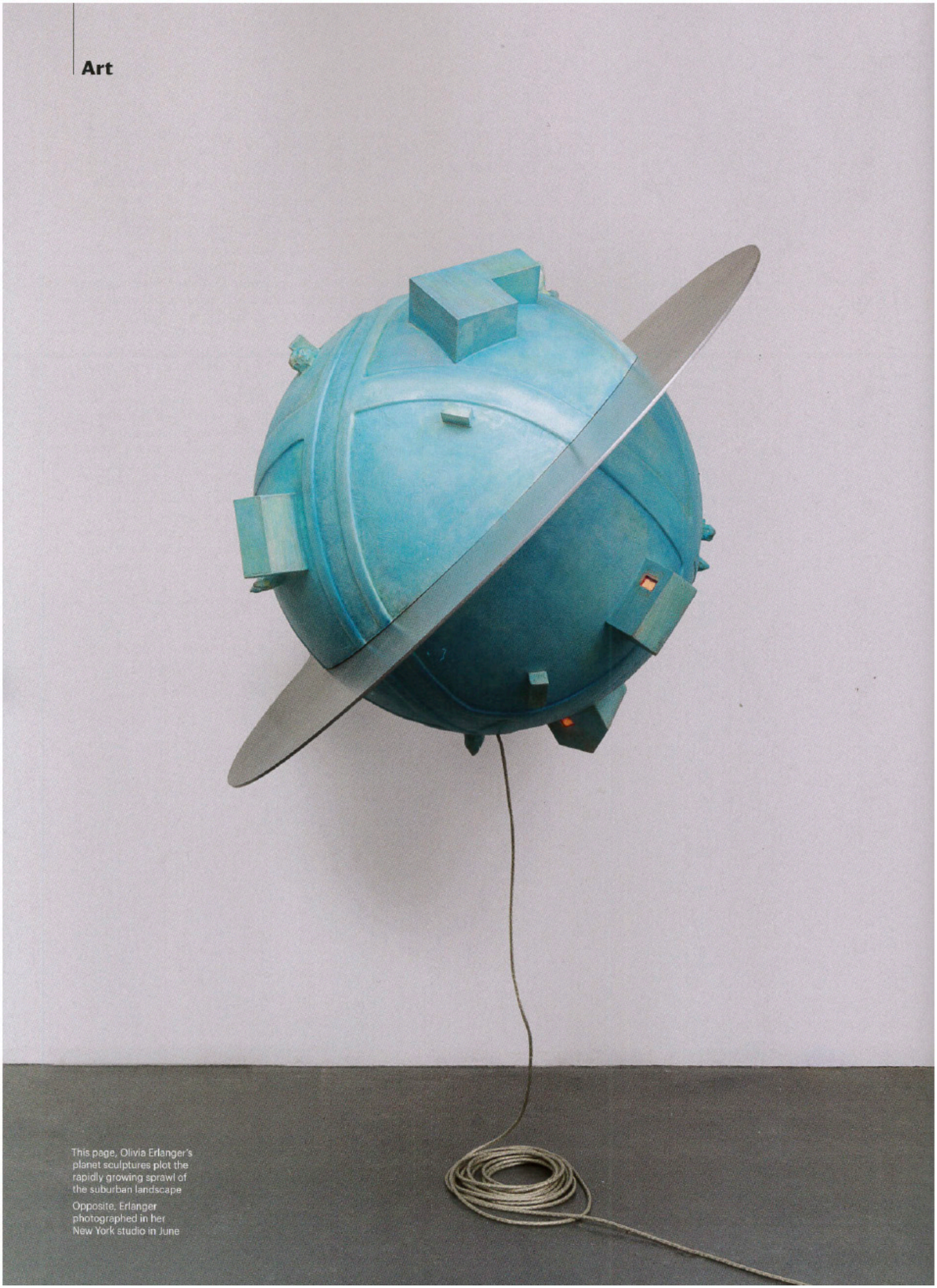


This page, Olivia Erlanger's planet sculptures plot the rapidly growing sprawl of the suburban landscape

Opposite, Erlanger photographed in her New York studio in June

Wallpaper, 2024

Other worlds

Artist Olivia Erlanger's dystopian exploration of suburban America is on show in Houston

Wallpaper, 2024

Both in school and at home, I was indoctrinated with an ideal of American exceptionalism where progress is linear, and each succeeding generation will be more prosperous than the last,' says New York-based artist Olivia Erlanger. 'This didn't match with reality. I came of age during the introduction of the personal computer, 9/11, the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, the advent and parasitic spread of reality TV, the global financial crisis of 2008 – events that have promoted the spiralling and fracturing of that promised progress. But dreams are boring. Delusions are more interesting and more powerful as make-believe frequently turns into reality.'

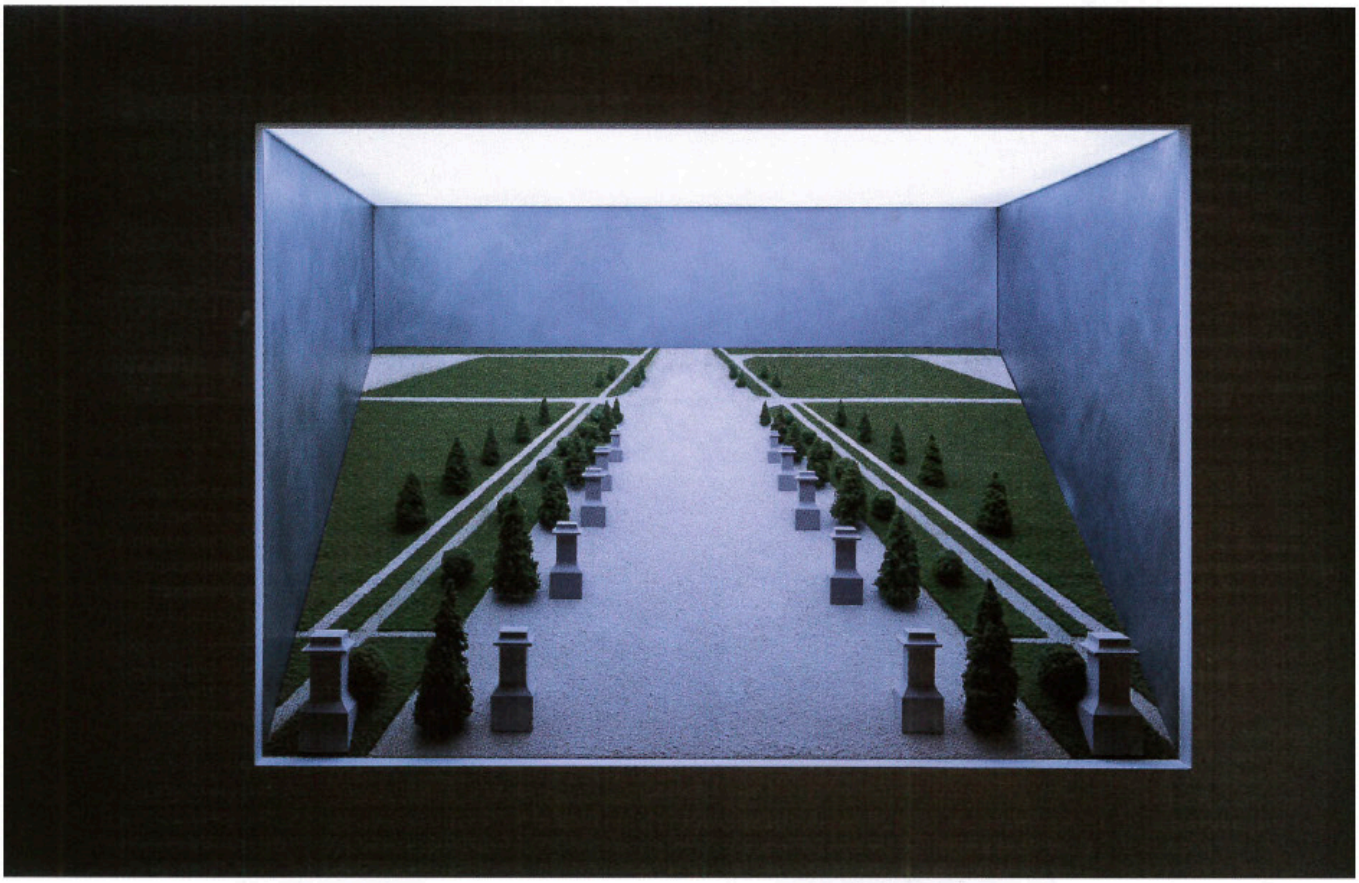
This preoccupation with the American dream runs throughout her first solo US exhibition, 'Olivia Erlanger: If Today Were Tomorrow', on show at the Contemporary Arts Museum Houston (CAMH). The title, taken from David Lynch's 2006 film, *Inland Empire*, hints at the often surreal, occasionally nightmarish deep-dive that Erlanger takes into American society, paying particular attention to the concept of home. A juxtaposition of references, from classical to utopian and architectural, reflects the cross-disciplinary nature of the works themselves. Throughout, Erlanger draws on her studies in sculpture and literature, with nods to HG Wells and JG Ballard, as well as to Chris Kraus and Mark von Schlegell, both of whose essays are included in the exhibition catalogue.

What is home? More than a built environment, here it is part of a wider context, becoming a vast ecosystem, from a neighbourhood to a planet, its possibilities and limitations explored through a series of installations, films and sculptures.

'When considering my ongoing interest in a suburban periphery, I looked to its component parts: the architecture, infrastructure, even the residents, as a point of departure,' says Erlanger. 'I have most enjoyed uniting all the different ways in which I think and create in one space. Additionally, transforming the space at CAMH with the help of architect Jeremy Schipper, who did the exhibition design, was an invaluable opportunity for me.'

Erlanger respects the mundane. She finds joy in everyday items often overlooked in society's aggressive quest for social mobility. 'My practice has long investigated the semiotics of suburbia, in which the home is proposed as a greater ecosystem containing not only houses, but also their surrounding

Blue Sky (below), 2024, and *Yellow Sky* (opposite), 2024, by Olivia Erlanger, on show at the Contemporary Arts Museum Houston



'Dreams are boring. Delusions are more powerful as make-believe frequently turns into reality'

infrastructures,' she adds. 'Maybe it's obsessive, but focusing on this specific set of concerns has been deeply productive and led me to develop multiple bodies of work, including sculptures, installations, films and two books. Take my most recent book, *Appliance*: I include five essays on the histories of different domestic objects and a play, *Humour in the Water Coolant*. Shortly after staging the play, I altered and adapted the story into a narrative short film, also titled *Appliance*, which premiered as part of 'If Today Were Tomorrow'.'

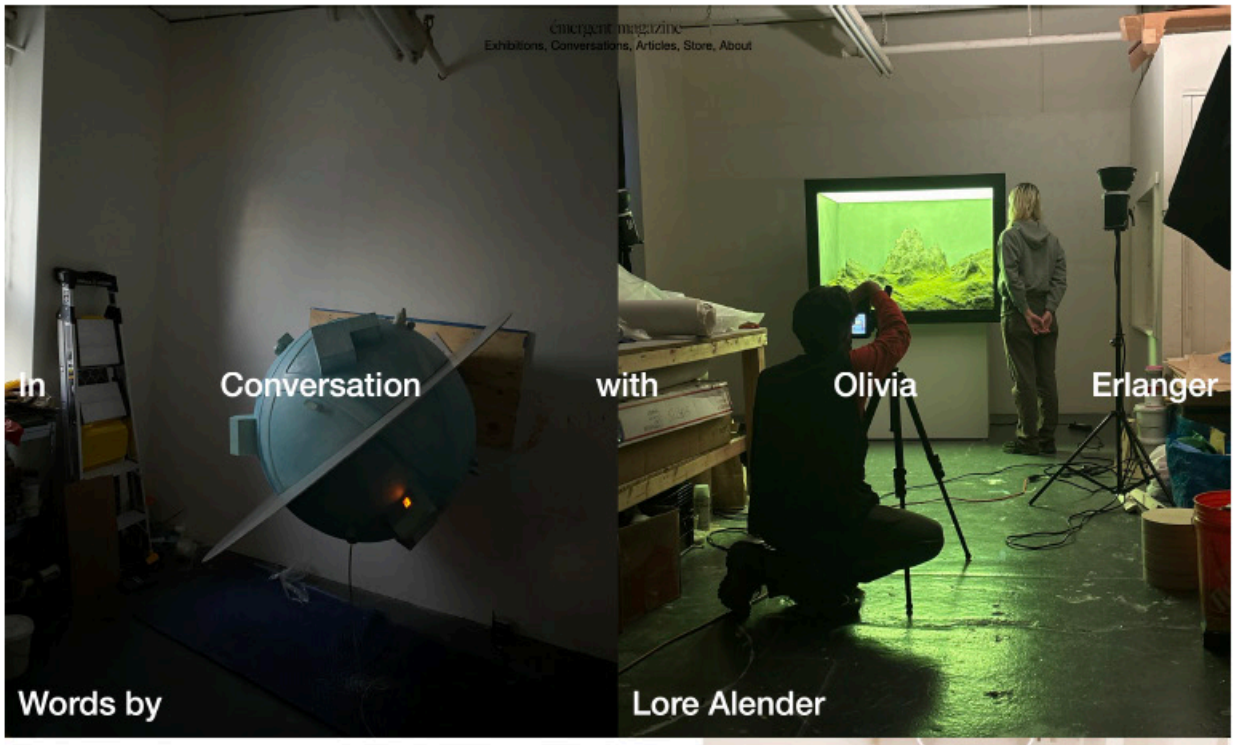
This eclectic roster of mediums supports Erlanger in her ongoing crusade for the democratisation of art, eschewing the traditional hierarchy of fine art that has, in the past, been guilty of keeping the public at arm's length. Through works such as her large, illuminated planets, which plot the rapidly growing sprawl of the suburban landscape, and her diorama sculptures, which wrestle with power and property – all created on a sliding scale from 'miniature to monstrous' – viewers can take pleasure in the many ways there are of dissecting a space. Here, Erlanger riffs off traditional ways to plot the infrastructure of a city, the planet sculptures tracing transport and electrical pathways on their surface, tracking the links between suburbia and commerce hubs.

Throughout, Erlanger teases at the definition of what a human-made and climate-controlled environment can be, building on her fascination with what architectural theorist Lydia Kallipoliti calls 'closed worlds'. The term, referring to the habitats we have created to the detriment of the outside environment, takes shape in the sculptures exploring alternative worlds, from a mountain encircled by disintegrating farmers' walls to a city made only from speculative real estate.

They are dystopias belied by a sense of occasional horror. In the short film, *Appliance*, domestic technologies become synonymous with humans in a slyly sinister questioning of where we end and the machine begins. 'Through a narrative that plays with horror film tropes, it specifically focuses on how their operations have been considered interchangeable with human bodily functions,' Erlanger adds. ✱

'Olivia Erlanger: If Today Were Tomorrow' is on show until 27 October at Contemporary Arts Museum Houston, camh.org, oliviaerlanger.com

émergent, 2024



Olivia Erlanger's play *Humour in the Water Coolant* premiered in the UK at the ICA. Set during a séance to cleanse a home of its haunted aura, the play delves into the inner lives of domestic objects. The appliances, now able to speak, reveal their emotions, including dissatisfaction, sadness, and a longing for connection and love. The psychological effects of their declining use and functionality challenge the notion of technological progress as inherently positive, instead presenting it as a form of escape. The play questions what ageing means for these objects, "born" on the assembly line, with easily replaceable parts and planned obsolescence.

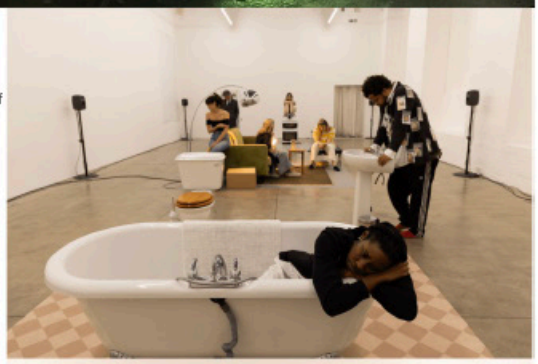
I read an article that described you as the chronicler of late capitalist fatigue. How does that label make you feel?

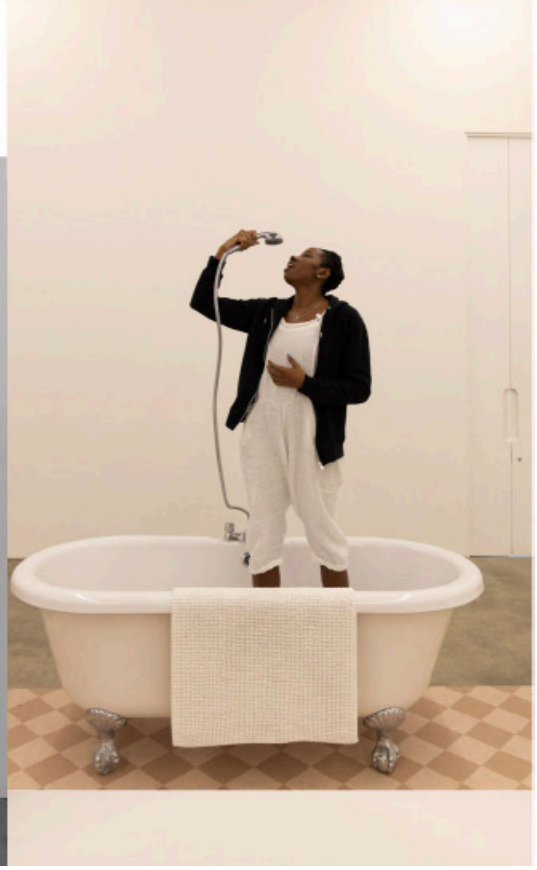
That sounds like a lot of responsibility. In my opinion Jenny Nicholson is the real chronicler of late capitalist fatigue. I'd say there is a general exhaustion as the promises of the 20th century, that of social mobility and linear (liberal) progress become increasingly less attainable. Fatigue stems from believing in these myths.

There's a lot of references to youth culture, and adolescence, in your work. What kind of a teenager were you? Do you think we ever really leave our childhood behind? Do we have to?

I was always in my art teacher Ms. Eskell's room, making drawings and covered in schmatte, same as I am in my studio today. Growing at any age can feel painful, embarrassing, and awkward. While I believe we grow out of childhood I feel we all cycle through moments of adolescence. For that, I'm actually grateful. Life would be quite boring if we remained static!

I look to my own adolescence as a source of inspiration and to understand my motivations. For example, my play *Humour in the Water Coolant* takes direct inspiration from the idea of enchanted objects, which appear across many children's stories. Who, as a child, wasn't mesmerized by Lumière, the talking candelabra from *Beauty and the Beast*, or Chairry from *Pee-wee's Playhouse*?





émergent, 2024

A large part of your practice touches on and plays with the notion of home and domesticity. What does home mean to you?

While there are many ways to approach my practice, 'home' is an approachable entrypoint because shelter is a universal need. The idea of home cuts across all languages and is a component part of the first stage of Maslow's hierarchy of needs. Talking about home is extremely political, especially in the United States due to our housing crisis and a growing unhoused population that is often overlooked and remains with limited or no access to many social services. As a woman it's almost a trope to make work about "home" or "domesticity." Like, hello, retro! Relegating a woman artist's practice to the domestic sphere feels similar to the same kind of subjugation women faced in the past—but tropes are ripe for subversion.

My exhibition *If Today Were Tomorrow* at Contemporary Arts Museum Houston is specifically focused on your question "what does home mean to me." The exhibition tries to depict the scales of home. The show uses these shifts in scale as a formal conceit, kind of zooming across and into different works: dioramas that propose alien landscapes, large-scale planet sculptures, a one-to-one representation of a living room that doubles as a screening room for my film, and on-going point of research "Appliance."

I recently saw your play *Humour in the Water Coolant* at the ICA. I absolutely loved it! What excites you about a play as an artistic medium?

Thank you! As to the success of the performance, I am completely indebted to the talent of the cast as well as Alexis Georgopoulos's score. Honor, Olivier, Michelle, Aimee, Callie, Adrian, Dani —there is so much knowledge and creativity between all of them. It really allowed the parameters that I set on the page to blossom into something way beyond what was written.

My initial interest in writing a play stemmed from a desire to be present with others. I wrote it during lockdown and the idea of a future where we could be in a room with one another, breathing the same air without fear, being witness to a shared event was intoxicating and at that point in time seemingly impossible. Oh, and I love making people laugh so that's always a win.

Images from the play 'Humour in the Water Coolant'. Courtesy of the artist

The play was incredibly funny at times. What role does humour play in your work?

Humor and its evil twin, horror, exist as polar opposites on the same axis, an axis that provides relief from reality.

I've always been most excited by art forms that are quite democratic. This isn't to say I want to make Disney art (although maybe I do) or Koonsian editions. And don't get me wrong, I love more austere presentations and institutional critique, but that has never felt natural to me as a working methodology. I've always wanted to be able to have a child or a grandparent feel like they "get" my work. This to me is the most powerful because it means you can talk to a wider audience. I think humour plays a part in this.

What does your artistic process usually look like? Is it very different when creating a play?

My process always begins with reading and research. Sometimes this translates into sculpture or an installation, or other times it becomes a narrative project like *Humour in the Water Coolant* or my short film "Appliance." This is a way of working that suits me and was forged during my first research-based project *Garage*. The original impetus to make the play came out of writing a series of essays, each focusing on the history of a different domestic technology. In compiling this writing I began to listen to the stories that the objects were "telling" me. The process of writing is quite different from sculpture but materially both begin in the same world of ideas.

What's happening next for you?

I'm working towards my exhibition, *Fan Fiction*, which opens in September at Soft Opening. It's go-time.

What would be the one thing you'd want people who see your work to take away from it?

I don't think there's one thing in particular that I hope for; that would make the work perhaps too didactic. If people connect with the work at all, then it is a success.

Olivia Erlanger, 'Pergusa', 2019. Commercial Washer, silicone, polystyrene foam, MDF, plywood. Dimensions variable. Courtesy of the artist and AND NOW, Dallas

Elephant, 2024

Dreaming Up Hypothetical World's in Olivia Erlanger's Studio

In her new column, Studio Sense, contributor Maria Vogel asks an artist to take us on a tour inside their studio using the five senses.

Installation Image of "Olivia Erlanger: If Today Were Tomorrow" at Contemporary Art Museum Houston. Photography by Sean Fleming.

For an artist, the studio functions as a second home, a space where they spend equal, if not more time, than the actual home they inhabit. For Olivia Erlanger, whose practice explores the concept of place, the studio space holds various levels of significance. In Erlanger's uncanny oeuvre, as much time is spent dreaming up hypothetical worlds as is spent on physical output.

It was within this very studio Erlanger envisioned her latest exhibition (and first institutional show in the US), *If Today Were Tomorrow*, which is on view at the Contemporary Arts Museum in Houston through October.

Read on to learn more about the space where Erlanger's humorous, surreal creations find conception, through the five senses (plus a bonus prompt).

Elephant, 2024

Portrait of Olivia Erlanger. Photography by Bobby Doherty

What are you looking at?

A month ago, my studio was packed with sculptures for my exhibition *If Today Were Tomorrow* at the Contemporary Arts Museum Houston. The exhibition is a commission of all new sculptures, a site-specific installation, and my first narrative short film, *Appliance*. The exhibition design was done by architect Jeremy Schipper.

I was working on that project for two-plus years and really executing the past year and a half, so since opening the show, it's been an adjustment period. To the right is my window that looks out onto the BQE. Highways and infrastructure are a huge point of inspiration for me because they act as a kind of artery between the urban epicentre and suburban periphery of my large planet sculptures in ITWT. I'm still sweeping up the railroad train flocking that I used in the dioramas I sent off—I'll be vacuuming shortly.

Elephant, 2024

Olivia's studio. Courtesy the artist.

What are you touching?

I'm bad about gloves. I like to feel things unmediated but that means that my wardrobe suffers.

Olivia's studio. Courtesy the artist.

What are you listening to?

I find music distracting at the studio; it's emotionally manipulative! Music is one of the darker arts —like comedy. I try to stay attuned to my own intuitions and thoughts while I'm at the studio so I like it quiet and still. That being said, once I'm in the execution phase of production, I'll put on science podcasts, like Alie Ward's *Ologies*.

Olivia's studio. Courtesy the artist.

What are you tasting?

This is also a no… very little tasting here. Mostly because the studio is likely covered in stuff that I do not want to ingest. There is a vending machine in the footprint of the studio building and a bougie bodega around the corner. When I need a break I'll go down, buy some snacks, and sit at the playground next to the skate park under the highway onramp.

Elephant, 2024

Olivia's studio. Courtesy the artist.

What are you smelling?

Smells with sculpture usually mean you're dealing with toxic materials, so hopefully I am not smelling anything. The older I get the less interested I am in working with hazardous materials. Call it growing up or maybe it's because I fell in love, but I really don't care to risk my health for art. If you look at the materials I've used in the past few years they've become increasingly benign. For example, with my new dioramas, the next logical step for me after having made sculptures with dollhouse materials for a number of years, has been to shift into train-set diorama art. Wherever your grandpa or grandma are getting their crafting gear, so am I.

What are you thinking about?

I've started to call myself a genre artist as a joke with friends. I'm not totally clear on what I mean but it feels right. I think it's because genre in cinema provides a framework, a system of logical evocations, tropes, symbols. Similarly throughout my practice I'm constantly looking for a frame. For me, this means that an object, a concept, even an architecture can act as a lode I mine until it is no longer creatively fecund. One consistent throughline that's apparent throughout the past decade and especially explicated in the bodies of work on display in *If Today Were Tomorrow* is my investigation into the semiotics of suburbia. In the exhibition I do some genre bending and mix in references to institutional vernaculars of display and tropes of science fiction, horror, and mythology. With this in mind, I've titled my next exhibition *Fan Fiction*, which will open in September at Soft Opening in London. As I prepare for this show I've begun to alter pre-existing appliances, re-engineering them to serve new purposes. As for what I'm reading, I recently restaged my play *Humour in the Water Coolant* at ICA London, and actor Adrian Pang, who performed as Fridge (aka a refridgerator) gifted me *Haunted Houses* by Lynne Tillman. Highly recommend it!

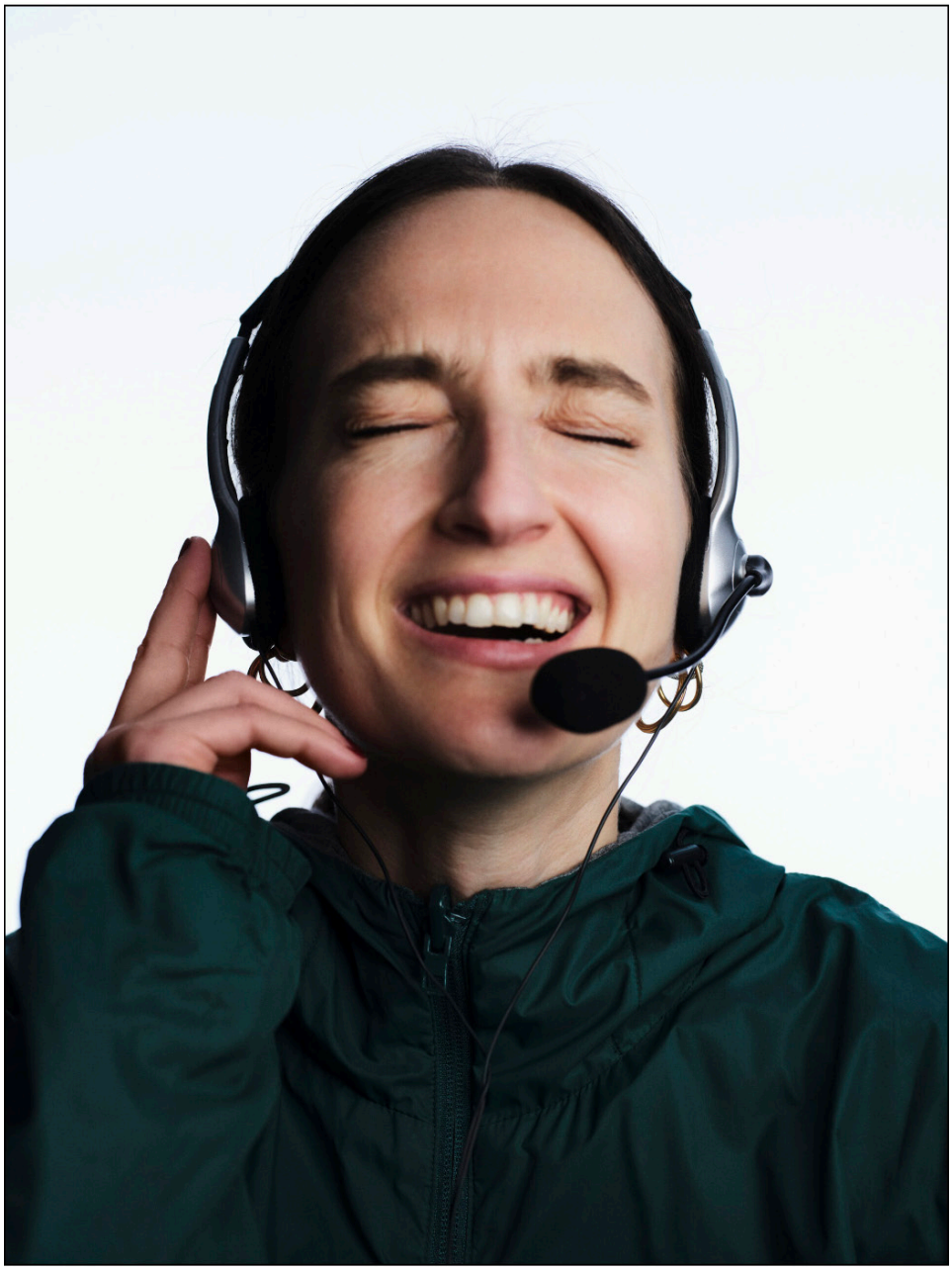
Words by Maria Vogel

IN CONVERSATION

Olivia Erlanger Invites Aubrey Plaza Inside Her Industrial Futurama

By Aubrey Plaza

April 18, 2024



Olivia Erlanger photographed by Bobby Doherty.

Interview, 2024

Erlanger first met her friend, the actor Aubrey Plaza, under some pretty post-world circumstances. Upon a site visit to a weed farm run by nuns in the dusty California valley where she was conducting research for a film, Erlanger discovered a zooted Plaza, who begged the artist to extricate her back to a Best Western (and later agreed to appear in the documentary). That project ultimately became *Garage*, an ongoing multidisciplinary collaboration with artist Luis Ortega Govela—which happened to be a huge inspiration for her new exhibition. *If Today Were Tomorrow*, opening this Saturday, is Erlanger's first institutional solo show in the States, scaling an entire level of the Contemporary Arts Museum in Houston. From functional sculpture to soundscapes and film, it's another cross-disciplinary investigation into how we design our lives in the cul-de-sac. "You love pill-popping suburban women just cutting themselves," says Plaza, who hopped on a Zoom with Erlanger before the opening to talk haunted appliances, alter egos, and the upcoming Francis Ford Coppola epic *Megalopolis*.—MEKALA RAJAGOPAL

OLIVIA ERLANGER: Oh my god, the evil hag. She hath arrived.

AUBREY PLAZA: Hold on, don't look at me. I have to get a tissue. I have really bad allergies. You know about my allergies...

ERLANGER: You look like you've reversed-aged. You look amazing.

PLAZA: No, I don't. I'm so old. I'm going to be 40 this year. Can you believe that?

ERLANGER: No.

PLAZA: This isn't about me. Congratulations on everything. Wait, I have to understand what's happening. I did research, but you're taking over an entire subterranean level of this Houston museum. Is that what's going on?

ERLANGER: Yeah, it's a solo show at the Contemporary Arts Museum in Houston.

PLAZA: Really? I'm going to get my ass to Houston.

Interview, 2024

"Antimeridian," 2024. All artwork photos courtesy of the artist and Soft Opening, London; Photography by Daniel Terna.

ERLANGER: Oh, we could definitely make it happen. When I went, I'd never been to Houston and I fully envisioned, like, mesas, Wile E. Coyote, red desert, but it is just so humid and lush. It's a very cool city.

PLAZA: This is just a nerdy art question, but when you get that solo show, do you start making stuff for it then, or have you already done that?

ERLANGER: It really depends. This time, I met with the curator, Patricia Restrepo, in 2021. We did this studio visit and she said, "If you were to be working on a big project, what would it be?" And I literally was like, "I have worlds inside of me."

PLAZA: Oh, yeah. Were you hitting on her?

ERLANGER: Probably.

PLAZA: I just feel like that's kind of sexual. I don't know why.

ERLANGER: Well, maybe it's like gestation or something, but I didn't know how to articulate what I wanted to make. I just knew that there were all of these stories to tell. Then I didn't hear from her for a year and I was like, "Okay, cool. Flopped." And then about a year ago, they invited me for the site visit and it's a commission of all new work, so that's how I came up with the show, *If Today Were Tomorrow*.

PLAZA: If today were tomorrow, I would be so fucked. Every day, if the next day was tomorrow, that would just be really bad for me.

ERLANGER: What's going on tomorrow?

PLAZA: Oh, nothing. I don't want to talk about it. I'm just glad it's not today.

ERLANGER: Amen, sis.

PLAZA: I don't know if this is valuable for this publication, but remember when we met? It's crazy how we met.

ERLANGER: People think it's made up. This is so classic art world. I've been asked if it was part of the concept to make up this crazy story of how we met, but no.

PLAZA: I was looking on your website. Honestly, I hadn't really perused your website before, and then I saw my face and I felt really cool to be a part of your archives.

ERLANGER: Working on *Garage* [Erlanger and Luis Ortega Govela's 2019 documentary film featuring Plaza] was a game changer. I feel like it set up an important paradigm for how I approach research and it was the first time I wrote scripts. I had never made a video before. It was just the first of so many different things, so it was eye-opening to the possibility of what my art could do.

PLAZA: Yes, and for the readers out there, *Garage* is an ongoing project and some of it's available somewhere.

ERLANGER: It's on Dis.art.

PLAZA: Oh, is it still? I stand by the idea that we're not done.

ERLANGER: That's what they don't tell you about docs.

PLAZA: They're never done.

ERLANGER: We need our angel investor. Calling all daddies.

PLAZA: We'll manifest that.

ERLANGER: Actually, part of the show in Houston is this project. There'll be my first narrative short called *Appliance* based off of a new body of research that I've been putting together.

PLAZA: Was this the one that you were texting me about when you were trying to find the DP?

ERLANGER: We worked with Mia Cioffi Henry at your suggestion, and she is a superstar.

PLAZA: Oh, fuck. I can't wait to see that.

"Appliance," 2024.

ERLANGER: It's really fun. It was my first narrative short and the seed of it came out of this exhibition that I did in Vienna two years ago. I wrote a play called *Humor in the Water Coolant* about this woman who was haunted by the appliances in her home, so people got to speak from the position of objects. It was really fun. It's being re-staged at ICA London in May. When I went to Houston for my site visit, we talked through my practice as a whole, and the through lines for the past decade of making art. I sound old, but—

PLAZA: Not as old as me, honey. Are you in the short?

ERLANGER: No. I don't know about acting for me. I feel like I have a lot of opinions, which is great for directing, but I don't know if I can do what you guys do. What you and Callie [Hernandez] and Sasha [Frolova, both of whom star in *Appliance*] do is incredible. You're channeling a different energy.

PLAZA: Like Marge?

ERLANGER: Oh my god. Bring Marge back.

PLAZA: Marge is my alter ego [in *Garage*].

ERLANGER: Yeah. I was like, "Give me Annette Bening drunk on pills in *American Beauty*" and you fucking served.

PLAZA: I went for it. Can I ask you what happened to you as a child with your appliances? Did you get trapped in a washing machine?

ERLANGER: My sister definitely tried to put me in the washing machine a couple of times, maybe. I don't know. You're digging for early childhood trauma?

PLAZA: Yeah. [Laughs] I was thinking of that movie *Safe*, with Julianne Moore, when you started talking about haunted appliances.

ERLANGER: That is literally the mood board.

Interview, 2024

"Orange Sky" (detail), 2024.

PLAZA: You love that shit. You love pill-popping suburban women just cutting themselves.

ERLANGER: Suburban noir. Yes. It's like a Gregory Cruzden and Todd Haynes mashup, an ode to both of them.

AUBREY PLAZA: Did you see *May December*?

ERLANGER: I did. I thought it was incredible. Natalie Portman, another woman like Julianne Moore, unchanged by time.

PLAZA: Both of them, incredible. But back to the haunted appliances.

ERLANGER: Just to clarify, there's no talking objects in the film. That would not be chic. We actually are relying on sound to precipitate their actions instead of personifying them. And there's a short story by John Cheever called "The Enormous Radio," which is about this woman who's gifted a radio by her husband, but the radio is kind of cursed and the frequencies that it turns to become like x-ray vision for the apartment that she lives in so she can hear the dramas that are happening in the different rooms and it drives her mad. Sound is very important, and the sound will bleed, actually. There's no way in the exhibition space to contain it. So you'll be looking at new sculptures and bodies of work, but you'll be hearing this score throughout all of it. It'll be pretty immersive.

PLAZA: Ooh, I love an immersive experience.

ERLANGER: Does that mean you love the Van Gogh experience?

PLAZA: Sure. I love the Kubrick immersive thing. The last time I saw something like that was Paul McCarthy's show. Did you go to that?

ERLANGER: Yeah, so good. I love his work.

AUBREY PLAZA: I was in there for a long time. So tell me about your sculpture. You don't *have* to. Is it weird to talk about what you do?

ERLANGER: Yeah, definitely. As I said, in this instance, I was invited to come up with new ideas, but the weirdest thing was that I've had to articulate what these things are before even making them, and so much of making art is a non-verbal or a pre-verbal thing. You're kind of going on gut instinct. For me, it's only after the fact that I'm able to understand what the fuck I just did, basically, but in this case I've had to really build out the framework. But it's been valuable because the past months have just truly been about execution. I just have to make now, which is the real pleasure.

PLAZA: Do you go into trance mode?

ERLANGER: Totally, when it's good. Some days things don't work and it's horrible.

PLAZA: But when it's working, you're just possessed?

ERLANGER: My temporal experience is just suspended. Is it similar in acting when you're really into a story?

PLAZA: Oh, yes. When I'm on set, there's an unconscious thing where it's like time doesn't exist. When you're shooting a movie, there's so much stuff that surrounds the actual moments when the camera's rolling. It's so little time compared to all the other stuff that has to happen to lead up to that moment. There's so much buildup and some people like all the noise. But for me, it's just a drug. I just want to get to that one moment where I'm out of my body and I'm possessed and time has stopped, but there's a lot of stuff that has to happen before you get to that point.

Interview, 2024

ERLANGER: Yeah, sculpture is similar. I always refer to it as a geological experience because everything just takes so much time and so there's so many processes in terms of preparation. But once you have the condition set and all of your material and everything's ready, then you get that opportunity to hit it the way that you're talking about, and it's the best feeling.

PLAZA: Yeah. Because you're constructing out of—I don't even know what the fuck. When I think about your mermaids coming out of your washing machines and stuff, I don't even understand how you do it.

ERLANGER: Part of it is the process of discovery, too. I have yet to find that one thing that I'd like to make for the rest of my life. I just love problem-solving, and I think my brain is geared towards puzzles. I always say that it's like solving some inverted riddle when I'm figuring out how to make something, but there's also certain things that I just can't do, and I don't have the room for the scale of certain projects. So, for example, I've been working with a diorama maker, and he has been helping me actually make these hyper-realistic dioramas that are going to be set into the wall in Houston.

PLAZA: What's the vibe of the diorama?

ERLANGER: The vibe? Each one is like a window. So much of my practice has been about the infrastructure of suburbia, the homes being interconnected by roadways, the car connecting the urban epicenter to a suburban periphery.

PLAZA: You have a whole thing about I-95, right?

ERLANGER: Yeah, it's funny because now I feel like everything sounds really East Coast, but what can I say? That's like my artery. But there are these large-scale planet sculptures, and I was inspired by I-95 as one of the main arteries of commerce. The planets I've made before are quite small and they have these arrows shot through them, but they're illuminated and mounted on the wall.

Interview, 2024

"Prime meridian" (detail), 2024.

PLAZA: They're like light fixtures.

ERLANGER: The wires are showing, but you can't turn them off. They're not really mean to illuminate anything, but the larger scale ones that I'm making for the exhibition are cantilevered out from the wall. I have to send you photos. I'm really excited about them.

PLAZA: I've seen some of the planets with the arrows.

ERLANGER: Yeah. But the dioramas are sort of the first time that I'm really delving into this. I've made things in miniature. I've made dollhouse art using dollhouse furniture. But these dioramas are landscapes, almost proposals for a speculative future. They're looking at property and how we delineate ownership. I wonder if you had this experience growing up in the East Coast too, but in the forest here, there's all of these old farmers' stone walls that were delineating property lines, but they're half crumbling now. They're very evocative. And then there's another one that's a cityscape, which is very commercial, tongue in cheek. I'm excited. It's just fun to share.

PLAZA: Share with me.

ERLANGER: I will. There's this project, *Futurama II*, from the '60s that was in the World's Fair, and it's really interesting to me. It was funded by General Motors, so it's private industry, and it was all of these dioramas of the future. Their depictions of the future were all very utopic like, "Cars changing the world for the better," and all of those proposals for energy uses cast in a very positive light. Fast-forward to now, and we are seeing a very altered climate and kind of living inside of these closed worlds. Lydia Kallipoliti is an architectural theorist that I love, and she has a whole book about how humans navigate these systems of enclosed, climate-controlled spaces without really an experience of whatever natural world is happening outside.

PLAZA: Not to bring this back to me, but I'm going to be in Francis Ford Coppola's movie called *Megalopolis* that is so up your alley because really, at the heart of it, it's about design and architecture. I don't want to put words in [Francis's] mouth, but there's a kind of idea in the movie that design can save the world. There's this guy creating a building material called Megalon. It's not real, but I think maybe Francis is trying to make it real. It's this organic, invisible building material in the future. It's all about building communities with this new material that is integrated with nature and it all kind of gels—

ERLANGER: Is it a specific proposal for a future?

PLAZA: Yes. He wrote the movie 30 years ago. He's so fascinated with architecture and design, and—I think I'm allowed to say this—but there's a thing in it where the homes are almost like organisms in that they move, they bloom, they open with the sun. The building material has allowed the structures to coexist with nature in a way where it's all harmonious in a different way. It's interesting, because the movie also tackles other stuff, like money and greed, but the core of it is design. And if you think about it, it's how we live. If you make the way that we live better, then maybe design could change everything else.

You know?

"Blue Sky" (detail), 2024.

ERLANGER: Yeah. There's a crazy connection between mortality rates and exposure to concrete. How much concrete you're surrounded by can impact your mortality. I always talk about New York as a hologram because it's such a cerebral landscape. It's just such an intensely artificial space, and I feel like my experience of the natural world is so altered because of that. I feel like a lot of talk around climate chaos can get very heavy. It's really the killer at a dinner table. You want everybody to go, just talk about climate change.

PLAZA: I know.

ERLANGER: I'm really not that interested in dystopias, and I'm more interested in utopic proposals. I can't wait to see this movie. When will it be out?

PLAZA: I have no idea. He made it on his own. He self-financed the entire thing.

ERLANGER: I just watched *The Godfather Part II*, the cokey comedown to *The Godfather*. So good, I prefer it. And it's Pacino, right?

PLAZA: Yeah.

ERLANGER: Pacino's hot.

PLAZA: De Niro, yeah. You don't have to tell me.

ERLANGER: De Niro?

PLAZA: Do you remember *Dirty Grandpa* De Niro?

ERLANGER: Oh my god, *Dirty Grandpa*.

PLAZA: I love tying your beautiful art exhibit into *Dirty Grandpa*.

ERLANGER: There's one degree of separation, let me tell you.

PLAZA: Right? I'm so pumped for your exhibit. It's really fun to know that all these people are going to be immersed in your haunted suburban nightmare. It makes me so happy.

ERLANGER: Me too. And *Garage* changed so much for me. It was like Saturn return for me. Plug: we are looking for your cash, angel investors.

PLAZA: Yeah, we've got to finish this movie. We're pumping this out into the world again.

ERLANGER: Didn't you just also have something at Sundance?

PLAZA: Oh, yeah. *My Old Ass*.

ERLANGER: Yeah.

PLAZA: Here we go. Guess who plays the part of my old ass? My old ass. It's another indie darling movie. It's a great movie and hopefully it's out this summer.

ERLANGER: I can't wait to see it.

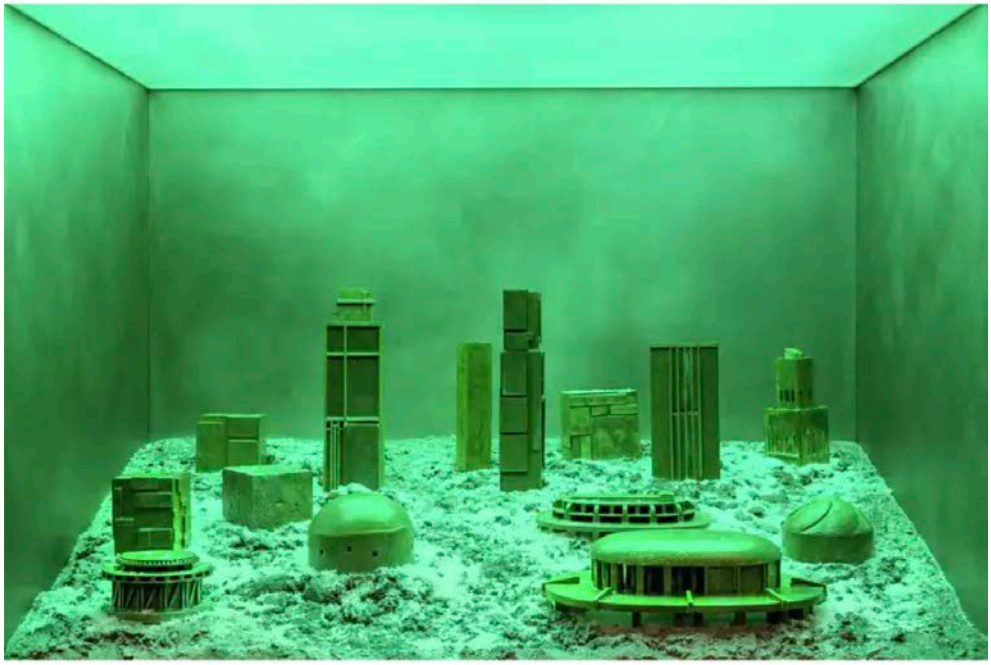
Chron, 2024

CULTURE | ARTS & THEATER

Artist Olivia Erlanger's built worlds take over the CAMH

"If Today Were Tomorrow" was named one of the most anticipated art shows of 2024 by W Magazine.

By **Brittanie Shey**
April 19, 2024



"Green Sky", a diorama by Olivia Erlanger, 2024.
Olivia Erlanger

The first thing you notice walking into the downstairs gallery at the Contemporary Arts Museum Houston is a blanket-covered couch positioned in front of a large screen. The room is dark, and the other furniture—a dining table and chairs, a yellowing lamp—give the impression of cast-offs. It feels like walking into a basement den, or perhaps a converted garage.

That's fitting because American artist Olivia Erlanger's previous work has dealt with the mythology of the garage—everything from Frank Lloyd Wright's apocryphal claim that he "invented" the attached garage to the founding of Apple to garage bands. During a preview of her new show at the CAMH—her first solo museum show in the United States—Erlanger mentions the GI Bill, which in part made home ownership accessible to soldiers returning from World War II. One of the stipulations of the bill, she says, is that the homes were required to have garages. This prioritization of vehicles is one of the things that allowed suburbia to proliferate in the post-war era.

For her new show, called *If Today Were Tomorrow*, Erlanger continues her exploration of closed worlds—human-built, climate-controlled environments—as well as the idea of home, and the role of homeownership in the quest for the American Dream.

Chron, 2024

A still from "Appliance", 2024, by Olivia Erlanger.
Olivia Erlanger

During a site visit last year, Restrepo took Erlanger to several Houston museums—not just art museums, but places including Space Center Houston and the Houston Natural History Museum. Though she was born and raised in suburban New York City, Houston looms large in the show, with its manipulated flood plains, car-centric infrastructure, and air-conditioned spaces.

The garage-like space, which serves as a screening room for her 17-minute film *Appliance*, is the entry point to a kaleidoscope of other built worlds, some large, some minuscule. "The scale is constantly shifting through the design of the show," she says.

In an homage to homeownership, the gallery's layout makes use of framing; each section of the exhibit is delineated by wall openings that evoke windows, as well as thresholds. From the couch, it's possible to see into the other worlds Erlanger has built.

One of those worlds consists of a series of dioramas, clearly referencing similar displays at the HMNS and other natural history museums. Though they look like miniature natural environments—a mountain, a desert mesa—there are still traces of humankind. At the top of the mesa, barely visible, is a tiny billboard. (Erlanger has also worked with dollhouse miniatures in her practice before.)

One of the more subtle installations is called "Eros (when night was last dark)," made up of 16 polished aluminum arrows piercing a wall in a corner of the gallery. The arrows serve as a star map of Houston as the sky looked on Jan. 26, 1880, the day before Thomas Edison received his patent for the light bulb. Perhaps ironically, this is also the brightest-lit section of the gallery, thanks to help from spotlights and a skylight.

If the CAMH exhibition was a dream show, Erlanger already has her sights set on a bigger project. One day, she'd like to build a house, incorporating her interlinked ideas of speculative architecture, control of the environment, access to the American Dream, and what she refers to as the "psychology of interiors."

"I'm interested in what people display in their homes, versus what they hide," she says.

Family Style, 2024

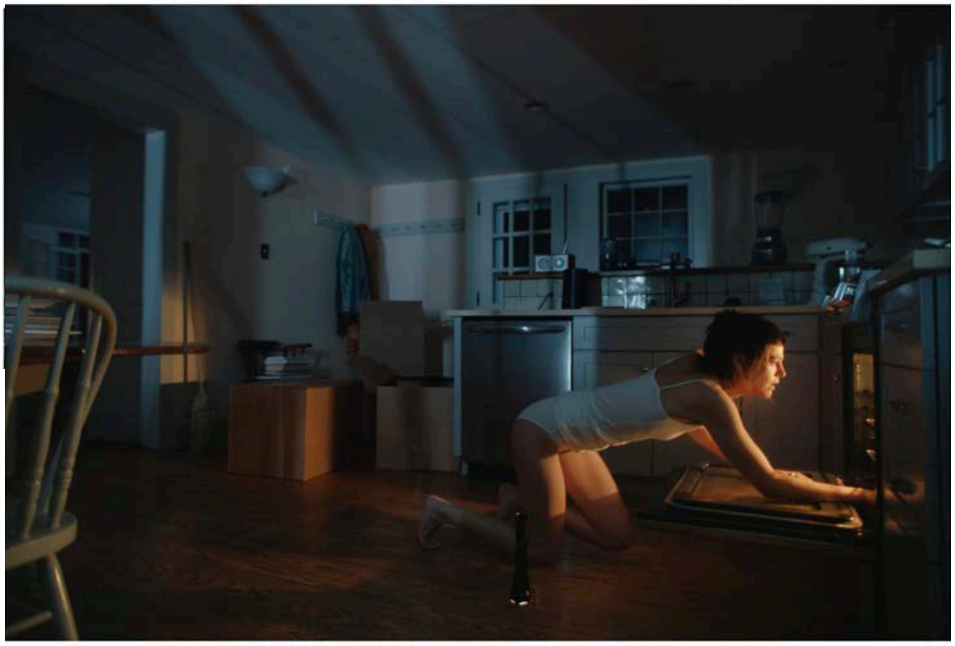
Art

The House is Alive!

Olivia Erlanger's immersive, multi-part installation at the Contemporary Arts Museum Houston marks the multidisciplinary artist's first solo museum show. An unnerving short film about haunted appliances sets the stage.

Words by Meka Boyle

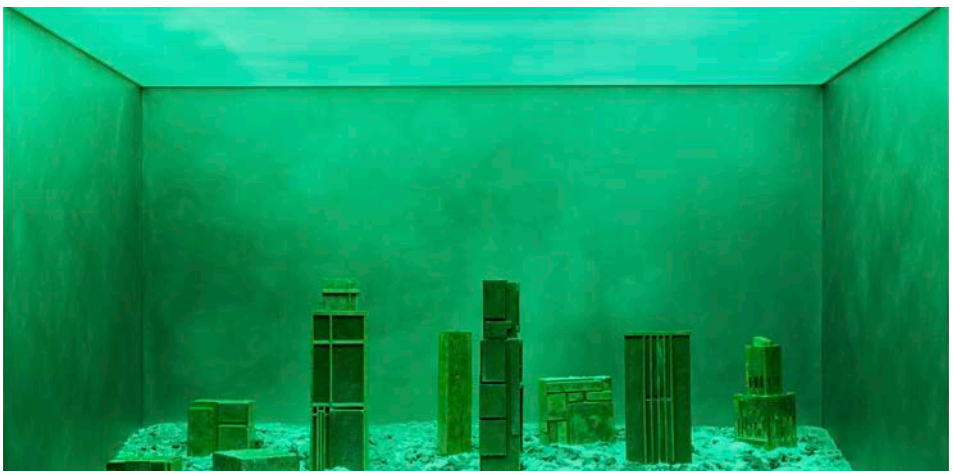
April 12, 2024



Olivia Erlanger, *Appliance, 2024*. Image courtesy the artist and Soft Opening, London.

Olivia Erlanger is steering an intergalactic voyage that zig-zags between the worlds we build and the worlds we dream up. The New York-based artist cannibalizes man-made structures to curious and insightful ends across writing, films, multi-sensory installations, and sculptures. When viewed as a whole, a layered and visceral study of everyday preoccupations, technological advancement, the climate crisis, and existential woes comes into focus. After all, it takes a powerful imagination to fathom what tremendous impact human consumption will have on the environment in the not-so-distant future.

In her solo museum exhibition "If Today Were Tomorrow," which opens April 20, 2024 at the Contemporary Arts Museum Houston, Erlanger zeroes in on man-made domestic structures—electrical grids and appliances—then zooms out to outer space. The museum is transformed into an immersive world. Pastel sculptures of minimal, developed planets, such as *Prime meridian*, 2024, feature a map of the I-95 highway and boxy modernist homes with small, LED-lit windows. Dioramas contain otherworldly desert terrains and a radiation-green extraterrestrial city on a ocean floor. Arrows pierce the staircase.



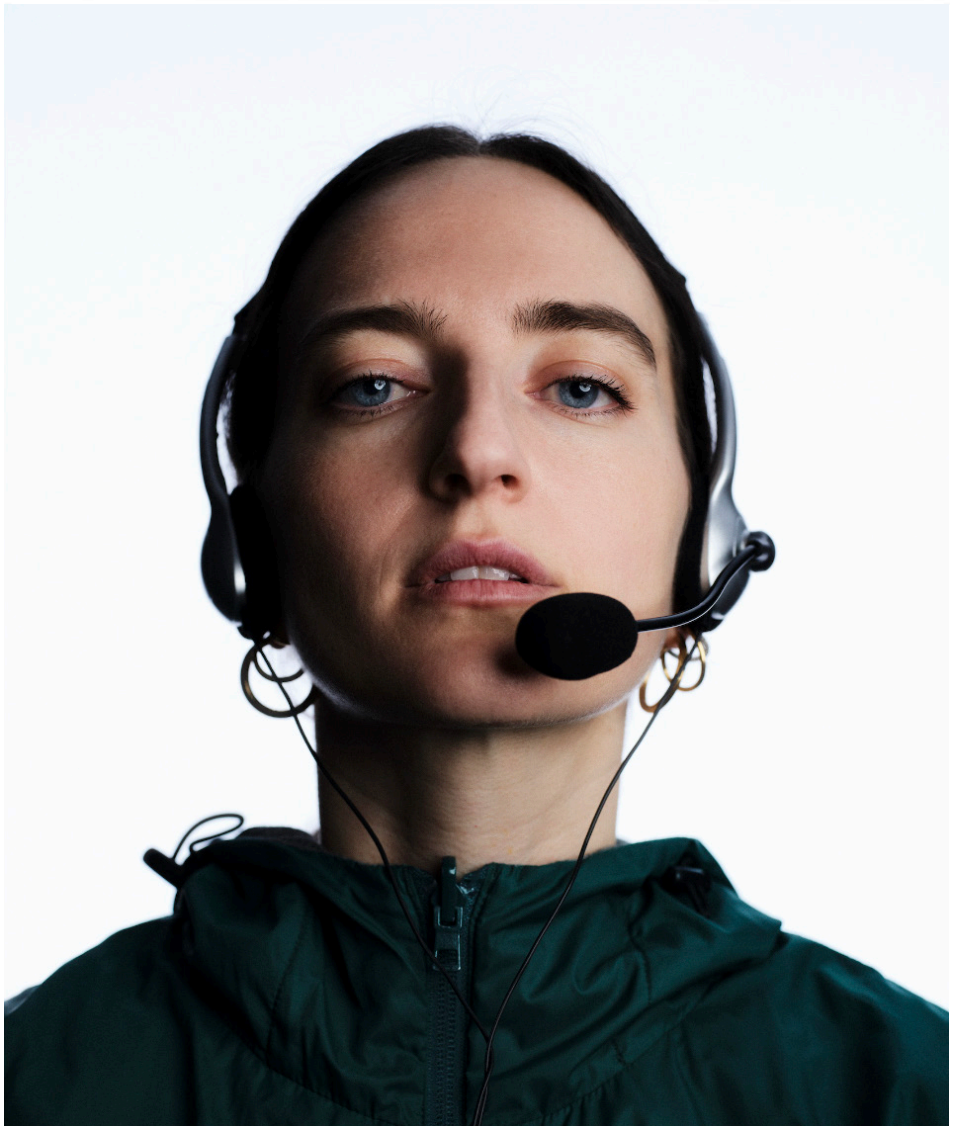
Family Style, 2024

Green Sky, 2024. Photography by Daniel Terna. Image courtesy the artist and Soft Opening, London.

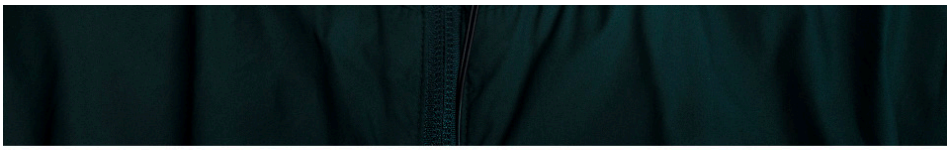
Elsewhere, a home interior set mirrors her new short film *Appliance*, 2024, originally adapted from a play *Humour in the Water Coolant*, which appeared alongside an installation and publication also entitled *Appliance* in 2023. Her take on a haunted-house tale stars Callie Hernandez as Sophie, a young woman who is haunted by her new house's appliances, and Sasha Frolova as Crystal, a psychic investigator employed to address the house's eerie frequency. Each neglected appliance becomes sculptural under Erlanger's lens, imbued with conceptual weight.

The artist is concerned with the inverse of the American dream that seeps into our waking life: the problems of today and their implications for tomorrow. At Frieze London in 2017, she debuted *Body Electric*, an installation where motion sensor benches triggered sci-fi climate-catastrophe narratives, and a sheen of blue light and fog ebbed and flowed throughout the room fluctuating with the price of oil. The artist has built a giant tentacle sculpture, mermaid tails in an LA Laundromat, and floral-wallpaper-clad eye sockets containing a 3-D miniature sets.

Now, in *Appliance* half-opened boxes flank the rooms in normal just-moved-in fashion, moldy produce rots in the refrigerator, dirty dishes pile on the counter, murky water spouts from a faucet, and static sockets threaten but never combust. Unnerving music builds and things only get weirder. Something ominous is stirring within the house. Sophie spends the film trying to figure out what it is.



Family Style, 2024



Portrait of Olivia Erlanger. Photography by Bobby Doherty. Image courtesy the artist.

"I know you think you came here to build something of your own, but I hear desperation as if you're dying to connect," Crystal, the psychic, later tells Sophie as she lays out a series of trinkets on a table to perform a séance, a small child in tow. Maybe Sophie is dying, unwell, or surviving through the help of the fluid she injects into her stomach with needles every day (is it insulin?). But connect to what exactly? Possibly herself. In the end, there is no resolution. Unexplained phenomena remains exactly that. And Sophie sweeps up shards of glass cup, inexplicably shattered from the night before. The house persists.

Raised in a suburban Connecticut town, Erlanger developed an interest in the charged and symbolic nature of the home. She was 9 years old when Disney's cult-classic *Smart House* came out in 1999. The trope of a house as an entity that is alive or haunted has long been a staple in sci-fi as well as horror films like *The Haunting*, 1963 and *The Shining*, 1980. Yet, in the last few decades, a home with a mind of its own has become something more tangible. A quick Google search for such living houses brings up a website for luxury smart home solutions and numerous articles on what has recently been coined the "dumb house," meaning a home without technology-heavy amenities. If the movement towards sentient homes and technology that encroaches on autonomy is any indication, the theatrics and magic realism of Erlanger's scenes soon might prove to be more fact than fiction.

"Olivia Erlanger: If Today Were Tomorrow," is on view April 20 through October 27, 2024 at the Contemporary Arts Museum Houston at 5216 Montrose Blvd, Houston, TX 77006.

W Magazine, 2024

CULTURE

The Most Anticipated Art Shows and Exhibitions of 2024

by **Maxine Wally**, **Andrea Whittle** *and* **Claire Valentine**
Updated: May 10, 2024
Originally Published: Jan. 16, 2024

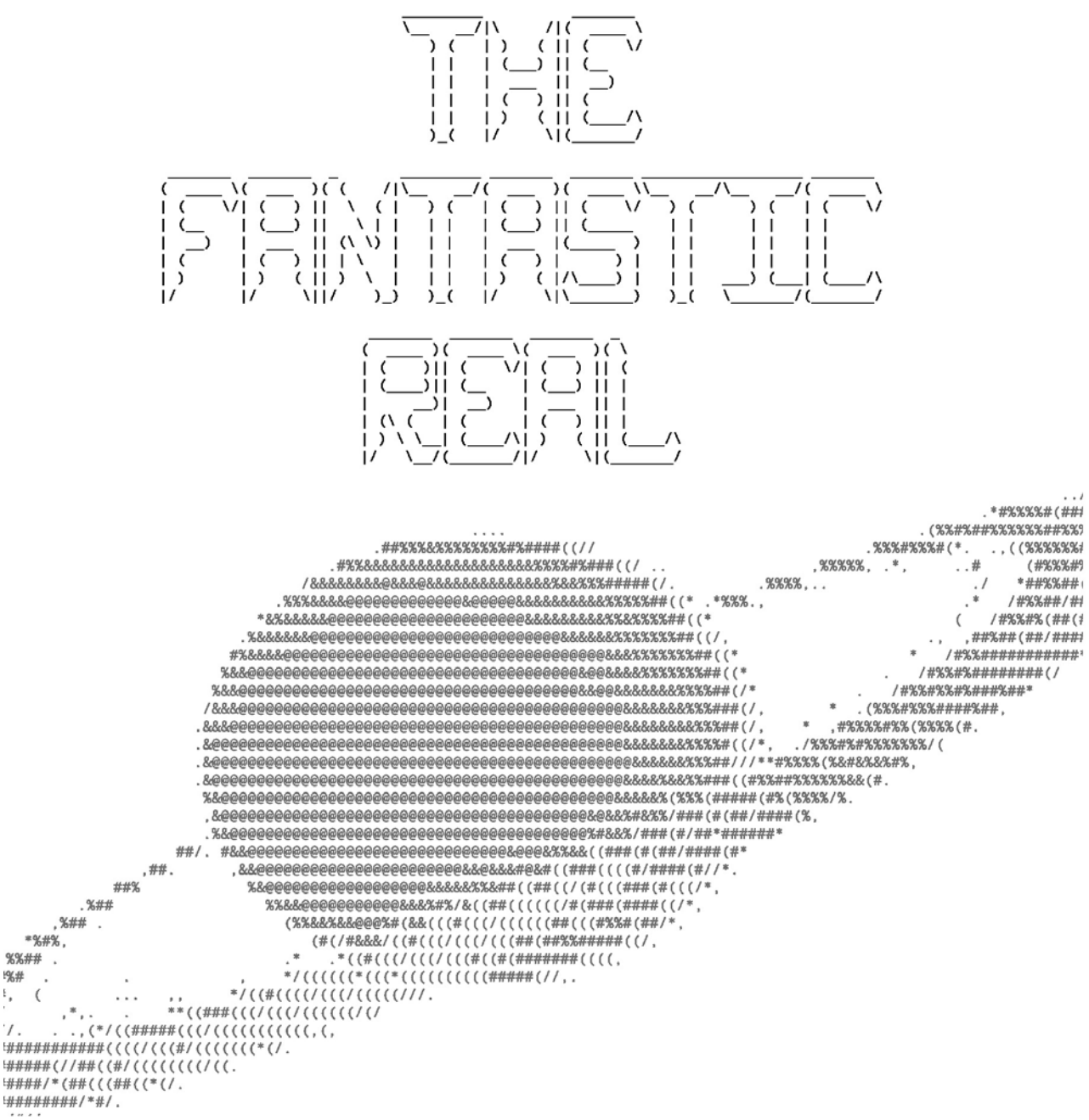
The arts calendar for 2024 is positively stacked. There's "The Harlem Renaissance and Transatlantic Modernism" at The Metropolitan Museum of Art, an exhibition showcasing paintings, sculptures, and photographs to chronicle the famous artistic and social movement; the de Young's show with Taiwanese-American artist Lee Mingwei, who is known for his installations that call for audience participation; and "O'Keeffe and Moore," a celebration (and juxtaposition) of two major modernist artists at the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts. And that's just in Q1. It's a lot to keep track of, but fear not: we've put together a list of the highlights of this year in New York City, Los Angeles, and beyond. Consider this your grab-bag guide to the can't-miss exhibitions of the season, and check back often—we'll be updating this list as more events roll in throughout the year.

Olivia Erlanger: If Today Were Tomorrow at CAMH

Olivia Erlanger, *Ida* (installation view) at Mother Culture, Los Angeles, 2018. Image and work courtesy of the artist. Photo by Ilia Ovechkin

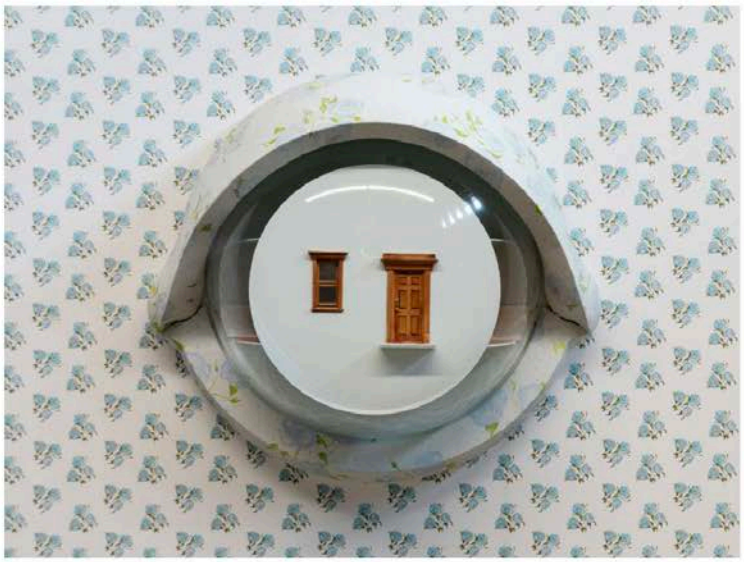
Meanwhile, farther south in Texas, the Contemporary Arts Museum Houston is mounting its newest exhibition, "Olivia Erlanger: If Today Were Tomorrow," which opens on April 20 and will be on view through October 28. Marking the artist's first solo museum show in the United States, "If Today Were Tomorrow" will include installation works, short films, and sculptures—all of which are brand-new. Erlanger's practice, in particular, seeks to define what "home" means; these themes have absorbed her work for the past decade or so. For "ITWT" specifically, Erlanger mulled "closed worlds," which she defines as human-made, climate-controlled environments. And in a full-circle moment, the show will take place in Contemporary Arts Museum Houston's cool, subterranean space, the Nina and Michael Zilkha Gallery.

Tank, 2023



On the ethical landscapes of young adult fiction.
Text by Olivia Erlanger

Tank, 2023



Olivia Erlanger, *Act IV*, 2022. Courtesy of artist and Museum X

In 2001, I fell nearly seven metres into a crevasse and broke my back. The following year I was diagnosed with compound autoimmune disorders that took me out of school during large swathes of my early adolescence. In memory, that time was spent being shuttled between doctors' offices, testing out alternative treatments, and generally feeling like shit. On top of it all, I suffered from garden-variety teen issues: social anxiety, dysmorphia and an all-encompassing obsession with, and terror of, the *future*.

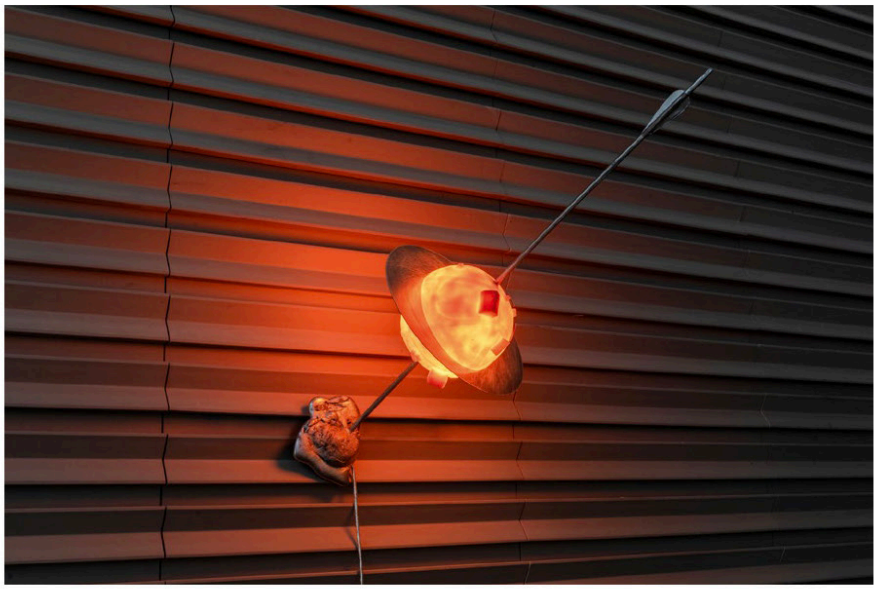
The future and my ideas of it were shaped by my bedside reading. I read compulsively while at home sick, and loved stories of distant lands, different physics and alternative realities. I read almost any story that took me out from under the weight of the banal and very non-magical reality that is illness. Being sick changed how I navigated the world.

Sci-fi fantasy literature (SFF) remains a favourite coping mechanism for when I'm feeling lost or stuck in the quotidian. SFF requires that its readers project into a space where the laws dictating our world no longer apply, and therefore liberates the storyteller from the pressure of relying on facticity. "Fantastic realism" was coined by literary scholar Alison Waller to describe how SFF contests realism by showing things not "how they are," but "how they are not". By making the impossible possible, SFF acts as a pedagogical tool, raising the visibility of non-normative identities: highlighting what is seen as weak, odd or neurodivergent, and reframing these qualities as extraordinary, or even at times, supernatural.

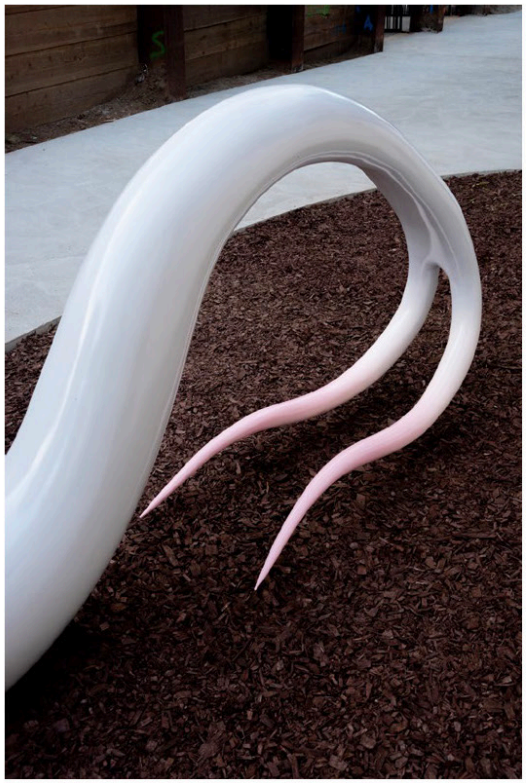
During winter 2021, locked in my small Manhattan apartment during the Omicron surge, I came across a new SFF novel, Ryka Aoki's *Light from Uncommon Stars* (2021). New York winters can feel oppressive, the sun barely peeking out from behind skyscrapers, the wind harshly stinging bare skin. Reading Aoki's book – which features a supernatural demon, a doughnut-making alien family, a galactic war and artificial intelligence – immediately brought me back to the liberation I felt reading SFF during my adolescence. The story follows Katrina Nguyen, a trans-femme violin prodigy and runaway who finds safe haven with violin instructor Shizuka Satomi. Unbeknownst to Katrina, Satomi has made a deal with the devil for Katrina's soul. She is initially resolved to fulfil her Faustian bargain, but by the end of the story would rather burn in hell than sacrifice Katrina.

As Aoki put it to me over Zoom last autumn, "In life there are many, many different ways to be a hero." In a media landscape dominated by variations of Joseph Campbell's hero's journey narrative, Katrina is anything but. She is tormented both at home and in the world because of her gender identity, and flees the Bay Area for Los Angeles. Katrina is so fearful after a lifetime of abuse that she accepts maltreatment more readily than love. Under the tutelage of Satomi, and within the safety of her home, Katrina begins to blossom, finding not only a place where her gender identity is accepted ("It's souls Satomi is after in the end, not boys or girls," Aoki clarified), but also a place to define and refine her innate skills and talents.

Tank, 2023



Olivia Erlanger, *35.1796° N, 129.0756° E*, 2022. Courtesy of artist and Museum X



Olivia Erlanger, *Final Girl (Parallel Object)*, 2022. Courtesy of Soft Opening

Fantastic realism allows us to process the irreconcilability of our real lives while inventing the future

By developing a sense of self-love in the face of adversity and a passion for self-expression, Katrina saves herself.

Teenagehood is equated with exploration and discovery, despite teenagers having limited agency and less experience. The concept of the "teenager", however, is a relatively recent marketing construction; as children's author Natalie Babbitt wrote in 1972: "It made its first appearance during the Second World War and was created partly by parents, partly by manufacturers, and partly by Frank Sinatra." With this nascent category a cohesive sector for commercial extraction was created. Stories for television and films began to be produced to make profit from teenage allowances and free time. One genre that especially took hold was SFF, its emphasis on world-building ripe for this angsty age-group. Today, SFF and young adult fiction (YA) can seem interchangeable, and oftentimes, SFF will feature a teenage protagonist or be told from a teenage perspective. However, to many practitioners of the genre, SFF need not be relegated to a specific audience. Indeed, it can be viewed as a pedagogical tool to contest the codes of adulthood by questioning them. Looking beyond the "teenager" as a marketing construction, the experience of adolescence is not bound by a diurnal turn: without an *axis mundi* of identity, there is malleability around selfhood itself.

Adolescence, like magic, is an experience of transformation; it is a state of constant change. Post-structuralist notions of identity suggest that at all stages of life, selfhood is plural, fluid and fragmented. In many ways we are constantly moving through what might be seen as states of adolescence. Aoki describes navigating her ageing mother's cognitive decline: "My mother is, in a sense, an adolescent to her changed ability, and as her child, I am an adolescent in my experience of being a caretaker." We oscillate throughout our lives cycling from fledgling, working towards some sense of mastery, and then beginning anew as experience and time bring us into narratives that we haven't yet experienced for ourselves. Aoki believes that identity is less determined by age than it is experience: a fresh experience renders us at a new beginning and we must learn and reinvent our roles. Transforming adolescence into a lifelong experience would mean remaining in a state of continual becoming.

For French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan, "fantasy lies at the very heart of subjectivity. The only true alternative to fantasy is psychosis." In studying psychosis, Lacan became concerned not with a reality with which a subject or patient might have fallen out of touch but rather what seeped in to take its place. In this way, subjectivity is defined less by whom we think ourselves to be and more so by how we perceive ourselves within the world. When we experience new stages of adolescence, it means occupying the position of "other" on an interior level, which may feel in opposition to our "adult" projection of self. As Mark Fisher describes in *Capitalist Realism* (2009): "If the Real is unbearable, any reality we construct must be a tissue of inconsistencies." It is within these inconsistencies that space for SFF can percolate.

World-building is intrinsic to child's play. SFF is therefore often derided as being less emotionally complex than other genres due to its relationship to youth. By doing so, however, critics presuppose that children, particularly teenagers, do not face the same problems as adults – but new technologies, war and climate chaos encroach upon us all. Long dead are the days of SFF being read only by nerds with neckbeards (no offence to neckbeards), and as the readership has shifted, so too have demands for narratives that don't require cultural transposition. As a result, SFF literature has become increasingly non-Western, non-white and non-heteronormative.

SFF allows for the kind of storytelling that can elaborate on and extrapolate from the increasingly bizarre reality we hold in common. When you find those whose perspectives resemble your own, a community can be built. As an anti-authoritarian genre, SFF is an especially participatory culture, where shared interest in the not-yet, rather than what-is, is valued. Self-selected families that contest the idea of a nuclear family are erected within the readership as much as within the storytelling – even if they reproduce the burdens and traumas found within genetic relations. Cosplay, fan fiction, Reddit boards and WordPress accounts are active places for kinship within the SFF community where people who feel displaced in their world can find a virtual kind of home. All unhappy families are unhappy in their own way, even the ones we construct; however, the experience – especially for those who do not feel safe or seen – of having support along the journey of self-invention is invaluable.

New stories alter how we relate to ourselves and others. In *Light from Uncommon Stars*, Satomi, acting as a kind of

surrogate to Katrina, exists outside of the traditional trope of a mother figure as either devourer or nourisher. Aoki describes how Satomi "in essence, loses everything but keeps everything. This is the sort of storytelling you get when you have queer writers, when you have writers of colour, people who have dealt with and have no illusions about being nurturing, because sometimes we have to just save ourselves as well. I want to reject the idea that stories need to be binary, that one character or person has to die for another to live." Aoki embraces a "both-and" structure for her characters that incorporates multidimensionality and resists binary frameworks. There is no neat bow tying up each plot; rather the reader believes that the characters within *Light from Uncommon Stars*, Satomi included, have the ability to chart the course of their next chapter. In the end, Satomi doesn't give into her Faustian bargain, but is instead saved by her would-be victim Katrina, who helps her escape an eternity in hell by fleeing to outer space. "Readers want to see different ways of conflict resolution," Aoki told me, "where, for example, an antagonist isn't vanquished but is allowed to process loss and to be potentially identified with."

In addition to being the year of my fall, 2001 was also the year of my first kiss, and in some ways, the beginning of my art practice. While recovering, SFF literature was (and continues to be) a tool for learning about and actively reshaping a world that can so often feel static and unchangeable. It also provided me with the blueprint for building worlds of my own through artmaking. During this time, I made collages by cutting up old *National Geographics*, *Vogue* magazines and *Better Homes & Gardens*, mixing in images from my personal collection of Absolut Vodka and Got Milk? advertisements (I had binders full of them) to create images of creatures promoting made-up products. A favourite comes to mind: a polar bear with Charlize Theron's legs in strappy black high heels pushing a lawnmower over a desert landscape. The headline screamed, "So Sexy! So Chic!" By attempting to make the known into something new, I too cycle through states of adolescence, frequently learning new materials, techniques and approaches to art-making. While there are more overt ways in which my predilection for SFF plays out in my practice – magical creatures, monstrous eyes and tongues, a play about enchanted objects – the genre really taught me how to think of reality as fluid, a space between what I can see and what is yet to exist. By building impossible architectures and shifting scale, I'm able to engage with SFF and make manifest my Wonderland-like fears of the future.

As Ursula Le Guin writes in her essay about SFF, "The Carrier Bag Theory of Fiction" (1986): "It is a strange realism, but it is a strange reality." What I believe Le Guin meant – as do writers like Aoki who are defining contemporary SFF – is that the genre allows us to process the surreal intangibilities of our shared lived existence while inventing possible futures. Not that any literature, per se, can solve the problems of our current existence, but SFF can teach us how to cope better by shifting our perspectives. Aoki's novel may read as fantastic in terms of its settings and conditions, yet the core narrative mirrors the multifariousness of life as much as (or even more so than) stories bound by notions of realism from the 19th and 20th centuries. What *Light from Uncommon Stars* and, more broadly, SFF does is to propose that there are alternate pathways for relating to one another. In this sense, as we encounter different stages of "adolescence", we construct nebulous and neoteric constellations of community across cultures and realities that allow us to queer our futures and make space for increasingly complex corporealities. ⊙

Olivia Erlanger, *Act I* (Detail), 2022. Courtesy of Del Vaz Projects

Olivia Erlanger, *Ida* (installation view), 2018. Courtesy of Motherculture

Tank, 2023

Elle Decor, 2023

Chris Mottalini

design + decorate > house tours

HOW ONE WEST HOLLYWOOD HOME WENT FROM "UGLY AS SIN" TO A COOL-AND-COLLECTED GEM

A homely 1970s ski chalet apartment gets a new modern layout that is airy and nuanced, thanks to architect Andre Herrero.

BY CAMILLE OKHIO PUBLISHED: MAR 29, 2023

Fixing up a house can be a romantic endeavor. Andre Herrero, cofounder of the architecture and design studio Charlap Hyman & Herrero, discovered this when designing an apartment for his girlfriend, Paige Zollars, who works in fashion. In 2020, Zollars and her sister, Laura, a music manager, purchased a West Hollywood duplex that was "ugly as sin," Herrero says. Untouched since the 1970s, it had a dated ski-chalet aesthetic and a suffocating layout. "I'm so grateful Andre came with us to view it," Paige says. "Only an architect could have seen the potential."

Herrero took it down to the studs and built it into a modern home of muted hues and airy spaces. Things got more layered when the architect introduced his favorite materials—stainless steel and metal mesh—throughout the home, helping to distinguish areas by use: "We hate open floor plans for small apartments," Herrero says. "Everything just feels smaller."

Cheeky art enlivens the apartment, while American antiques ground it. Everything was done on a shoestring budget without sacrificing quality. "We were crafty with our resources and took advantage of architectural quirks,"

Herrero says. “Things that seem like negatives can contribute to a more romantic narrative.”

That romance was brought in by way of different periods, materials, and styles. Playful works of art balance out serious antiques throughout the apartment. In the living room, for instance, an Olivia Erlanger sculpture of a room within an eye hangs above the sofa. Intensely surreal, it recalls the dollhouses both sisters played with as children. In the convivial spirit, a pair of 19th-century Queen Anne–style side tables provide space to work or eat from the sofa, while a stool by Shun Kinoshita in the foreground acts as a home for cell phones, TV remotes, or any passing bric-a-brac.

“Things that seem like negatives can contribute to a more romantic narrative.”—Andre Herrero

Minimal though this project may seem in comparison to some of Charlap Hyman & Herrero’s past work, planning still demanded a thorough deep dive into references, people, and places from the last several hundred years. A series of contemporary material interventions take cues from historic interiors while remaining freshly up to date.

BY KATHRIN HEINRICH

Home is No Escape: Olivia Erlanger's "Appliance"

In her show at Kunstverein Gartenhaus, Vienna, Olivia Erlanger explores the abyss of contemporary living.

Nov 1, 2022

"In these rooms, your imagined world: you slumber even while you wake. Consumed with desire for a life lost and, maybe, never lived. To be free of the body is to run without a hum, without the worry of a missing heartbeat. There's no growl of an empty stomach, no ache of a strained eye. There's no scent of lactic release or soreness from a sprained and twisted spine. There's no baited breath walking down these halls with fear and confusion. No internal clock tick ticking away." – HOUSE's monologue from *Humour in the Water Coolant*

It was virtually impossible to get a glimpse of OLIVIA ERLANGER'S show *Appliance* on its opening night at Kunstverein Gartenhaus in Vienna, as a crowd gathered to see the project "comprising a play, an installation and a publication" come to life in performance. Centering on the relationship we build with our living spaces and their furnishings, *Appliance* homed in on what can only be described as a very specific millennial condition in a manner that seemed mocking

and strangely consoling all at once.

Within the exhibition space, three rooms – arrangements of furniture without walls – set the stage for Erlanger's play *Humour in the Water Coolant*, which sees its protagonist Sophie being confronted by her appliances during a séance booked with the aptly-named Crystal to rid her suburban home of its hauntings. But we soon learn that there are many more ghosts than just her lamp, oven, or shower plaguing Sophie, a former actress in her early thirties. Disillusioned with her career and a broken relationship, she has just left the big city for a suburban fixer-upper where she is undergoing fertility treatment as well as a regimen of crippling self-doubt. Her description as "barren" seems outdated and misogynistic, while the accumulated set of problems render her a rather one-dimensional character, whose humanity seemingly never stretches beyond platitudes.

The ensuing dialogues feel, at times, heavily overwritten, bordering on Insta-affirmation terrain. "Living in many ways requires surrendering," says Crystal, while the character "House" muses: "Things are just place-holders, are they not?" Bad writing or a tongue-in-cheek meta-critical take on the millennial chamber play? The performance on the show's opening night suggested the latter: a cast assembled on short-notice from the Viennese art scene performed a campy rendition of *Humour in the Water Coolant* read from the manuscripts so exaggeratedly that its unrehearsedness seemed outright mannered. Overacting as an artistic choice.

While the play and its dramatic staging hit the audience over the head with symbolism and subtext, the actual stage constructed by Erlanger painted a much more nuanced picture, bound to strike a nerve with the crowd that filled the Kunstverein to the brim and even gathered beyond its shop windows, trying to peek at the performers. It was easier to watch the Instagram Live, Erlanger's chosen mode of documentation.

The stage set's furnishings were fragmentary; collected remnants of shared living spaces interspersed with the mainstays of the culturally inclined millennial's interior design: a second-hand replica of Mart Stam's metal tube chair, an Artemide lamp ubiquitous in the media world, a semi-ironic toilet-brush mount shaped like a porcelain cat, an issue of the New Yorker, or a beat-up oven with an old-fashioned worn-out tea towel dangling from its handle. Together with a stack of books on art and design, they told of aspirations towards status in precarious working conditions just as much as of the ostentatious understatement of those who can afford to play the game of the art world.

The rooms were tinged both with nostalgia and the awkwardness of lives past – topoi that run through Erlanger's artistic practice. Beyond sculpture and installation, she also uses writing to explore themes more deeply or to annotate her works with (art)historical and personal context, as does the eponymous essay collection for *Appliance* that is published in the context of the exhibition.

The next day, a strangely anachronistic vibe echoed throughout the empty rooms of *Appliance*, bearing no trace of contemporary digital

devices beyond a large silver TV-set. The minimal, slightly worn-out furnishings lacked a truly personal touch. While intended to invite viewers to kick start their own performance of the play, to fill in the blanks with their own characters, the overall vibe was art-student American Psycho, more alienating than relatable.

Yet, it was exactly this dark undercurrent that made *Appliance* intriguing. Per the exhibition text, the show purports to "explore the panpsychic potential of domestic objects" by sharing the "psychological effects of their declining usage and functionality" to "antagonize the idea of technological improvement as a positive development". But rather than a comment on planned obsolescence, or sustainability in the broadest sense, the exhibition's sly vibe seems to hint at the appliances' dystopic potential – that has been long realized in smartphones and smart devices, despite their absence from the stage.

As "Lamp" airs its grievances to Sophie in the play, it touches upon notions of surveillance, but quickly countersteers towards sentiment: "Do you know how much I know? Do you see even a fraction of what I see? I'm familiar with the spiders, the cobwebs that you ignore, that hang here, like me, left in limbo." For all its drama, *Humour in the Water Coolant* ends on a strangely conciliatory note: the séance a success, self-doubt cast aside with the provision of just a few esoteric homespun remedies. The machines might turn on us, but they just want to be loved. This moodlifter hardly redeems itself, of course: as much as one might wish that things weren't just place-holders, *Appliance* makes it – yes – crystal clear that there is no escape, neither from capitalism and classism nor from psychoanalysis or some of its new agey Co-Stars.

Olivia Erlanger: Appliance, 9 Sep – 29 Oct 2022, Kunstverein Gartenhaus.
The performance *Humour in the Water Coolant* on the opening night was written and directed by Olivia Erlanger, edited by Rosa Aiello and Marko Gluhaich and produced by Kunstverein Gartenhaus. Cast: Camilla Schielin, Luca Büchler (transparency note: also part of PW-Magazine's editorial team), mirabella paidamwoyo* dziruni, Soshiro Matsubara, Luis Javier Murillo, Sophie Gogl, Sophie Alisha, Ian Waelder.

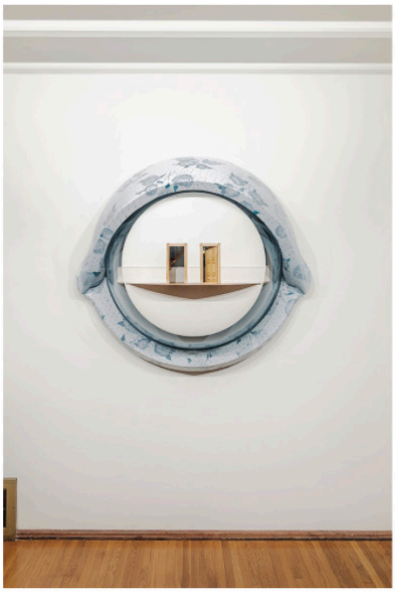
Flash Art, 2022

• 338 SPRING 2022, FEATURES

Space As a Reflection Of the Mind

by Olivia Erlanger and Keller Easterling

March 10, 2022



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Olivia Erlanger, *Act I*, 2022. Architectural model door, baseboard, staircase, sconce, MDF, foam, paint, LED lights and battery. 116,84 × 111,76 × 50,8 cm. Courtesy of Del Vaz Projects, Santa Monica.

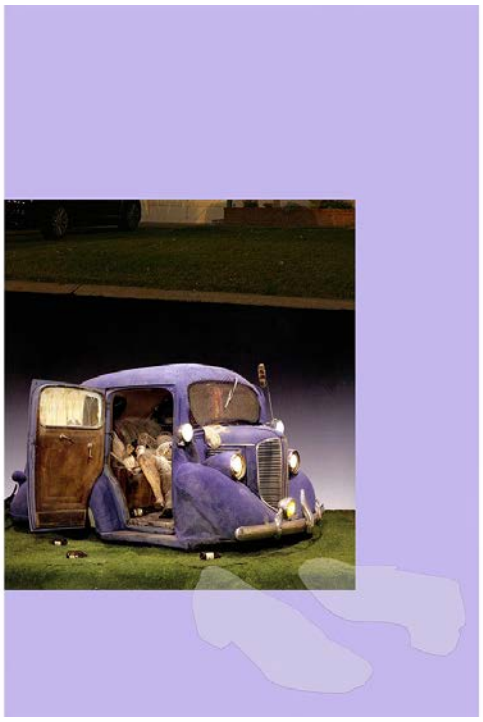
Olivia Erlanger: I've been really interested in the psychology of interiors and the way that space can act as a reflection of the mind. And I think that that really resonates with this idea of storytelling that you write about, that infrastructure has narrative capability. How do you see spaces, cities, towns telling stories, and what is an overarching narrative of infrastructure in a suburban space? To me, one would be the myth of the nuclear family as ultimately a narrative or story that infrastructure is selling us.

Keller Easterling: Within the repeatable suburbs of the mid-twentieth century, one of the narratives was about family. The nuclear family was also associated with patriotism — as if you were carrying on the war effort by building a house and taking part in the transition of wartime industries into the housing industry. As the century goes on, other narratives about exclusion and

luxury offer an amnesic sense that what you're buying is greater freedom or autonomy. There is also still some lingering idea that you're in the country or something like that. But the unspoken disposition embedded in the arrangement of the house is the most consequential. It makes some things possible and some things impossible. The house is constructed as a hybrid between the assembly line and the agricultural field. And the houses were financial instruments that were part of a scheme to jumpstart the economy.

OE: Right, building houses was never the real point. The point was to make mortgages, to make capital. The home is just an instrument of currency.
KE: Exactly. The idea was to make the houses bankable, or like currency. The Federal House Administration approved houses that were self-similar, and they rubber-stamped large batches of similar houses. The houses were part of repeatable formula or *spatial product*. It's not as if you bought a lot and decided to build a house that was suited to something you wanted. Houses could not have a flat roof, for instance, because this was seen as too eccentric. Because of their position relative to the city, the houses all had a garage—an attached ten-by-twenty- or twenty-by-twenty-foot box. And traffic engineering geometries like turning radii formatted OE the world. Beyond morphology, the FHA also develop procedures, as you know, that excluded people of color.

OE: It's as if those houses, at least as Luis Ortega Govela and I were looking at it for our book *Garage* (2018), are built and designed for the machine rather than for the human. And this sort of mechanization of domesticity is then exported. And one thing that kept coming up as I was reading *Extrastatecraft: The Power of Infrastructure Space* (2014) is just how global your perspective is, that your references are not limited to just Western typologies or ideologies. And I wonder, do you think the Fordist line of production changed this or instigated this American production of suburban spaces with houses all alike, and then that got exported culturally through cultural imperialism on a global scale, and you see these sort of Western-style suburban enclaves in parts of China, etcetera. What technology or what political change or



Olivia Erlanger, Garage. Mi. Press, 2018. Courtesy of the artist.

technology do you think that's a reflection of? How do we end up with a global idea of suburbia such that lives may be less in a physical space but rather in a shared collective imagination?
KE: Well, in a book called *Organization Space: Landscapes, Highways, and Houses in America* (1999) I was trying think about the way in which the mid-twentieth-century US suburb was a spatial product. This field of houses so clearly modeled the idea. But heir to the "org man" that Harold Rosenberg identified was, it seemed, another kind of organization man making *spatial products* of all sorts — repeatable formulas for suburbs, container ports, agropoles, resorts, cruise ships, or skyscrapers.

OE: Seriality en masse.
KE: Yeah. And the org men are shaping both space and time. So a big box is not really a building. It's more like a kind of assembly of protocols for stock-keeping units and parking and just-in-time production and so on. There is an enclosure but the logistical interplay is the real intellectual property. Or back to houses: the golf course community is a contagious spatial product around the world. The formula involves subdividing the surface area of the golf course with enough villas to match the debt incurred in building the fairways. It is a game played by men and women in the afternoon, but it's also a game of number

crunching played by developers. And the accompanying narratives are varied. In China, for instance, the story may be about having arrived at another kind of status or rank within an increasingly capitalized culture.

Olivia Erlanger, *6:13 AM*, 2020. 50,8 × 50,8 × 25,4 cm. Courtesy of the artist.

OE: These communities sell and prey upon a larger narrative of aspiration, one that seems to be totally entrenched in an American ideal. It's interesting to think about how capital "performs" and in particular how it performs in structural decisions. I wonder how your own experience in theater informs the ways in which you understand spatial intelligence, performance, and potentialities for space to enact upon users, offering new entanglements? I feel at least that space and the objects contained within almost have panpsychic qualities. Personally, I wonder how infrastructure decisions affect the construction of identity and the performance of self. Or if it's the inverse, if constructing one's disposition is a reflection of these invisible forces.

KE: Infrastructure is used broadly sometimes to refer to the pipes and wires of transportation, communication, or utilities. What I'm really trying to describe is another sort of matrix of a much broader apparatus that's not always hidden, as we usually think of infrastructure. It is the stuff we're swimming in, all the rules and relationships that format the spaces that we're moving through. Institutions that are reconsidering their "infrastructure" are maybe

reconsidering their constitution or disposition—how their arrangement makes some things possible and some things impossible, or how their internal arrangements might have a different chemistry. It is this focus on the disposition of a matrix and space that I've been trying to articulate.

Olivia Erlanger, *41.149804553968735° N, -73.31752522169846° W*, 2021. Graphite, aqua resin, fibreglass, aluminium, LED lights, transformer, and cables. 82 × 17 × 42 cm. Courtesy of Soft Opening, London.

OE: In my understanding, what you're describing is a meta-modernist perspective of the through lines connecting self, location, and experience to history. Or it's really an attempt to begin to pull back, zoom out of the matrix of the legislature, built environment, community that's side by side with our feeling of what constitutes "reality." This really resonates with how I think an artist's brain works, plumbing the depths of the spaces between language and construct, between form and material.
KE: Maybe there is also a critical exposure of the modern apparatus. Thinking in this way, not about the objects but about what's between the objects, is non-modern. It's a way of exposing the modern Enlightenment apparatus that favors declaration and object and lexical expression and so on. I always say that I am trying to look with half-closed eyes past objects and to see relationships between things for relational intelligence. I am suggesting that thinking dispositionally is one way to see past those stubborn habits of mind—past homo economicus and geometrized

property and solutions and on and on.

OE: This makes me think of your book *Medium Design: Knowing How to Work on the World* (2021), which uses the identifier of the designer rather than the architect. It's interesting, as what you're describing as the way in which a designer sees is actually a way of looking at or examining the space between two objects. Yet this is fundamentally how I think of art-making. As like a space between languages. Artists — or at least my way of thinking about what I do — try to delve into the in-between: a visual language, a spoken language, the built environment, and the sense of the ephemeral. All of these different kinds of vernacular. I don't personally see much difference between the roles of architect or artist. In many ways, it's all similar in terms of strategies, problem solving, or puzzle making. And I feel within the schema you propose in your writing that all of these modalities are actually just a way to describe similar patterns of thought. Ways of being and making that unite all of these roles, which I really appreciate.
KE: *Medium Design* was written to a broader audience to make a case for spatial practices and spatial thinking within a culture that gives more authority to anointed digital, legal, or econometric expression. It focuses on the heavy, lumpy, physical information in space that should be consequential in global decision-making. It's a practical thing that everyone's doing all the time, but it's under-expressed — to think ecologically, relationally, to think in terms of the interplay of things. But to the degree that everyone manages potentials in their environment, everybody is a designer. The subtitle, *Knowing How to Work on the World*, is not authoritative. It's not solutionist. It's the exact opposite of that. The book talks a lot about knowing the difference between knowing how and knowing that. "Knowing that" is something like knowing the answer. "Knowing how" is more like knowing how to work on something that doesn't have any solutions, that unfolds over time and needs constant tending—like most things.

OE: Right. It offers an organic investigation rather than an empirical quest for an ending fact. It's the difference between, I don't know, being on a journey and taking a trip where there's an endpoint.
KE: There are no singular solutions or singular enemies.

Olivia Erlanger, *37.350666455067966° N, 23.464661047493465° W*, 2021. Silicone, aluminium, LED lights, transformer, and cables. 71 × 25 × 56 cm. Courtesy of Soft Opening, London.

It's worse than that. Seeing in this way can also reveal more injustices and forms of environmental violence that may be accomplished not with a gunshot but with fossil fuels, sheltered wealth, monopolies of data, or murderous policing. And the community we were discussing—the interplay between human and nonhuman beings and objects can't be quantified. This is just one of the ways that capital is stupid. Organizations that are alive can have incalculable productivity. If you plant one seed or one tube you get ten. Often it is a matter of getting the abstract financial apparatus out of the way of this excessive productivity. That is some small part of what *Medium Design* is trying to think through. But it's a quiet contemplation.

OE: Oh, I think that's a beautiful sentiment to end on.

Olivia Erlanger's works are on display in "Shell," a three-person show on view at Del Vaz Projects, Santa Monica, through April 10, 2022; and in the group show "The Kick Inside" at X Museum, Beijing, Spring 2022.

Keller Easterling is an architect, writer, and the Enid Storm Dwyer Professor of Architecture at Yale. Her most recent book, *Medium Design: Knowing How To Work on the World* (Verso, 2021), inverts an emphasis on object and figure to prompt innovative thought about both spatial and non-spatial problems.

Cultured, 2022

DESIGN

Olivia Erlanger Plays Out Her Dreams at Frieze Los Angeles

Artist Olivia Erlanger has always dabbled in the fantastical, but with her new commission for Frieze Los Angeles, her dreamworld takes a sharp turn. The peripatetic artist discusses the big twist.

WORDS
Cultured Magazine

PHOTOGRAPHY
Harry Eelman

Cultured Magazine: What makes a public commission apetizing?

Olivia Erlanger: I'm in art to speak to the masses. I'm interested in democratizing forms and conversations.

CM: Your vision of the environment always includes the guts. Can you tell me what the sculpture actually is?

OE: A massive, severed serpent tongue. It's 12 feet long, six-and-a-half feet tall. I really have wanted to connect my interest in the infrastructure of a built environment to the horror and mundanity of suburban life within climate chaos. The idea of this horror was really exciting to me because a lot of the work that I've been making has a sense of fantasy, but I hadn't yet twisted to its

Cultured, 2022

CM: Architecture seems liek an inescapable part of your disposition.

OE: My brain is geared to creating puzzles, but they're inverted because I'm making all the pieces and I don't necessarily know the final image I'm putting together. That's the art of it, right? I'm intuiting the direction.

CM: A lot of what you're doing is playing pretend with real life.

OE: I think that's what I was talking about: that very thin line between fantasy and nightmare.

Artvisor, 2022

12 Women Artists to Watch

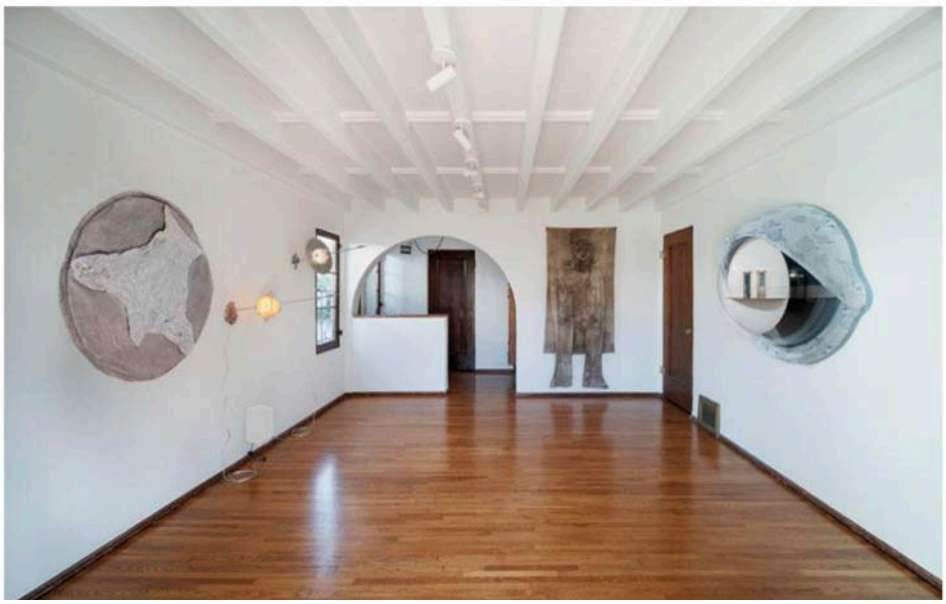
In celebration of International Women's History Month, Artvisor is taking the opportunity to showcase some women artists whose work we admire.

Olivia Erlanger

Olivia Erlanger (b. 1990) is an American artist based in Los Angeles, California. Erlanger's most recent sculptural series, made during the lockdown, *Home is a Body*, draws from the cultural mythologies and aesthetic production surrounding the 'American dream': white picket fences, sleek kitchen appliances, perfectly placed house plants. These miniature domestic spheres appear under the heavy concave lens of an eyeball. The ocular imagery alludes to the all-pervasive presence of surveillance capitalism in our lives today. In this way, Erlanger's work captures the tension between alienation, loneliness, and disaffection that characterises our digital age, and yet the These miniature domestic spheres appear under the heavy concave lens of an eyeball. The ocular imagery alludes to the all-pervasive presence of surveillance capitalism in our lives today. In this way, Erlanger's work captures the tension between alienation, loneliness, and disaffection that characterises our digital age, and yet the simultaneous presence of another's gaze in our lives. Erlanger's work is currently showing in a group exhibition, *Shell,* alongside Heidi Bucher and Nicola L. at Del Vaz Projects, Santa Monica.

Top Shows to See During Frieze Week Los Angeles

From Samara Golden's mirrored installation at Night Gallery to Ulysses Jenkins long-overdue survey at the Hammer, these are must-see shows in LA



'Shell'

Del Vaz Projects

16 February – 16 April

'Rooms are shells, they are skins. Peel off one skin after the other, discard it,' wrote the late Swiss artist Heidi Bucher, one of three artists featured in this formally concise but philosophically expansive exhibition at Del Vaz Projects. Bucher, who died in 1993, is best known for her skin-like latex casts of architectural interiors. Before she arrived to her signature technique, however, she made a series of wearable foam 'Bodyshells' in the early 1970s. A circular fragment from a 'Bodyshell' is featured here in the wall-mounted *Untitled*, (1978–81), combined with a glued-on blouse that resembles an animal's pelt. Nicola L. – also European-born, but periodically based in Los Angeles until her death in 2018 – made 'Penetrables' such as *Cloud* (1974–78): essentially rectangular canvases sewn with legs and sleeves that one could (theoretically) step into. Born in 1990 in New York, Olivia Erlanger, the youngster here, presents *Act 1* (2022), a wall-mounted sculpture in the shape of a wallpapered eye, its cornea a transparent plastic shell that encasing a miniature domestic interior. The built environment, in this exhibition, is shown as both sheltering and oppressive, particularly for women. 'Shell' is especially poignant, located in the anything-but-oppressive context of Del Vaz Projects, based in a Spanish Colonial Revival home.

Dazed, 2022

Ten women artists and designers on their love of Louise Bourgeois

ART & PHOTOGRAPHY - LISTS

As Louise Bourgeois: The Woven Child opens at the Hayward Gallery, we speak to ten women whose artworks and designs are inspired by the artist's vast and varied oeuvre

22nd February 2022

Text Emily Dinsdale

Textiles were transfigured, in the hands of Louise Bourgeois, becoming the very fabric of her life and experience. The artist's prolific cutting, ripping, sewing, and joining were acts of repair and investigation, part of her ongoing enquiry into the fathomless depths of her psyche. Dissecting and reconfiguring time-worn materials – often sourced from her own household and personal history – these artworks are crafted from the fabric of memory, trauma, identity, sexuality.

Louise Bourgeois: The Woven Child (currently at London's Hayward Gallery) focuses exclusively on the textile and fabric artworks made by Bourgeois in the final few decades of her multivarious career as an artist, working across numerous mediums and touching on some of the most significant artistic movements of the 20th century.

OLIVIA ERLANGER

"I could speak endlessly about her sculptures but I am most inspired by Bourgeois' drawings. Drawing is a cornerstone of my practice. Every sculpture begins as a sketch. I recently saw a drawing of hers that has been haunting me in which ladders extend from the ceiling rather than the ground.

"I'm most influenced by the knowledge that being an artist is a lifelong endeavour. It extends well beyond show histories or commercial interests. Louise Bourgeois made art because she had to rather than because she was asked to. This idea of 'making' a compulsion is something that I relate to."

Follow Olivia Erlanger on Instagram for updates on her upcoming exhibitions at Del Vaz Projects and Museum X

Louise Bourgeois: The Woven Child is running at London Hayward Gallery until May 15 2022

"Shell"

DEL VAZ PROJECTS

Cloud, 1974–78, a body-size construction by Nicola L. (1932–2018), is a large, wall-mounted rectangle of cotton canvas measuring five feet high and three feet wide. From it hang five pockets of fabric that respectively mimic a head, arms, and legs. This object is one of the artist's "*Pénétrables*," 1968–2012, so named by French art critic Pierre Restany in the late 1960s. These wearable works were paraded in various art and non-art settings around Europe in the 1960s and 1970s by figures such as musician Caetano Veloso, attendees of the 1970 Isle of Wight Festival, and the artist's own son. Indeed, they are paintings you can put on and animate with your body.

Cloud is installed alongside other pieces by Heidi Bucher (1926–1993) and Olivia Erlanger (b. 1990) in "Shell," a pithy eight-work show at Del Vaz Projects. The exhibition's metaphorically rich title draws, among other things, upon both the escargot motif that frequently appeared in Nicola L.'s art and Bucher's 1972 "Bodyshell" series of wearable sculptures, which she made while living in Los Angeles. "Shell" is a stimulating invitation to mull over the fecund conceptual junction of woman/body/architecture/habiliments: an especially important set of interlocking ideas for feminist artists in the second half of the twentieth century.

Most of the works on view are objects that imply the body but from which the body is, of course, absent. They invite visitors to imagine putting them on, taking them off, or walking around inside of them. I found that they are better described as *inhabitable* rather than *penetrable*, as each piece offers the viewer an entrance, either symbolic or literal, mining the slippages between *wearing* and *dwelling* (like the small shift between *habiller*, the French verb meaning "to dress," and *habiter*, the word for "to dwell"). Situated off the inner courtyard of this gallery—a spacious Spanish Revival–style home in Santa Monica—the domestic setting of the space provides a felicitous backdrop for the objects on display.

Similar to the inside of an abalone or oyster shell, Bucher's hanging sculpture *Untitled*, 1978–81, is glazed in mother-of-pearl pigment. To make the piece, Bucher adhered a blouse with splayed sleeves, frozen in glue and covered in pearlescent paint, to a large round piece of foam. While Nicola L.'s painting is wearable, the clothing employed by Bucher functions differently. It is a skin once worn but now molted. In a series of works that Bucher called "*Einbalsamierungen*" (Embalmings), 1973–78, she mummified personal and found garments, including pantyhose and nightgowns. (She made the works after she left Los Angeles and returned to Switzerland in 1973, just two years after women there were given the right to vote.) For Bucher, clothing functioned as an evocative container of bodily memory. In a 1981 interview, she explained: "At the very beginning, I embalmed my own underwear. . . . I would also call the underwear skin, that is to say, a very, very personal shell. . . . When I do this, I hold on to a part, a moment from my life . . . so these are perhaps discarded shells, discarded skins, which are then solidified . . . in order to lighten them, in order to bear them, in order to create a new state for myself."

If Bucher's work in this exhibition is metaphorically inhabitable, Erlanger's *Act I*, 2022, solicits the viewer to move around in a dollhouse-style space with their eye; the setting also happens to resemble an eye. This diorama contains a pair of miniature doorways within an ocular convex shell made of Plexiglas, all of which are set into an eyelid-like frame covered in floral wallpaper. In this work, the interior of the home and the seeing body are one.

All the pieces here struck me as willingly vulnerable things. Calling to mind literary theorist Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's description of deconstructionist, feminist, and postcolonial ways of thinking as a "radical acceptance of vulnerability," they are objects offered to the viewer in a spirit of openness and curiosity.

— *Ashton Cooper*

Flaunt, 2022


A
GLIMMERING
TEMPORALITY
NEW GROUP EXHIBITION SHELL EXPLORES THE DAZZLING IN-BETWEEN

[illegible] universe. Plants are underbaked shell impulses and the air about us trails, we explorers shoot their fills the atmosphere with questions about what it might hold. What will crawl, ooze, or walk out? With what force will the [illegible]? If it's broken, what has it held? What made a home of it? What will become of its form? Shell forth, the word and the new group exhibition at Santa Monica's Bel Vita Projects) evokes a glimmering and tactile temporality.

In *The Rabbit and the Pumpkin*, Rhiannon Welch-Du Pont writes a fleshly ontology of tangible sight, where "Between the alleged colors and visibles, we would find more for humans: that I come from, a number from, and which for the point is not a thing, but a possibility, a concept, and a field of things." In *Shell*, the artworks of Heidi Bucher, Olivia Erlanger, and Nicole L. Strasnick, for worlds' shows are stemming from what a human will move [or will have moved] through them: before, now, and again.

Body armour, camouflage, home, shrine, eye, planet, interior and exterior, here and there, mind and nervous. The shell is a membrane of possibility holds porous and opaque, of archives and stores pregnant with possibility and supernatural, immediately and intimate making various reconnection. The [illegible] many shells mark the shedding in between, making time felt as a force we move through:

> water and mist
> water and mist
> the shell.

If you walked into a room and there was nothing but a shell in its centre, what would you do? If you walked into a room and saw a see-through eyeball-shaped object with a miniature bedroom inside (Olivia Erlanger's *Home is a Body*, 2020), how might you approach it?

I spoke with Erlanger on the phone in late December. From opposite ends of the country, we talked about planets and their suns, distance and proximity, motherly, seeing, light, the grotesque. Walter Benjamin's *Berlin Childhood*, and Juhani Pallasmaa's *The Eyes of the Skin*, a book about architecture and the senses. Erlanger's worlds seem to elaborate Pallasmaa's words: "The eyes want to collaborate with the other senses. All the senses, including vision, can be regarded as extensions of the sense of touch—as specialisations of the skin. They define the interfaces between the skin and the environment... between the opaque interiority of the body and the luminosity of the world."

Indeed, Erlanger's eye-shaped, plexiglass-encased dioramas mediate between the miniature environments they hold and the room in which they are situated. They ask us to consider invisible events occurring in the space between, explore how information is conveyed and held by the interface. In *The Skin of the Film*, Laura U. Marks writes "Both film and video become more fugitive as they die. Every time we watch a film, we subtract the grain of decay; another scratch, more fading as it is exposed to the light, and the mental deterioration, especially with color film."

Erlanger's works dilate points of resistance, transmission, and open haptically.

There, consider the inherent optic of Erlanger's fixtures like sculptures—tubed, wandering stems fallen from orbit and pinned to the wall. They have scanned by GPS locations for a reason. In a planet, already? Around what are they [illegible] with things? What about our location and measurements are calculable and what will be lost in translation? What is the nature of the mist?

During slow decay, light pulsates and spawns, expanding before collapsing fantastically. Erlanger's works remind us that to look at a planet is to view what it is infused by. Skin and [illegible] are composed of glimmering pieces of minerals, seasons, cosmos, and unknown materials splattered then reconstituted, changing and spawning. The planet is the farthest we can see with our naked eyes—a spec of barely-there light. Erlanger's work dilates the limits of sight: very close [illegible] glove, a world, a vivid structure, and very far away (a planet). Sight stretched to its strange ends melts into touch. Pupil to skin, skin to [illegible] permanence embedded from orbit.

Featured elsewhere in *Shell*, Nicole L's *Shell* (1974-76) is a weathered bronze [illegible] with the word CLOUD shrouded across its drooping crevices. It feels fortified, fossil made for an atmosphere, even as it is preserved. Similarly, *Cave Armoured (Blue)* and *Cave Armoured (Wood)* (2021) are orange [illegible] and silver (ancient) pumpkin—light, burrowing skin, burrowing shell.

How, our luminescence are forever might step into an earthly cave. Or that we might step out of, putting them to rest. That we might be in them lights, and that these lights are also forms—that form is not stagnant but functionally necessary for the transmission of messages and light. That the moon is an ancient shell orbiting us as we wander around the shell of the many [illegible] and morphing.

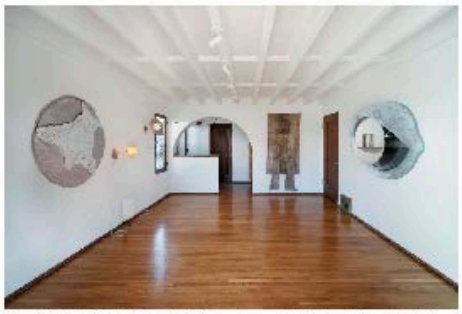
Heidi Bucher's work is also skin-like. In *Hautraum* (*Skin Membranes*, *Lindgren Kissenbrut*) (1980), latex, gossamer textiles, bamboo, and construction wire form a soft [illegible] room suspended from the ceiling like a puppy's cloud—whatever it can hold [illegible] from the center of the stained room. In an untitled work dated 1980 by Bucher, what looks to be a piece of fabric [illegible] like that stay a circle—as though it's been discarded or stepped on. How is a shell like an extension of a body—something we shed, move in congruously with [illegible]? Bucher's works roll up questions about what these pieces of relevant material have the ability to [illegible].

During [illegible] strangely stressful time—a pandemic containing us in shell-like homes—the word metamorphosis is changed. Shell potentially conjures and complicates the separation and contentious existence of transmission [illegible] moves, passages between inside and outside, avoiding and receiving, remembering us that to transmit is also to communicate by means of a shared [illegible]—passport, planet, room to travel to, [illegible]—shells which are also messengers.

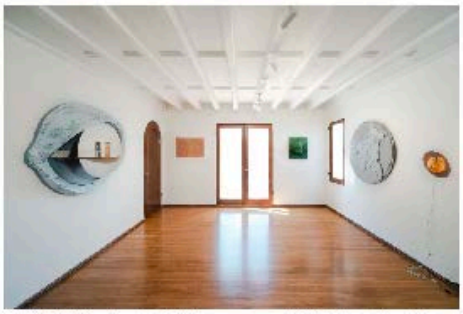
Pin-Up, 2022

SHELLS AND SKINS: THE BODY IS A HOME AT DEL VAZ PROJECTS

by Samantha Ozer



Shell at Del Vaz Projects. Photo courtesy of Del Vaz Projects. Photo: Exhibit View.



Shell at Del Vaz Projects. Photo courtesy of Del Vaz Projects. Photo: Exhibit View.

Jay Ezra Nayssan founded Del Vaz Projects, which gets its name from the Farsi phrase دست و دل باز (dæst o del bāz) for open-handed and open-hearted, in 2014. The intimate exhibition platform's programming has always centered the domestic — first located in a guest bedroom of Nayssan's west Los Angeles apartment, it's now situated in his Santa Monica home. Architect Frank E. Bivens built the house in 1929, and it was once Shirley Temple's childhood home. It's a space that is serendipitously astute for the context of its current project *Shell*, an exhibition of works by Heidi Bucher (1926–1993), Olivia Erlanger (b. 1990), and Nicola L. (1932–2018). Bucher lived nearby in Los Angeles with her then-husband and their two sons while she was working on her now iconic *Bodyshells*, a series of material-body experiments, a precursor is featured in this exhibition, that she made in collaboration with her husband in 1972. In a chance encounter, Erlanger once worked with L's grandson on a film shoot. In addition to these cosmic links between Del Vaz's guests and the space itself, Nayssan identified shells and skins as the throughline across the works and grounding points for understanding home, as an architectural and bodily construction but also the emotional space we experience with others.

Throughout her life, Bucher repeated the words "Rooms are shells, they are skins. Peel off one skin after the other, discard it…" Beyond the material differences of shells versus skins, which Nayssan outlines as "hard versus soft, impenetrable versus porous, stiff versus malleable," they are both structures of enclosure for protection, concealment, and adornment. They are in many ways integral aspects of our being, shaping our identities and reinforcing the performance of our outward-facing selves and who we want to become. Bucher's *Untitled* (1978-81) is a remnant of a body of foam works that she worked on throughout her life, deflated to resemble one of her wearable sculptures from *Bodyshells*. A dragonfly, a recurring motif in her work and a symbol of transformation, emerges from the flattened grey iridescent sphere.

16 Der Parkettboden des Herrenzimmer in Wülflingen, Winterthur (1979), continues this animalistic story of rebirth, shedding layers like a snake. In her "skinning" series, she applied latex on the walls, floors, and furniture in personally and historically charged locations to create a visceral record of the space. The framed cut on the walls of Del Vaz is a pull of her father's study in her childhood home. By excising a sample with the same amount of care by which a physician biopsies a patient, Bucher confronts the social divisions of 19th century bourgeois engineering by softening and decontextualizing the traditionally patriarchal space of the domestic study or "herrenzimmer." For Nayssan, Bucher's process of applying latex and peeling it away "establishes a haptic quality to architecture and a plea towards skin in architecture" that goes beyond a purely archival desire. In physically transcribing a structure, Bucher creates a specter of the built environment that folds in a deeper understanding of memory through touch.

Pin-Up, 2022

Detail of Olivia Erlanger. *39.31037775068422, -123.79876400034462*, 2022. Photo courtesy of Del Vaz Projects. Photo: Exhibit View.

Olivia Erlanger, *39.31037776068422, -123.79876400034462*, 2022. Photo courtesy of Del Vaz Projects. Photo: Exhibit View.

Detail of Olivia Erlanger's *Act I*, 2022. Photo courtesy of Del Vaz Projects. Photo: Exhibit View.

Erlanger continues this legacy of deconstructing prevailing notions of home that hinge on gendered expectations of bourgeois domestic life. Two silicone and flesh-like planet sculptures *1.3521, 103.8198 and 39.31037776068422, -123.79876400034462* (both 2022) are pierced with a metal arrow, shattering their projection of a glowing suburban topography. While modern suburbia exhibits a uniform regularity that holds profit over consideration for public and private life, it is reigned by an outward presence of order. The regularity of urban planning both models and reinforces normative conceptions of a family unit. For Erlanger, whose planets and home in *Act I* (2022) are devoid of people, it is the architectural shells of these structures that set the stage for a new set of references for home. Cut open at a cross section, split and encased within a large eyelid and plexiglass lens, *Act I* is an empty space to traverse, inhabit, and fill. The eye is the home of our mind, the space to imagine the types of structures that should hold ourselves and those we care about.

L is celebrated for her more functional art directed towards the objectification of women's bodies, but it is her long-running series *Pénétrables*, a term coined by art critic Pierre Restany, that through a contemporary lens could be seen as her most subversive. L produced the series by affixing legs, arms, and faces onto the surfaces of canvas, cotton, and vinyl to create a distorted suit for individuals and collective skins for groups. Each "coat" was labeled with a different natural element, such as sky, earth, sun, and sea. Shown here, Cloud (1974-78), a full-body Pénétrable inscribed with the word "cloud," is placed alongside an untitled green head from the late nineties. Initially conceived to be worn as a form of second skin that makes viewers reconsider individual subjectivities, when looked at today Nayssan believes they are a "prompt (for) us to shed our individual identities in exchange for a share of a collective skin." Unlike other works that highlight biologically female body parts, the Pénétrables blankets the body in a unified form, suggesting a non-binary or genderqueer future. The Pénétrables, like the other works in the show, are empty vessels waiting to be filled by bodies. In absence, the works allow us to imagine new futures for these forms — of domestic homes, of women's bodies, of both visible and invisible gendered constructions of identity and architecture.

Text by Samantha Ozer.
Photos courtesy of Del Vaz Projects.

Inside Winterfest: The making of a new holiday tradition at Aspen Art Museum

News FOLLOW NEWS | December 17, 2020

Andrew Travers FOLLOW
atravers@aspentimes.com

Aspen Art Museum's Winterfest art sale and exhibition on Thursday, Dec. 17, 2020(Kelsey Brunner/The Aspen Times)

Aspen Art Museum's Winterfest art sale and exhibitic Brunner/The Aspen Times)

Hide Captions

Amid the sounds of banging hammers and whirring drills, curator Saim Demircan winded on Tuesday afternoon through a labyrinth of sculptures, paintings and crafts staged for installation at the Aspen Art Museum as a team transformed galleries into Winterfest.

"This is the fun part," said Demircan, a curator-at-large for the museum who spearheaded this new COVID-safe architectural installation, exhibition and sale. "Just figuring out where everything is going to go."

Physically, it is a marvel. Designed by the German artist Veit Laurent Kurz, the installation fills two galleries. It includes three massive mountain sculptures, which provide free-standing walls for hanging two-dimensional works, a large concrete lake sculpture that doubles as a pedestal for sculpture, and an alpine cabin, which functions as its own gallery-within-a-gallery (yes, go inside).

It's a new kind of show for the museum, chiefly because patrons can buy work off the walls, but also because it functions as an installation, an exhibition and fundraiser. In the works since late spring, Winterfest is a creative solution to several of the vexing challenges facing museums during the coronavirus pandemic: it provides festivity without crowds; it provides a fundraiser for an institution that was forced to cancel the galas it has long counted on for income; it gives artists a boost of exposure and sales at the end of a year when many gallery shows were scrapped or moved online.

Aspen Art Museum director Nicola Lees, who took the post in the spring as the pandemic fallout was just beginning, began brainstorming what would become Winterfest with Demircan in those early days. The COVID-19 pandemic led to the cancellation of the museum's annual ArtCrush gala in August as well as its major winter fundraising event, normally held between Christmas and New Year's Eve. Lees and Demircan began discussing ways to replace these with an event that might raise money and exhibit art without requiring large crowds.

Those talks led them to the German tradition of "jahresgaben," selling exhibitions conducted by the nation's member-based art galleries in the weeks before Christmas — part of a civic patronage tradition there since the 1820s.

"It's been a very successful model," Demircan explained. "I suggested we use the skeleton of that as a model for a selling show of unique works."

Aspen Times, 2020

Kurz, with his familiarity with the German tradition, was also natural fit to build the environs for this show because he has recently been experimenting with temporary structures — including a cardboard gallery on a Brooklyn rooftop — in his work.

Rather than a simple sale or silent auction, the Aspen adaptation of the concept would also be the kind of exhibition artists would get excited about, a unique exhibition platform.

"We wanted to do a fundraiser that artists really wanted to be a part of because it is an exhibition in and of itself," Demircan explained. "The artists are responsive to this because it is not your typical group show."

IF YOU GO ...

What: Winterfest: An Exhibition of Arts and Crafts

Where: Aspen Art Museum

When: Friday Dec. 18 through Feb. 21, 2021

More info: aspenartmuseum.org

Exhibited within Kurz's alpine fantasy land, the Winterfest show includes original artwork from 28 artists including locally based stalwarts, American stars and international artists.

Standout pieces among them are a pair of new watercolor and dirt paintings of flowers by conceptual artist Precious Okoyomon, who has been exploring the fertile symbolic ground of invasive species in recent work.

There are masks by the the late Beau Dick, a renowned First Nation artist from Canada, and there is a massive "Sesame Street"-esque stuffed snowman by the artist Stefan Tcherepnin.

There are ceramic wall-mounted lamps by Soshiro Matsubara and early 1970s work by the Aspen-based painter Richard Carter, who also co-founded he museum in 1979. The Carbondale-based sculptor James Surls has also contributed a wood sculpture. Malcolm Mooney, best known as the former singer for the krautrock band Can, contributed several small new watercolor works that he calls "Damn-demic Monsters" (short for "damn pandemic monsters," they look just like that).

And there are young and emerging artists here, like Olivia Erlanger and Rochelle Goldberg and Brandon Ndife, whose first major New York gallery show this spring was cut short by the pandemic shutdown.

Surprising connections between the artists arose as Demircan put the show together. On a visit to the studio of great Aspen ceramicist Sam Harvey, Demircan noticed Harvey collected pieces by Viola Frey — who is also included in the show — and learned Frey had taught Harvey.

Proceeds from the show will go at a 70-30% split to the artist and the museum. Winterfest is also intended to drive museum memberships, which are required for buyers. Admission remains free. The show runs through Feb. 21.

atravers@aspentimes.com

Soft Opening, 6 Minerva St, London E2 9EH

Olivia Erlanger: Home is a Body

Artist : Olivia Erlanger
Title : 5:13 PM
Date(s) : 2020
Material : Miniature toilet, bathtub, shower, scale, rubber ducky, succulents, Evian plastic tile, resin, HDU foam, wood, MDF, polyester paint, plexiglass
Website : http://www.softopening.london/exhibitions/home-is-a-body
Credit : Courtesy the artist and Soft Opening, London. Photography Theo Christelis.

The autobiographical documentary 'Stories We Tell' (2012), opens with the above quote. In it, filmmaker Sarah Polley attempts to map the history of her family and, in particular, the life of her mother, through a combination of anecdotes from her loved ones and found footage of their suburban life in Toronto, Canada. The documentary uses filmmaking—its unrivalled ability to, at once, conceal reality and reveal truth — to explore the ways memory and the stories we're told shape identity and one's sense of belonging.

Artist Olivia Erlanger's work shares a number of common interests with Polley; a desire to uncover the stories which lurk under the polished surfaces of post-war North American suburbia, as well as a curiosity about how identity is moulded by the particularities of this context. Erlanger has explored these ideas through a diverse research practice which emerges in writing, filmmaking and sculpture. Her new exhibition 'Home is a Body' at Soft Opening's Minerva Street space, brings together new sculpture by Erlanger with a recent formal interest in miniatures, having exhibited a series of related snow globe sculptures at Bel Ami, Los Angeles, earlier this year. At Soft Opening, contained within five large polystyrene and plexiglass eyes — their slightly warped corneas protruding from the walls — Erlanger presents a collection of domestic rooms, modelled precisely in miniature: a bedroom, garage/gym, living room, bathroom and garden. The white picket fences and floral bedspreads evoke an image of suburban life that those of us who grew up outside of America will recognise largely through its ubiquity in the fictional worlds of Hollywood films.

Erlanger's interest in the 'American dream' (with its white supremacist, middle-class myths of social mobility and self-improvement) has often focused on the architecture that props it up (in 2018 she wrote a book about the secret history of the garage with Luis Ortega Govela). In this new body of work, she turns her focus to the interiors of the home, which, even absent of their inhabitants, seem to tell a story of their own. This, in itself, tells us something about the complex nature of identity in these spaces, where objects can, seemingly, so easily stand in for the lives they are only supposed to adorn.

Searching for the life that might unfold in each room, you subconsciously ask yourself questions like, "what kind of person would own a floral bedspread?" "Who could own an Isamu Noguchi coffee table?" The plexiglass eyes which enclose them — looking out at me as I peer in — are a reminder of the pervasive system of, what Shoshanna Zuboff has termed, surveillance capitalism. It is a system which asks itself similar questions about who we are and what we buy. Apple products are scattered throughout the rooms; a pink MacBook left precariously on the corner of the coffee table, an iMac abandoned on a bedroom desk next to some art supplies. They reference one of suburban America's favourite fairy tales — Jobs and Wozniak inventing the first Apple computer in Jobs' garage — but they also probe at another interest in Erlanger's work, the impact of surveillance on identity.

Big tech, which infiltrates nearly every part of our lives, understands users' identities through data profiles — information about what we buy/read/watch put through an algorithm to predict what we might want to buy/read/watch in the future. Similarly to these data sets, the objects in Erlanger's rooms feel like nodes of information, a scaffold on which to hang our invented stories about who the mysterious, absent inhabitants might be. In the process of implanting my own story, I am confronted with both the strangeness of my desire to piece a narrative — an identity — together in this way and the impossibility of doing so.

Like Polley's filmmaking, it is the artifice of Erlanger's miniature worlds that reveals the truth regarding the stories we tell about identity and all that they overlook. Erlanger skillfully unpacks the limited way these systems – the socio-political apparatus of the American Dream and the extractive networks of surveillance capitalism – package up fragments of identity and try to sell them back to us as whole bodies. In this way, Erlanger's work reveals the more hidden, unknowable parts of others and ourselves. They are the parts that can't be held by these systems — "a dark roaring, a blindness, a wreckage" as Atwood terms it — and there is power in their refusal to be distilled into a tidy narrative.

Published on 20 October 2020

frieze, 2020

Olivia Erlanger's Sci-Fi World-Making

At Soft Opening, London, the artist's new sculptures explore the psychic terrain of domestic space in the age of surveillance capitalism

BY **KATE WONG** IN **REVIEWS** | 30 OCT 20

Five bulging eyes protrude quietly from the walls of Soft Opening's new space on Minerva Street. Installed at varying heights and painted in either powder pink or muted grey, each orb is a self-contained scene, modelled after typologies of the aspirational American home. Though each individual bubble is replete with the usual tropes associated with bourgeois domestic life – generic

Five bulging eyes protrude quietly from the walls of Soft Opening's new space on Minerva Street. Installed at varying heights and painted in either powder pink or muted grey, each orb is a self-contained scene, modelled after typologies of the aspirational American home. Though each individual bubble is replete with the usual tropes associated with bourgeois domestic life – generic house plants, designer furniture and literal as well as figurative references to self-care and improvement – these particular depictions are devoid of any real representations of human life. If American suburbia of the 1960s functioned as both a symbol of perfection and isolation, do we find ourselves increasingly lonesome in the age of surveillance capitalism or has human life become disembodied to the point that we now transcend our physical conditions?

Olivia Erlanger, *5:13 PM*, 2020, miniature toilet, bathtub, shower, scale, rubber ducky, succulents, Evian plastic tile, resin, HDU foam, wood, MDF, polyester paint, plexiglass. Courtesy: the artist and Soft Opening, London; photograph: Theo Christelis

economic and political life (including her 2018 publication *Garage*, co-written with Luis Ortega Govela), 'Home Is a Body' sees a shift in Erlanger's technical practice. Where the analogue aspects of her previous sculptural works were more apparent, here the combination of outsourced fabrication and commissioned dollhouse furniture yields objects with newfound slickness. Each orb is not only a window into someone else's world but also a reflection of our own. A tension is struck between the softness of traditionally feminized domestic space and the cool materiality of human life mediated through two-way screen devices.

Olivia Erlanger, 'Home Is a Body', 2020, installation view, Soft Opening, London. Courtesy: the artist and Soft Opening, London; photograph: Theo Christelis

Building upon extensive research into the significance of domestic architectures in shaping social, economic and political life (including her 2018 publication *Garage*, co-written with Luis Ortega Govela), 'Home Is a Body' sees a shift in Erlanger's technical practice. Where the analogue aspects of her previous sculptural works were more apparent, here the combination of outsourced fabrication and commissioned dollhouse furniture yields objects with newfound slickness. Each orb is not only a window into someone else's world but also a reflection of our own. A tension is struck between the softness of traditionally feminized domestic space and the cool materiality of human life mediated through two-way screen devices.

Olivia Erlanger's 'Home Is a Body' is on view at Soft Opening, London, until 7 November 2020.

Main image: Olivia Erlanger, 3:07 PM, *2020, miniature couch, armchair, knock off Noguchi Table, pink MacBook, dinosaur sculpture, water pail, cactus, cork floor, posters, books, resin, HDU foam, wood, MDF, polyester paint, plexiglass. Courtesy: the artist and Soft Opening, London; photograph: Theo Christelis*

K

KATE WONG

Kate Wong is a Chinese-Canadian writer and curator living in London, UK.

Flash Art, 2020

•REVIEWS

Olivia Erlanger "Home is a Body" *Soft Opening / London* by Philomena Epps

October 27, 2020

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Olivia Erlanger, *5:13 PM*, 2020. Evian plastic tile, resin, HDU foam, wood, MDF, polyester paint, plexiglass. 50.8 × 50.8 × 25.4 cm. Courtesy the artist and Soft Opening, London. Photography by Theo Christelis.

The title of Olivia Erlanger's exhibition at London's Soft Opening — "Home is a Body" — brings to mind Louise Bourgeois' "Femme Maison" series, in which the artist depicted the female form as being conflated with the architecture of the home. In her painting from 1947, the domestic environment is rendered as an interchangeable anthropomorphic surrogate, with the shape of a house or apartment building in place of where a head or torso might be found.

Erlanger's heart-shaped fence sculpture, *Wyndcliffe* (2020), conveys a similar symbolic presence. The iconography is romantic, even cute. However, the coldness of the aluminum material, with the point of each picket sharpened like the tip of a knife, indicates a more sinister analysis. Akin to the work of Bourgeois, this demarcated area of refuge, even love, instead becomes a location of confinement or alienation. Interested in the mythology surrounding 'the American Dream', the aesthetic of suburbia — from the distinctive picket fences to flat-pack homes, garages, and laundromats — has occupied much of Erlanger's practice, often depicting the urban landscape as a space of isolation or estrangement. Earlier this year, in Los Angeles, she presented a trio of snow-globe sculptures, the miniature houses inside trapped and siloed from the rest of the world.

The other five works in the show, each titled after a different time of day — *11:34 AM*; *3:07 PM*; *5:13 PM*; *8:41 PM*; *12:21 AM* (all 2020) —all take the same form. A dollhouse-like room, complete with a selection of miniature furniture and objects, encased by a clear, plexiglass dome, set within a frame shaped like a large eye. When compressed, this concept of "home is a body" is also suggestive of the word "homebody," an individual who prefers to stay indoors rather than venture out. However, in this case, all the 'home bodies' are absent, only able to be represented metonymically through a selection of specific possessions. Erlanger's attention to detail is exacting, and each item is discernible despite its scale. The objects are additionally listed in the materials section of the work's captions, configured as a litany of stuff. Across all the rooms, these include: Mac desktop, pink MacBook, white fender, bench press, dumbbell, Coca-Cola, Pepsi, Evian, bicycle, armchair, knockoff Noguchi table, dirty laundry, cactus, books, posters, among other things. There is a sense of accessibility. The items are both familiar (the quintessential rubber duck in the bathroom) and topical (the keyboard balanced on a paint box perhaps indicative of a makeshift home office). Their proximity to current trends — the 'millennial pink' computer, succulents, a particular design aesthetic — allows the potential inhabitants of the space to become an amorphous being rather than a singular individual, in addition to questioning how identity and personal taste is actually led and shaped by consumerism and market influences.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Olivia Erlanger, "Home is a Body," installation view at Soft Opening, London. Courtesy the artist and Soft Opening, London. Photography by Theo Christelis.

Although the interior of each environment is unique, the serial nature of their exterior can be analyzed through ideas of modularity and mass production, notions which are also commonplace within the history of post-war suburban architecture and town planning. In the introduction to *The Infinite Line* (2004), the art historian Briony Fer writes of repetition: "It is a means of organizing the world ... of disordering and undoing ... utopian or dystopian ... animating and transforming the most everyday and routine habits of looking." In her text "Endless Days," commissioned to accompany the exhibition, Orit Gat perceives Erlanger's constructions as akin to surveillance cameras. This concept of CCTV perhaps supports a far more dystopian interpretation of Fer's "everyday and routine habits of looking": the sinister observance of the state. Like a voyeur, the viewer is free to peek in unobserved, but there is not much pleasure to be derived from this snooping. Rather, the home is packaged as a product, a timestamp, an extract of an abstract existence, with the potential for replication.

Artnet News, 2020

Mermaid Tails, Haunted Snow Globes, and the Myth of the American Dream: The Distinct Millennial-Defining Art of Olivia Erlanger

The 30-year-old artist is showing her quarantine-era work at Soft Opening in London.

Taylor Dafoe, October 21, 2020

Olivia Erlanger, 2020. Courtesy of the artist. Photo: Bobby Doherty.

Three years ago, artist Olivia Erlanger rescued actress Aubrey Plaza from a marijuana farm run by nuns in the dusty heart of California.

Erlanger was at work on what would become *Garage* (2019), the documentary film follow-up to her book of the same name about the history of the titular suburban enclave—birthplace of countless bands, businesses, and forgotten home gyms. The artist was in search of characters to portray what she and her co-author, architect Luis Ortega Govela, had identified as the seven archetypes of garage users when she met the Sisters of the Valley, members of a feminist permaculture collective that launched a marijuana company in the name of boosting land ownership among women.

Artnet News, 2020

"Olivia's work investigates how the different kinds of collapse in economics and ecologies influence the recent fracturing of identity," summed up curator Attilia Fattori Franchini, who worked with Erlanger on a installation at Frieze London in 2017 that emitted blue light and fog in response to fluctuations in the price of oil. "She is exploring American folklore and symbols of the middle class from a feminist and cinematic perspective."

Olivia Erlanger, *Soft Kiss* (2020). Courtesy of the artist and Bel Ami.

Erlanger was born in New York, the daughter of a couple in finance. When she was a child, her family decamped to a commuter town in Connecticut—a paradigmatic suburban experience that would come to cast a large shadow over her artistic output.

Erlanger was born in New York, the daughter of a couple in finance. When she was a child, her family decamped to a commuter town in Connecticut—a paradigmatic suburban experience that would come to cast a large shadow over her artistic output.

In an elementary school art class, she recreated—to exacting degree—an Absolut Vodka ad. Her parents were called in. "They were actually very proud of me," Erlanger said with a smile. "They told me that this was a sure sign that I was destined to be an artist because I had started a conversation—and a little controversy. After that, I knew what I wanted to do."

Artnet News, 2020

"I think we all were envisioning the *Sound of Music* at a lush weed farm," Erlanger told Artnet News over video chat in October. "But what we found was a shared compound, a small garden with a few marijuana plants, and some women dressed as nuns drinking out of red solo cups. We didn't know what was going on."

Adding to the strangeness was the unlikely presence of Plaza, far from Hollywood and stoned out of her gourd. There to promote her new film about nuns by lighting up with the Sisters, she approached Erlanger's team and asked them not to leave without her. "I told her we were staying at a Best Western around the corner and she was like, 'Perfect. Take me with you,'" the artist recalled.

The day ended okay; Plaza sobered up, and the nuns—who, if you haven't guessed by now, weren't *actual* nuns—earned a starring role in Erlanger's documentary. (Plaza made an appearance, too.)

We begin here because this story, while entertaining, is also pure Erlanger.

A movie star in a Steinbeckian pocket of California, a bizarre entrepreneurial scheme devised around an illegal cash crop—it all smacks of the strange recipe at the heart of Erlanger's art. There's a healthy dose of American mythology, some environmental economics, and a pinch of Lynchian theater.

Erlanger, in other words, is the quintessential artist for an era we've come to describe as surreal because we don't have a better adjective. Born in 1990—a time of prosperity and belief in the American Dream—she witnessed that promise get punctured by the Great Recession and the rise of Donald Trump.

Her work embodies the experience of a millennial who has seen the rules of the game change without warning.

The American Dream, Deferred

Erlanger, now 30, is effusive and easy to talk to. She spoke with us from a friend's plant-filled apartment in Brooklyn, just after the launch of her new show at Soft Opening in London. After several years living in LA, she's found herself without a permanent address. The peripatetic setup is a reminder of how young the artist is—something that's easy to forget given the sophistication of her work, and the sheer amount of it she's produced over the past seven years.

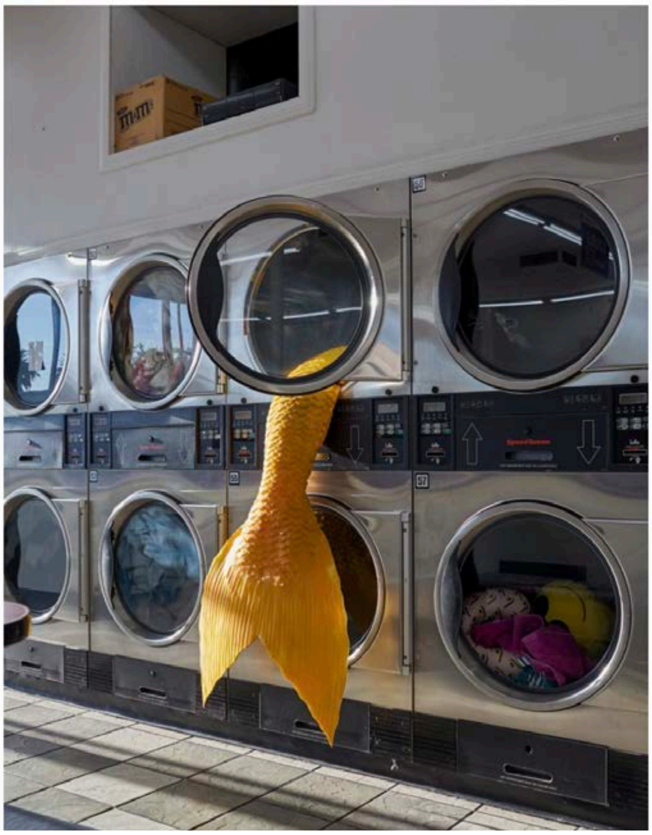
Her father patented IP around a new marketplace designed to increase transparency in home loans and lines of credit—a precursor to what would become blockchain technology. But the burst of the housing bubble hit her family hard, and they sold their Connecticut home around the time Erlanger headed to college.

"I grew up with a conceptual conversation around the home as a financial instrument," she recalled, "while actually experiencing the fallout of the home as a financial instrument on a global scale."

In college, at Lewis & Clark—then, briefly, Parsons, and then Lewis & Clark again—she studied sculpture and literature. After graduation, Erlanger traveled on a whim to Berlin, hoping to meet several artists she knew only through Facebook. It led, circuitously, to her first significant show, at Fluxia Gallery in Milan, in 2014. She was just 23.

She returned to New York and took up a pair of jobs: one as a bookkeeper for an architectural firm, and another as an assistant to artist Anicka Yi. (She helped collect samples for Yi's breakthrough 2015 show "You Can Call Me F," in which the Korean-American artist synthesized biological material from 100 women into a single, backlit bacterium.)

Erlanger's artistic career began to pick up speed in 2016, when she secured solo shows at What Pipeline in Detroit (she showed "raft" assemblages made of resin, bee pollen, and blinds) and Mathew gallery in Manhattan (for which she created a filing cabinet filled with mud and red light that varied in intensity according to fluctuations in the Mercantile Stock Exchange). But her big breakthrough did not come until she moved to Los Angeles the following year.



Installation view of "Olivia Erlanger: Ida," 2018. Courtesy of the artist and Mother Culture.

Artnet News, 2020

Through the Looking Glass

In LA, Erlanger seized on another middle-class space, the laundromat, to stage what would become her most recognizable—and certainly her most Instagrammed—project to date. Inside a modest storefront, she created a surreal tableau: silicone mermaid tails dangling lifelessly from washing machine and drier doors. (The project, mounted by the experiential art space Mother Culture in 2018, has been revived at Frieze New York in 2019 and at the Daelim Museum in Seoul, South Korea this year.)

The scene feels more like a trippy funhouse than a reference-laden cultural commentary. But it is emblematic of the way research forms the backbone of Erlanger's work. The installation was inspired by an essay that posits *The Little Mermaid* as a feminist metaphor for female hysteria. (The show was titled *Ida* after Ida Bauer, a patient of Sigmund Freud's who was diagnosed with hysteria after losing her voice—just as Ariel does in Disney's interpretation of the Hans Christian Andersen tale.)

Erlanger's not dogmatic: she seems open to all readings of her work, and for the magical realism in *Ida*, there must be many. The idea itself came from a playful *mis*reading of a wall-mounted sculpture of a pair of snake tongues in Erlanger's show at Mathew. A friend's child identified them as mermaid tails.

"I had just never perceived them that way," Erlanger said. "It's as simple as the conversation around the work led me to a new way to access thinking through the pieces."

Installation view of "Olivia Erlanger: Split-level Paradise," 2020. Courtesy of the artist and Bel Ami.

Looking Ahead

Erlanger's 2020 is bookended with a pair of shows that similarly marry the fantastical with the domestic—and they feel almost eerily quarantine-y.

"Split-level Paradise," her show at Bel Ami gallery in LA that closed the week the country went into lockdown in March, comprised three snow-globe-shaped sculptures the size of La-Z-Boys. In the top half of each orb sits a two-story, ticky tacky home painted in wan colors—an almost comic literalization of the phrase "housing bubble."

Fake snow pools at the bottom, ready to be jolted into a winter wonderland. But the sculptures aren't shakable; the snow is stuck and the homes suddenly read as Truman

Artnet News, 2020

Fake snow pools at the bottom, ready to be jolted into a winter wonderland. But the sculptures aren't shakable; the snow is stuck and the homes suddenly read as Truman Show-style traps. It's not a stretch to project the artist's own suburban experience onto them.

"I think that was at the core of it: how do you make a memory?" Erlanger mused. "How do you make an art that is a memory and how do you examine the ways in which we protect those memories, creating idealized or perfect moments? The myth of home ownership in America is very much tied to that same protective measure of a fascination with an ideal that truly no longer exists and is contested throughout the history of the development of suburbia."

Olivia Erlanger, *11:34 AM, 2020* (2020). Courtesy of the artist and Soft Opening.

Six and a half months separated that show and "Home is a Body," her new exhibition at Soft Opening. That was enough time for a virus to take hold of the world and force us all inside our own little bubbles, and the new series reflects that sense of isolation.

Lining the gallery walls is a suite of domed sculptures that resemble both apartment-door peepholes and human eyes. Each is named after a different time of day and inside are different domestic scenes—a disheveled basement, a bare-bones bathroom—devoid of inhabitants.

"There's always a flirtation with the uncanny in Olivia's work that I think is immediately recognizable," said Antonia Marsh, Soft Opening's director. "I'd spot her self-aware engagement with the American Dream turned delusion—imagery that might seem to reflect a picture-postcard America but with a distinctly dystopic, Ballardian twist."

While Erlanger emphasizes the research that goes into her work, she acknowledges it's driven by a desire to mine her own history. "How else do you become obsessed with examining the idea of home and the American Dream," she asked, "without a personal relationship to it?"

Art Review, 2020

ArtReview

No Space, Just A Place: Seoul's Alternative Art Scene

ArtReview Video 14 May 2020 artreview.com

An exhibition at the Daelim Museum in Seoul, powered by Gucci, celebrates the city's alternative art scene and speculative futures

A largescale exhibition at the Daelim Museum in Seoul, powered by Gucci and its Creative Director Alessandro Michele's reflections on eterotopia, and curated by the Renaissance Society's incoming executive director, Myriam Ben Salah, sees ten of the city's independent art spaces sharing a platform with five international artists to explore the catalytic value of creative disruption and to offer a vision of brave new worlds.

Works by Meriem Bennani, Olivia Erlanger, Cécile B. Evans, Kang Seung Lee and Martine Syms sit alongside installations that were created or displayed in the meatyards, warehouses, private residences or abandoned shops that house Seoul's alternative art scene, in an exhibition that celebrates both the local and the global, via the social, cultural and creative forces that transform space into place. A new video produced by *ArtReview* for Gucci allows viewers to tour the show and meet the people, artworks and experimental practices that made it happen.

No Space, Just A Place
Eterotopia
17th April – 12th July 2020
Daelim Museum Seoul
Powered by GUCCI
Curated by Myriam Ben Salah

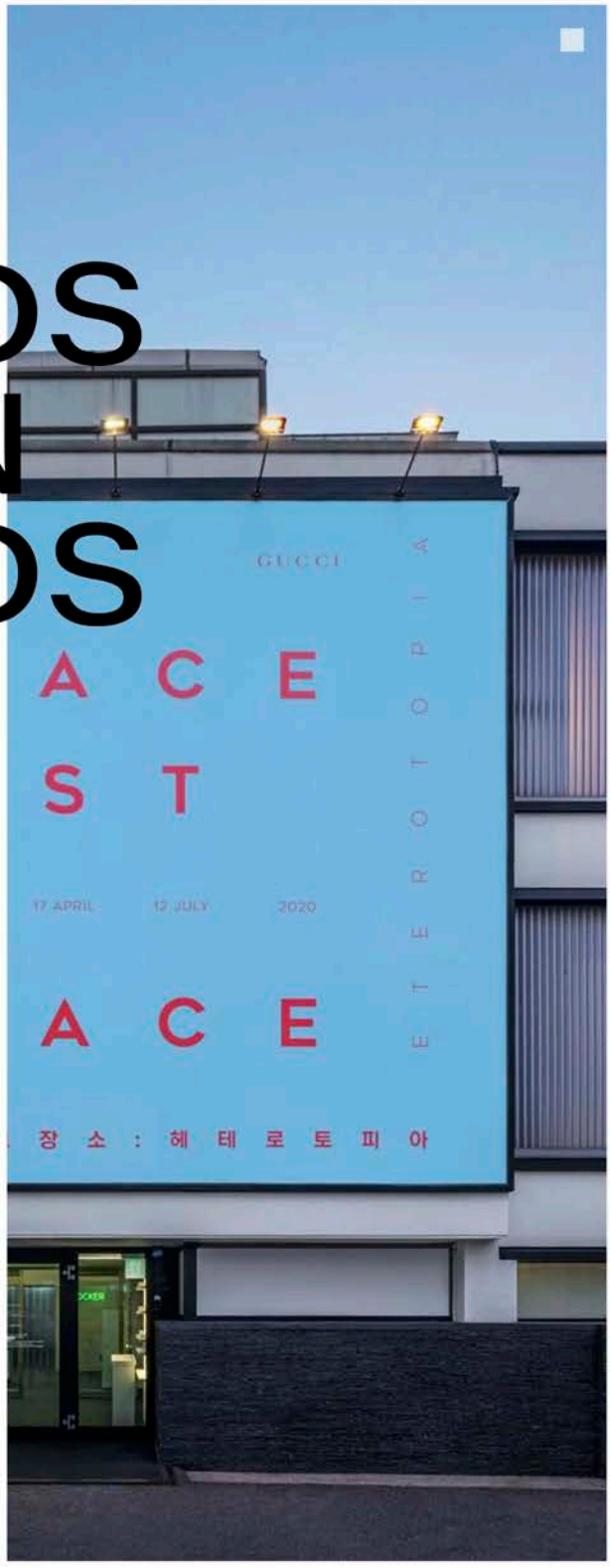
An ArtReview Production
Narrated by Andy St. Louis
Filmed by Aaron Choe
Cinematography by Seongil Lee
Translations by Vicky Won

ArtReview Video 14 May 2020 artreview.com

TANK, 2020

WORLDS WITHIN WORLDS

Gucci's *No Space, Just a Place* invites us to consider the radical potential of "other spaces"



TANK, 2020

Utopias are defined by their placelessness. They are ideal images of society that float free of any actual location. To this hard contrast between the placeless fantasy of utopia and the ordered space of reality, the philosopher Michel Foucault added a third kind of the space: the heterotopia (or *eterotopia* in Italian). Heterotopias are "other spaces" somehow isolated or opposed to what surrounds them, worlds within worlds where conventions are inverted and unlikely encounters can take place.

The possibilities offered by these other spaces form the organising principle of Gucci's exhibition *No Space, Just a Place*. Curated by Myriam Ben Salah, the exhibition brings together presentations from ten alternative and independent galleries from Seoul within the Daelin Museum alongside five additional immersive installations from Meriem Bennani, Olivia Erlanger, Cécile B. Evans, Kang Seung Lee and Martine Syms.

A mosaic of superimposed spaces and voices exploring overlapping but not identical concerns of identity, hybridity and displacement, the exhibition provides a platform in which alternatives to our present reality can be imagined through collaboration and conversation rather than isolated escapism. Ben Salah cites the ancient Greek concept of *proxenia*, which describes the care of those from other places, as another key reference. Through bringing together disparate perspectives, the exhibition seeks to create "a new definition of 'being together' while not being one thing".

Dream Bubble: Olivia Erlanger

Laura Brown

Olivia Erlanger has been taking up various forms, filling and then unraveling them like conspiracies. For *Split-level Paradise*, her recent exhibition at Bel Ami, Los Angeles (2020), she nominated a series of snow globes as a potential and possessive form of space—in her words, "a movie director's dream, constructed from every angle."

Around the same time that Erlanger's exhibition opened, I had the unexpected fortune of watching the Alexander Payne movie *Downsizing* (2017). Deep in snowy Norway, a scientist formulates the possibility of miniaturizing living things—first a rat, then humans—as a solution to the global ecological crisis. The invention is publicly unveiled on a Las Vegas convention stage, from which dozens of five-inch-tall people smile and wave. Their combined waste fills half of a sagging garbage bag, displayed alongside them.

Ten years later, the sales pitch has transformed into a lifestyle dream. Tiny colonies with names like Leisureland offer a life of endless recreation in giant mansions (relatively speaking). Once you decide to physically shrink, your equivalent wealth shall inversely expand by a factor of around eighty. This mini land is insulated by an ever-present ceiling of netting—a security feature preventing inhabitants from being catastrophically pierced by regular-size mosquitos. Almost a sci-fi drama, although more of a comedy, it is all fantastically mundane. In *Split-level Paradise*, each large plastic dome functions something similar to the *Truman Show* like mosquito-net ceiling, pressing an awareness of inside and outside as you gaze into them. There are three works in total, varying by subtle house-paint hue. In each, an architectural model of a split-level home floats on a thin, tilted surface. A large hole appears in this plane—a sinkhole? A loss? A portal? Above and below, artificial snow rests in silent banks.

In Erlanger's recent collaborative project with Mexican architect Luis Ortega Govela, *Garage* (2018), which took the form of a book published by MIT Press and a documentary film, the garage became the central architectural element. Symbolizing a nostalgia for suburban entrepreneurship, as in the mythical origins of Apple, we find the garage to be an invention in itself. Erlanger also began thinking about the car that lives in and leaves it, delivering the moving world through a curved glass windscreen. With *Ida* (2018), she installed a number of protruding mermaid tails inside a Los Angeles laundromat, surrounded by the pulsating faces of washing machines. Now, in *Split-level Paradise*, the snow globe encloses the entire family home, including its garage, car, and front-load washer. We can imagine further possible screens inside of it, like the doors of a shower or a microwave oven.

Down one side of each modeled house the paint appears darker, as if to suggest a certain orientation and time of day. Erlanger cast into her memory of her childhood home to construct these split-level structures. Like the apparitions inside a snow globe in a film—Orson Welles's *Citizen Kane* (1941) being paradigmatic—this childhood memory functions as a form of nostalgia, which itself revolves as a construction of movies and television. Erlanger's attempt roughly parallels Mike Kelley's *Educational Complex* (1995), wherein Kelley recalled and combined the layouts of his suburban schools, approaching the gaps in his memory as representations of trauma. Erlanger also finds precedent in Julie Becker's extensively sketched and modeled *Researchers, Residents, A Place to Rest* (1993-1996), through which the artist sought a transformative process of identification with fictional spaces and people. With *Split-level Paradise* Erlanger reaches into the alternative dimensions of pop-cultural reality stored in one's own mind. The snow globe turns into a crystal ball.

In a conversation with her mother, Erlanger realized that her memory was invented: the family home never had a second floor. Absent of people, latent movement underpins these works. Under snow and lichen, a road stretches a surreal map from edge to edge. Beneath the blue house, *Soft Kiss* (2020), a second hole appears, finally opening up a full circulation. Erlanger's sculptures become much like movies in themselves, continually constructing the direction of memory as we peer into them mesmerized, waiting.

57 Olivia Erlanger, *Mr. Held's Class*, 2020. Courtesy: the artist and Bel Ami, Los Angeles. Photo: Paul Salveson

58 59 Olivia Erlanger, *Split-level Paradise* installation view at Bel Ami, Los Angeles, 2020. Courtesy: the artist and Bel Ami, Los Angeles. Photo: Paul Salveson

Mousse, 2020

Mousse, 2020

Flash Art, 2020

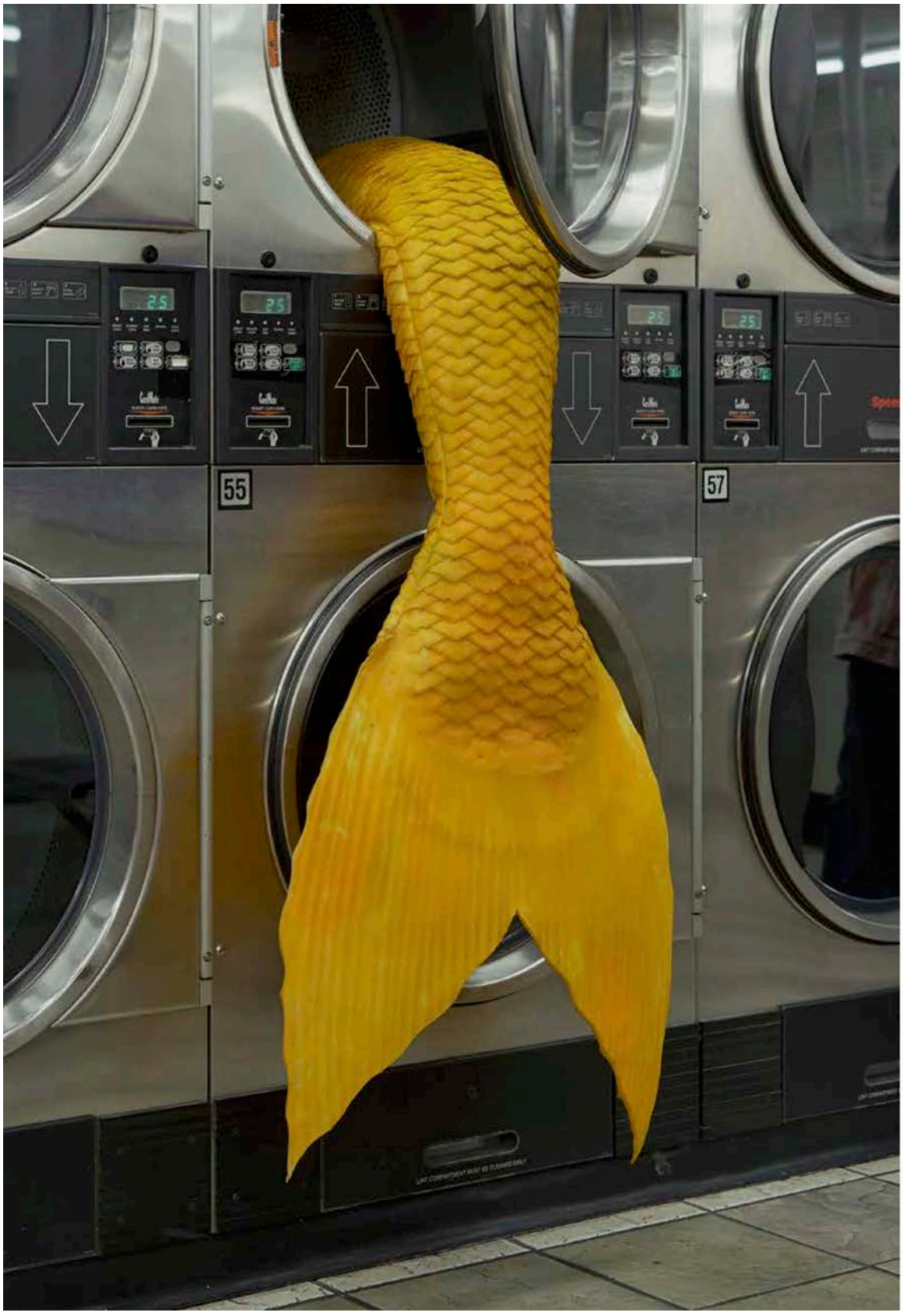
Feature 88—95

WELCOME TO SUNNYDALE

Mining the American suburban fantasy through a widely varied output, Olivia Erlanger expands the limits of sculptural thinking

by Franklin Melendez

Flash Art, 2020



Flash Art, 2020

Olivia Erlanger politely asks me to hold the call while she scrolls diligently through her screen cap folder. The lengthy silence that follows attests to the sizeable archive, newly expanded by the flurry of unexpected reactions to her most recent sculptural outings, but she repeatedly assures me that the image will be worth the wait. Lo and behold, it decidedly is when it materializes in my text messages a few moments later: a screen grab of an effusive DM accompanied by a picture of a tattoo modeled after one of the silicone mermaid tails initially displayed at a laundromat down the street from the Los Angeles project space Mother Culture in September 2018. "It's not necessarily about me or my art or my practice," she adds with a tone of curiosity. "It's more like this particular sculpture has generated its own fans and has a public life that's independent from me. I find that distinction really interesting."

> While some artists fastidiously monitor the discursive parameters through which their work is filtered and framed, Erlanger seems more than happy to embrace these types of unexpected and oftentimes rhizomatic deviations. In fact, they might be as generative and constitutive of the practice as the base matter itself. Case in point: the series began as a funny misreading when a friend's toddler was playfully asked to choose a favorite work at the opening of her 2016 New York solo exhibition "Dripping Tap." The child paused before pointing to the twin, forked-tongue sculpture *Slow Violence* and gleefully exclaimed: "I love the tails!"

"That stayed with me," notes Erlanger. "I loved the idea of these protrusions as shape-shifters. It resonated with the research I had been doing on the status of women's bodies and domestic spaces. All of these mythical chimeric figures but also a woman with her head in the oven..."

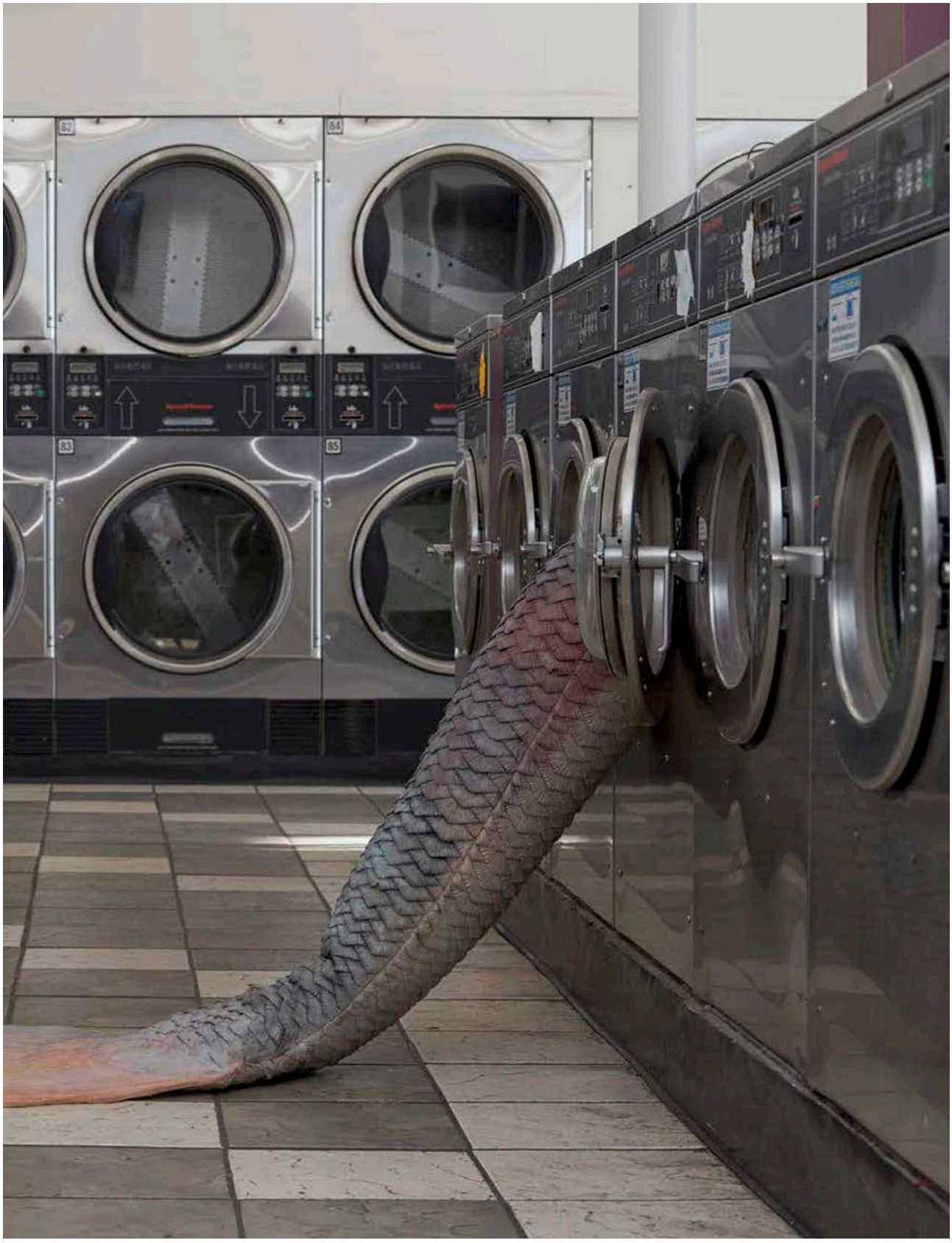
It is worth pausing here and noting that research forms the core of Erlanger's larger intellectual project; it both animates her wide-ranging output — from sculpture and installation to writing and filmmaking — and supersedes it. Specifically, it's her sustained and open-ended investigation of American postwar suburbia: its material roots and development, its objects and accouterments, its architectural legacy (such as the advent of the attached single-car garage), its gender and racial divides, as well as the unseen power structures, fantasies, and projections embedded therein, which remain lodged within our cultural imaginary. Since 2013 this undertaking has unfolded as a protean impulse and yielded manifold physical manifestations. These include discrete exhibitions, such as 2015's "Dog Beneath the Skin," which traced the lineage of totemic middle-class objects, from the Victorian parlor piano to the modern garage door. Following the same historical thread is 2016's "The Oily Actor," in which modular sculptures evoke the floor plans of prefabricated model homes. Bringing together a wide array of highly symbolic materials (from felt to pollen), the pieces map out an allegorical topography of the forces that converge around the contemporary housing market — from the micro to the macro. The resulting edifices are at once imposing and tenuous, underscoring the fissures where aspirations meet material limits while foregrounding a sculptural logic that is associative rather than descriptive, linguistic rather than purely optic. One corner nook nestles a large slab of shea butter embedded with mini-maquettes of a manor-like home. The ghostly outline appears as a greasy fossil; when pressed it reveals itself as a miniature of Wyndcliffe Mansion — the palatial nineteenth-century home erected in Rhinebeck, New York, for socialite Elizabeth Schermerhorn Jones. Sparking a wave of imitators in the surrounding area, the home is credited with coining the phrase "Keeping up with the Joneses," which continues to have currency to this day.

> Sometimes these historical threads define the parameters of immersive environments such as *Body Electric*, developed for Frieze London in collaboration with BWM's Open Work in 2017. Featuring video, a reactive soundtrack, and a fluctuating light system, this durational sculpture traces the vicissitudes of the luxury car — the ultimate middle-class status symbol — in relationship to a live and interdependent global oil economy. This automotive shift might have also anticipated the publication of *Garage* (MIT Press, 2018), co-authored with Luis Ortega Govela. This critical tome traces the evolution of the humble home appendage from its initial design by Frank Lloyd Wright to its near mythic status in the 1990s and early 2000s as a crucible for American ingenuity, from garage bands to start-ups. This project has itself undergone its own transformations, spawning a series of lectures and being adapted by Govela and Erlanger into a full-length future documentary and individual chapters available through the viewing platform DIS.art.

iii

Flash Art, 2020

Flash Art, 2020



Flash Art, 2020

Elastic and constantly permutating, this wide spectrum of activities vacillates between contingency and material specificity. In doing so, it also attempts to circumvent the trap of didacticism by posing forth material propositions rather than crystalized resolutions. This questioning is unruly resulting in its own chimeric guisesbut in so doing I also tests out new positions for the role of sculpture in our contemporary world. How is it received and consumed? How can it be read? What spaces can it occupy? And, perhaps most alluringly, can it reach out beyond the insular bounds of the gallery world? It is a sustained working through more indebted to the associative interventions of the Surrealists than the structured semantics of relational aesthetics. It also remains conscious of its own baggage.

Much of this informs the exhibition "Ida," which introduced the now-infamous series of mermaid tails and was originally slated for the "main" space of Mother Culture, the art incubator/gallery founded and run by Milo Conroy and Jared Madere. While visiting the space, the trio also ducked into the laundromat a few doors down, where the gallerists also did their weekly wash. Immediately the format activated the lingering play on tongues/tails, the symbolic status of the home washer-dryer, as well as a photograph by Dora Maar, *Untitled (Shell hand)* (1934). Installed in unused machines, the tails were both hokey and wondrous, haphazard and deliberately staged — their dual function to transform the appliances into portals but also call attention to the space surrounding them. In many ways, this is a contemporary re-harnessing of the surrealist ideal of the "marvelous." As Hal Foster puts it in *Compulsive Beauty* (MIT, 1993), this notion is pledged to "the re-enchantment of a disenchanted world, of a capitalist society made ruthlessly rational. [It] also suggests the ambiguity of this project."

This ambiguity is inherent to the laundromat itself, which is underscored by the intervention: it is ostensibly a democratic space — open to all, but overdetermined by class and race. After all, the American middle-class dream of home ownership already comes as a package deal with a washer and dryer; to have to go without and venture into the outside already says a lot. Further still, this space is also the theater for the clashing forces of gentrification (who's doing their wash, when, and why?) as they come into contact with the specific history of the Arlington Heights neighborhood in Los Angeles.

What was perhaps not expected was the way in which these objects, deployed into the world, came to exceed the bounds of the original gesture, taking on a life of their own — fueled by specific interactions, circulation in social media, and coverage by the local news. "Even Drew Barrymore posed about it," recalls Erlanger with a laugh. Indeed, detached from their original site, the tails become free-floating signifiers — not a meme, but an image placeholder where different meanings can be projected. In a way, they provide a litmus test for different ways of connecting to an audience while maintaining no control over the image — but then again, think of the primary ways art is consumed at any given art fair. Click, point, selfie. For some this is a fatalistic endpoint, the evaporation of the art object and its integrity. But for Erlanger it represents different possibilities between cracks and fissures, unseen endpoints that, she readily admits, cannot be planned.

vi

Olivia Erlanger' solo exhibitions include "Soft Opening," London; and group exhibitions at the Dallas Museum of Art, Dallas; Kunsthalle Charlottenborg; and Daelim Museum, Seoul (all forthcoming in 2020). Olivia Erlanger and Luis Ortega Govela co-wrote Garage (MIT Press, 2018), a secret history of the attached garage as a space of creativity, from its invention by Frank Lloyd Wright to its use by start-ups and garage bands.

Franklin Melendez is a writer and independent curator based in New York. He is the co-founder of DM Office.

i *Ida*, 2018. Detail. Silicone, polystyrene foam, mdf, plywood. Dimensions variable. Installation view at Laundry Zone, Los Angeles, 2018. Courtesy of the artist and Mother Culture, Los Angeles.

ii *Soft Kiss*, 2020. Detail. Architectural model, artificial snow, lichen, moss, hair, urethane resin, charcoal, carbide grit, dibond, plexiglass, MDF, paint. 43 × 30 × 30 in. Courtesy of the artist and Bel Ami, Los Angeles.

iii *Soft Kiss*, 2020. Architectural model, artificial snow, lichen, moss, hair, urethane resin, charcoal, carbide grit, dibond, plexiglass, MDF, paint. 43 × 30 × 30 in. Courtesy of the artist and Bel Ami, Los Angeles.

iv *Ida*, 2018. Silicone, polystyrene foam, mdf, plywood. Dimensions variable. Installation view at Laundry Zone, Los Angeles, 2018. Courtesy of the artist and Mother Culture, Los Angeles.

v, vi Olivia Erlanger and Luis Ortega Govela, *Garage*, 2019. Documentary. Stills from HD Video. 55 mins. Courtesy of the artists.

Pin Up Magazine, 2019

PIN–UP

Still from a series of educational infomercials based on the book *Garage* (2018). Courtesy Olivia Erlanger and Luis Ortega Govela.

A DOCUMENTARY ABOUT GARAGES EXPLORES UNORTHODOX SUBURBAN IDENTITY

By Drew Zeiba

"There's many layers of gossip that lead to its origin," Olivia Erlanger explained about the starting point of her still-in-progress film, a collaboration with Luis Ortega Govela that would preview later that night at London's Institute of Contemporary Art. Sitting by the pond in the nearby Victoria Park, I offered the journalistic safeguard that any of this chatter which informed the film could be told to me "off the record," but Erlanger was adamant that nothing needed to be kept clandestine. "Print it! Tell them all!" she exclaimed. "With names please," Ortega Govela added. Who knew the story of the garage, that banal architectural appendage of the suburban home, would be so juicy!

The film *Garage*, which shares a title with the pair's book, published by MIT Press last October, explores the origin of the garage and its impact on the American non-city and psyche, tracing a narrative from Frank Lloyd Wright (and even Jesus Christ) to the present, stopping along the way to pick up characters like Steve Jobs and Gwen Stefani, and connecting them in a conspiratorial web of American mythmaking.

Pin Up Magazine, 2019

The film is similarly a strange amalgamation of characters: weed-dealing nuns, actress Aubrey Plaza, and a live-in sex slave all make appearances even just in this rough cut, around half the running time of the eventual feature. But what do drug nuns and *Parks and Rec* stars have to do with architecture, you might be asking? According to Erlanger and Ortega Govela, quite a lot.

"The garage is the id of the home," Ortega Govela contended. Often windowless, it's where the excess of a home spills into, squirreled away into cobwebbed concrete corners. Though designed "for" the car, it is often misused, so to speak, making it a sort of anti-programmatic space, one both of and separate from the normative family home. It's where disaffected dads can form maladapted masculinities and grunge rock teens can delude themselves into thinking they're counterculture, which is to say in this space of difference, the sameness of the white hetero-patriarchal family may in fact be formed.

"Ultimately *Garage*, the book, is an exploration of the spaces where family is created and where family lives," Erlanger explained, discussing how its film adaptation, though punctuated by historical anecdotes dramatized through uncanny improv skits, remains firmly rooted in the present. "I think the way that family lives today is very represented in the media. If you think about the Kardashians, you consume family as an entertainment symbol." According to this logic, the garage is an image and ideology as much as it is an architectural form.

Pin Up Magazine, 2019

While *Garage* the book argues that the garage and its attendant material and political concerns — from zoning laws to automatic doors — were a product of the normalization of a heterosexual white suburbia, the film picks up this narrative in our current era when homeownership is on the decline. According to Erlanger, the adaptation is about "the underside of life and the characters are all people who are overlooked." Fourth-wave garagedom is not for cars, and not exactly for upstarts or bands either, but for that which can't fit in the home. "There's a lot of different people who look to the garage as a space of refuge because their identities never fit into a mainstream," continued Erlanger. "So naturally in making a film about a garage we are going to meet people who don't fit into that norm. And it really is gratifying because I just think that we're giving space and platform to people who are complex." And, while the book focuses on the patriarchal power of the garage, the film examines American lifeways that they believe are increasingly "matriarchal."

Erlanger and Ortega Govela propose that the women who today find refuge in the garage (and the final film will primarily, though not exclusively, feature women) engage in the strategic mode known as Reality Distortion Field (RDF), which has a decidedly masculine legacy spanning Lloyd Wright, Jobs, and even Kurt Cobain. A term that Apple employees borrowed from Star Trek to describe Jobs's ability to state objective falsehoods in order to make people believe them enough to make them real, in this context RDF refers to how the film's subjects are using the garage as architectural and ideological modes of projecting their own non-realities.

The filmmaker duo is interested, as well, in how these reality distortions extend beyond the garage. Plaza is, of course, an actress; which is not to say she's fake but rather that her career is predicated on faking it for others' entertainment. The Sisters of the Valley, it seems, do not in fact grow their marijuana as they claim, but import it from Colorado. And what do dominatrixes traffic in if not fantasies? Slippery, these stories are always shifting, like a concrete garage floor slick with oil from a car long out the door. Erlanger and Ortega Govela even put RDF to work themselves when they went around telling friends and potential funders they were making a film without any concrete plans — Erlanger claiming (perhaps as an act of mythmaking) that she's barely held a camera besides an iPhone.

Pin Up Magazine, 2019

The most traditional hobbyist garage project has always been construction of the self, according to Erlanger and Ortega Govela. After all, branding and mythmaking is the central American mass-delusion, one that more or less must be engaged in to survive under the extremities of this era's particularly coercive and isolating form of capitalism. Garages, the architectural spaces that held the cars that made suburbia and the entire white-picket fence American Dream possible quickly revealed themselves as everything but stables for automobiles. Erlanger and Ortega Govela insisted in their book that that the garage is not just a physical space, but an ideological device: one that helped make the "all-American" nuclear family and the white flight suburb as much as it made Nirvana and Hewlett Packard. Now in their film that same architectural and ideological typology gets a second, very 21st century wind, serving as a place that allows weed-cultivating nuns to flourish and kinksters to live comfortable (and profitable!) lives.

Text by Drew Zeiba.

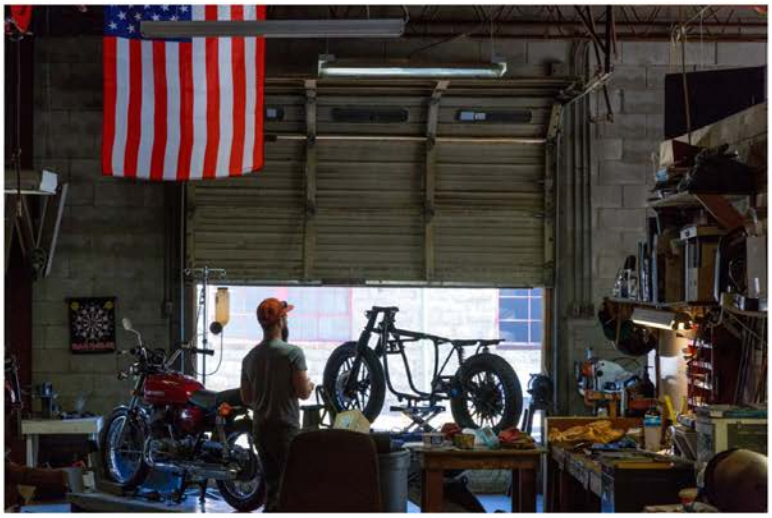
Videos and stills courtesy Olivia Erlanger and Luis Ortega Govela. Extended cuts will be released on October 28th with DIS.

THE NEW YORKER

DEPT. OF DESIGN

HOW THE GARAGE BECAME AMERICA'S FAVORITE ROOM

By Nikil Saval
January 14, 2019



The true revolution took place when the garage became an essential part of the house, attached and connected by a door. Photograph by Ed Kashi / VII / Redux

In Philadelphia, where I live, a menace has invaded city streets. A number of new town houses, clad in nostalgic, deferential brick, have put at their bases a yawning portal: the garage, an offensive import from the suburbs. Parking in a dense city is always a testy, teeth-grinding experience. But the street-facing garage turns it into something like a crawl through endless desert, each oasis of space a mirage that evaporates as a shutter comes into view. Some of the developments have tried to remedy this problem by creating new streets altogether, perpendicular alleyways that face the garages and are sometimes segregated behind a gate. These succeed only in diminishing the street life of the city.

The New Yorker, 2019

No one truly needs a domestic garage to park a car; space is available, if not readily, on city streets. So why do garages exist? The reason may have nothing to do with parking. In their recent book, "Garage," Olivia Erlanger, an artist, and Luis Ortega Govela, an architect, coin a term, "garageification," which describes a strange excrescence, initially unrelated to the central functions of the home, acquiring a life of its own and beginning to blend previously separate realms. Garages were, of course, designed to house cars. But they soon became much more: storage spaces, offices, man caves. Entire companies were concocted in a garage, and several styles of music were named after it. The authors of "Garage" locate themselves in the tradition of the German critic Walter Benjamin, who speculated for more than a thousand pages on Paris shopping arcades as emblems of the nineteenth century. For Erlanger and Ortega Govela, who speculate with more brevity, the garage is a latter-day arcade, a symbol of modernity—or maybe postmodernity.

The extravagance and curiosity of the early American garage was symbolized, the landscape historian J. B. Jackson noted, in the borrowing of what was obviously a French word for an American phenomenon. Modelled after stables and coach houses, garages were initially detached, for sanitation reasons, from the main home, and could be constructed in the fancy styles of the day; a 1906 *House Beautiful* issue laid out Colonial, Tudor, and Craftsman garages. Often, a second story housed the chauffeur (another French borrowing). But many house designs took pains to hide the garage at the end of a long driveway, or behind a wall. Around the time of the First World War, American cities began to have more prosaic garages, lined up along service alleys, often ransacking the space back yards once occupied.

The true revolution took place when the garage became an essential part of the house, attached and connected by a door. This made it all but another room. Erlanger and Ortega Govela, looking for the origin of the contemporary garage, find it in an unexpected place: Frank Lloyd Wright's Robie House, one of the architect's original Prairie-style homes, which was completed in 1910 and is still standing, on the South Side of Chicago. Frederick Robie was an entrepreneur, the son of a bicycle manufacturer; his wife, Lora, had come across Wright's work in

House Beautiful and insisted that the two meet, with the hopes that Wright might design their new home. They shared an enthusiasm for new technology: Wright was an early adopter of the automobile—when he went to meet Robie, he drove his custom-built yellow Stoddard-Dayton, a low-slung motorized canoe with tall wheels and cartoonishly eyelike headlamps—while Robie wanted his father to turn to car manufacturing. For Robie's house, Wright did away with the habitual front porch and stable, and instead placed, right up front, what may be the world's first attached three-car garage. The house announces its integration of the automobile. Erlanger and Ortega Govela note that Wright also eliminated much of the closet space from the house, foreshadowing the eventual move of most storage into the garage, "the American consumer's preferred landfill." For Erlanger and Ortega Govela, Wright's garage was ahead of its time, an autonomous object, freighted with ideological momentum, that paved the way for the reshaping of cities around cars and the expansion of the suburbs. This theory counters more common forms of historical explanation—federal subsidies in the form of highways and suburban housing, for example—but captures something of the monstrous, devouring nature of the American garage.

Just as basements became game rooms, garages, too, became multipurpose. After the Second World War, public transit declined, tracts began to sprawl, and households felt the need to acquire more cars, but home-delivery services also decreased, which meant that houses had to have a washer and dryer and freezer, and an easy way to ferry increasingly larger loads of groceries. Human beings, not designers, changed the meaning of the garage. "Once home and work are garageified there is an erosion between the domestic and productive spheres, where the dichotomy, language, and aesthetic of home and work borrow from one another," Erlanger and Ortega Govela write, with academic portentousness. The garage was transformed into a place for storing old bicycles, family albums, and one's bulkier board games. It was also foundational to the mythos of Silicon Valley, a retreat for nerds like William Hewlett and David Packard to develop the audio oscillators that gave amplitude to Walt Disney's "Fantasia." (The HP Garage is now a private museum, in Palo Alto.) Garages, which once stored the vehicle that took you between work and home, became workspaces that one had *at* home, if not quite *in* the home.

"Garage" aggressively meanders, in the lurching, free-associative style of cultural studies, from the Robie House to the myth of Steve Jobs and Steve Wozniak, both of them alums of Hewlett-Packard, concocting the first Apple computer in a garage. (Wozniak disputes this story, sourcing most of the original work to his apartment and Jobs's bedroom.) Garage rock, and Gwen Stefani and No Doubt rehearsing in a garage, are also name-checked, as is the garage as gym, where the last rites of American masculinity are conducted in sweaty privacy. "The garage without a car lost its prescribed use and became a *deprogrammed* room, a raw residential space that could be easily appropriated for a new set of codes and behaviors that weren't particularly domestic," Erlanger and Ortega Govela write. In a move at once strange and predictable, they conceive of the Internet as essentially a giant garage. "The garage was a technology that displaced the home and its subjects," they write. "Now domesticity is being reformatted once again through technologies that detach the home from the house." Suggestive as the comparison is, they miss the opportunity to comment on the Internet's general atmosphere of garage-ness, with its dank memes and moldy conspiracies.

For Erlanger and Ortega Govela, the garage is an emblem of suburban privatization. But the future of the space may well be in cities, where the number of cars has far exceeded population growth. As the transportation consultant Bruce Schaller noted in a recent article, the growth in urban households that are "car-free" is being outpaced by those that are "car-light" (owning one car) or "car-rich" (owning two or more). Many of these households are in cities where public-transportation options exist alongside the heavy use of "ride-share" services like Uber and Lyft, which seem to have contributed to the rising number of cars. "From mid-2000 to 2012, transit ridership increased while car ownership grew slowly, if at all," Schaller writes. "But now car ownership is expanding faster than population. Add in ride-hailing services, and the glut of motor vehicles makes it more difficult to give buses, bikes, and now e-scooters the road space they need to be speedy, safe, and comfortable." Rather than becoming less dependent on cars, cities have become filled with them. And, just as privatized forms of transportation have ballooned, so might private forms of parking. A civilization that has grown up with garages will not, it seems, dispense with them easily.

Nikil Saval writes about cities, architecture, and design. He is an editor of n+1 and the author of "Cubed: A Secret History of the Workplace."

Los Angeles Magazine, 2018

Los Angeles MAGAZINE

Photograph by Brendan Lynch

ART

Surprise Mermaids Have Appeared in One L.A. Laundromat

Artist Olivia Erlanger's sculptures fracture everyday reality

By Brittany Martin - September 12, 2018

Most people walk into a laundromat thinking they're going to do a routine chore. But what if laundry day became an opportunity to encounter something thought-provoking or surprising? Thanks to artist Olivia Erlanger's installation at the Laundry Zone in Arlington Heights, customers are being confronted with life-size mermaid tails emerging from certain machines.

"I hope that the mundanity of the everyday can be fractured for a moment," Erlanger says of the project.

Los Angeles Magazine, 2018

PHOTOGRAPH BY ILIA OVECHKIN

The show was organized by gallery and arts platform Mother Culture, which is based a few blocks from the laundromat. Erlanger had mentioned to Mother Culture founders Milo Conroy and Jared Madere that she was interested in working on a project around mermaid tails, building off a sculpture of large-scale forked snake tongues which she showed at Mathew gallery in New York in 2016.

It was Conroy and Madere who suggested the installation might find a home in the laundromat rather than a traditional gallery space. They pitched her on the idea in spring of this year, after stopping in to do their own laundry.

"My practice is extending into creating environments, so it felt like a natural experimentation to inhabit a public space," Erlanger says.

Customers have been coming into the laundromat, not knowing to expect the art pieces, and reacting with curiosity, surprise, and delight, the artist reports–but mermaids inspire her for reasons that go beyond the merely whimsical.

"I'm interested in mermaids as a kind of pre-gender or genderless archetype, a representation of a chimeric existence that I feel we each take on as different environmental pressures effect a transformation of sorts," she says. "When they are presented as female, mermaids bring up many questions of mobility, not only in a physical sense, but also ones around agency. Ariel, for example, gave up her voice to walk on land."

Ida by Olivia Erlanger is currently on display at Laundry Zone, 1600 6th Ave., Arlington Heights.

Mousse, 2017

Mousse Magazine

CONVERSATIONS

Garage: Luis Ortega Govela and Olivia Erlanger

Share

Luis Ortega Govela and Olivia Erlanger in conversation with Attilia Fattori Franchini

Attilia Fattori Franchini: In October 2018, MIT Press will publish *Garage*, an extended version of the book *Hate Suburbia* you self-published in 2016. How did the book first start?

Luis Ortega Govela: It was in 2012, and I wanted to get away from the London Olympics, so I did a road trip through the California desert up to Silicon Valley. When I got to San Francisco, I stayed with a friend in the Mission District who was then working at the Googleplex. She commuted in one of those Google buses that had not yet been protested. I took the trip with her one day listening to Lana del Rey's Born To die, there was this palpable tension between the city, the pastoral corporate tech campus, and the suburban homes surrounding the office park. These three zones were eerily connected, and illustrated uncomfortable truths about American life, just like Lana Del Rey in our soundtrack, you could feel the decline of a middle class and its culture. At the same time it was wild to think that the "tech revolution" had been planned and invented inside one of these prototypical patriarchal homes.

It was then that I became fascinated with the myth-fact that most technological advancements that were appearing on the market—also changing the ways we inhabit space and communicate—had emerged from a garage in a more sub-than-urban Bay Area. That tension simmered in my head for a while. When I went back to do my final year of diploma at the Architectural Association there was a big wave of encouragement to sort of deal with your hometown. Faculty always pushed students to concentrate on sites that had a connection to their past, so the obvious choice for me was Mexico. But my approach has always been sort of contrarian, reacting against my fathers, so to speak, so I sat down for my interview with Pier Vittorio Aureli and explained how I wanted to fuck with Americana, to challenge it by taking the garage and the foreclosure crisis and explode it as a cultural artifact with imperial colonial power. Expressing something about these structures could help get to the roots of the internet era. So I wrote a queer-Marxist thesis on the garage, a history of it, uncovering that Frank Lloyd Wright was the first architect to attach a garage to a home.

Around the same time, Olivia was doing a booth at Frieze London and needed a place to stay for a couple of nights. She arrived with a huge crate and stayed for two weeks. After that, we were talking on the phone every other day. Mostly about our teen angst, which turned into a collaborative editing project and our first book, *Hate Suburbia*, and now four years later the conversation has expanded into a film and a second book with MIT. The idea, coming as it does from two different vectors, really is about our friendship and this world we have constructed together, through years of hanging out.

When we were working on *Garage*, we both moved to Los Angeles and lived in the same city for the first time (we almost killed each other in those first few months, filming and trying to finish the book). If before, my writing was done from a critical distance sort of fed through the image presented in pop culture, this was written from within. I wrote most of the book in my husband's garage in Highland Park, which incidentally became the cover of the book. My husband sent the photo as a joke to my editor, and a focus group liked it so much that we were bound to that decision! It's sort of embarrassing to be on the cover of the book like a Kardashian, but ultimately it reinforces the main thing the book talks about, which is the distortion of the American value system of individuality. Maybe it's even meta.

Olivia Erlanger: My work investigates how the different kinds of collapse in economics and ecologies influence the recent fracturing of identity. In many ways I am exploring American folklore and symbols of the middle class. The garage as a subject came up through my personal history with the space. The garage is emblematic of my teen angst. At thirteen I stole my parents' car and drove through their garage door. There was a tin can in the back corner where I used to hide weed. I remember distinctly the feeling of anticipation and thrill of sneaking outside through the side door of the garage to smoke my first cigarette. It was the space in our home that I retreated to, to get away from my family, to disappear. I found refuge in the garage.

The garage is also a site of aspiration and consumption. In the bedroom community I was raised in, how many garage doors you had indicated your status. One-, two-, or three-car garages all had very different implications, and even as children we knew how to read this secret language. And in terms of a mythology, I think all American kids come preprogrammed with the Apple narrative, of Jobs and Woz tinkering away in their garage working toward a future no one but them could envision. These two self-made kid geniuses—and potentially cold-blooded narcissists—created the Ouroboros of devices that perpetuates a radical individuality, one that is without responsibility to a greater whole. If the garage gave birth to Apple, then its founders and the space of these technologies' gestation are in part responsible for our hyper-capitalist, consumerist culture.

In 2015 I opened the show *Dog beneath the Skin* at Balice Hertling's midtown Manhattan space. The show included a sculpture titled *Palimpsest*, which was a garage door with holes drilled through it. The show opened the same week as Luis's thesis presentation, and we realized the strength of our shared interests in class, identity, and architecture. Afterward we decided to write an essay, which turned into the first book we self-published, *Hate Suburbia*. From there I felt confident enough to cold call Roger Conover at MIT. I got his number off their website and left a voicemail: "Hi Mr. Conover, my name is Olivia Erlanger. I wrote a book with my friend on garages and I think it's pretty good." The rest is herstory!

AFF: Luis, you are an architect, artist, and critical writer, and Olivia, you are a visual artist and writer. How have your different backgrounds impacted the final outcome of *Garage*?

LOG: Actually I have a love-hate relationship to architecture. It's conservative, boring, straight, elitist, and for me things and my thinking really started with dance, choreography, social behaviors, design, film, music. Architecture is the last thing that came into the picture, but it was very clear that this was the framework that I could use to construct my practice. I always think about writing as the glue that ties all of these things together, and also allows for my frustrations with architecture to be expressed. To a certain degree it also allows for these ideas to exist outside the hands of private collectors. But maybe this is coming from spending time in China and romanticizing mass production.

OE: Art making and writing requires thinking about the production of images, space, and objects in relation to narrative or larger historical context. I write from a critical framework that is rooted in this ability to create, consume, or dissect objects and images, while Luis's background in architecture and art, predominantly installation, lends itself to a spatial history and typological reading of space that was integral to the construction of the argument. This is represented in the book through the images of work I made over the course of working on this project, and Luis's mood boards, which he uses in his personal practice.

Architecture has always been of interest to me and percolates throughout my work. I've built structures to house smaller objects, thinking of them as systems or scaffoldings for storytelling. I think this is in part because I was grew up with Randian narratives of the romantic idealism of the architect. My father studied at Ayn Rand's school of Objectivism, and *The Fountainhead* (1943) was one of the first books I remember connecting to.

That said, I think it is a strength of the project and of our friendship that we inevitably find a bridge between the vision of both artist and architect. The book is written from two perspectives: one inside the space, and one outside of it. This fluidity and permeability of perspective also allows us to tackle more difficult issues around identity and its construction, as our voice becomes a kind of melding of the two. Personally, my favorite kind of work moves between the rational and the subjective. I think the *Garage* project achieves this. Its strength is that it traverses many worlds and dialogues. If the garage is the most democratic space in the home, then the first book on it should be, too.

LOG: Working with Olivia is great. Sometimes with other architects I don't feel like sharing my ideas in such a way, but with Olivia it's different. It's also interesting in that she grew up in a Connecticut suburb, and I grew up in northern Mexico with a very clear image of America coming from a huge parabolic antenna attached to the pitched roof of my house. This satellite was feeding my home in Mexico the symbolic language of propaganda as reality—shortening the cultural distance between one country and the other but also functioning as a colonial tool of supremacy. I remember how glorified the United States seemed when I was a child—the economic stability, the cultural exports, the way of life. All of these were obviously facades and screens, veils of a national identity that were being consumed in the States but also in my home and many other homes in Mexico.

There was a distance imposed by language, but these images exported under the guise of entertainment made the border feel like a permeable thing. So I grew up with these two faces, one of America and one of Mexico, that are not cleanly separate but wrap around each other, poke through each other, dissolve into one another, as though the official body of the state were slowly revolving to face me. In a sense that's how I think about my collaboration with Olivia. It allows me to physicalize these two faces. The schizophrenia exists but I can disentangle mine onto hers. Hers is an experience of being inside this construct, while mine has always had the position of outside and against. This perspective shifted when I moved to Los Angeles last year to write this version of the book and make a film, and came to the realization that America has always been a culture of aliens.

AFF: *Garage* takes the architectural innovation of the garage as a symbol of the distortion of the deluded American dream, analyzing its genesis in Frank Lloyd Wright's architecture and its evolution through the American imaginary. Can you tell me more about this?

OE: As with everything, it begins with the attached garage. If Wright attached the garage to his Robie House, then it's impossible to separate progeny from progenitor. Wright was notorious for revising his personal history as well. The attached garage is imbued with this legacy of self-alteration and adaptation. The space naturally comes with a kind of transfiguration programmed within for others' use.

LOG: It's been a decade and a century since Frank Lloyd Wright erased the dates on his drawings for the Robie House and replaced them with a lie, obscuring the invention of the attached garage. The Emersonian ideals that Wright implemented in his designs reflected a transformation in American identity—one that was increasingly reliant on corporations and hyper-individuals. Since then, what one finds in the architecture of the deprogrammed garage is the ability to self-mythologize an obsession that has generated fictions more powerful than facts.

Within this short history one can trace a trajectory of capitalism as a force of expansion, and the garage functions as an apparatus for the spread of this ideology. These structures were produced as an extension of heavy lobbying from car manufacturers. To create a clientele, they had to make America into a motor-centric culture, and proposals for public transport were thwarted in favor of the car. This "neutral" container, created by Fordism, shifted the production of capital from industry toward a new frontier.

OE: I was indoctrinated with propaganda. America is the best country in the world, land of the free, home of the brave. Manifest destiny. With hard work and determination, you can achieve your dreams. And yet the reality of living here is that that dream has been deferred and perverted. Social mobility is increasingly difficult, and in the age of Twitter tyranny and alt facts, this legacy of transformation found within the garage has perpetuated the ability to distort reality toward that of self-indulgence rather than mutual reliance. The garage, as a temple to the self, is totemic in a society that thinks constantly of individual success over collective success. To access the dream, that of aspirational transformation, with the knowledge and experience of America's reality—this is the delusion we are referring to.

What I've found fascinating is the parasitic way that the architectural innovation of the garage evolved, first attaching itself to the Robie House, and then entering into the first tract housing developments through Joseph Eichler, to becoming a kind of appendix. It's so ubiquitous that people don't question the need for it; rather, it is as elemental to home design as a pitched roof. With models of car ownership shifting and the weatherization of the vehicle itself, the garage stands free, unoccupied. While usually empty, it is now occupied more by mythologies of self-realization and potential transcendence. It is a space waiting to be appropriated, and as with the little surviving civic space in most American cities and suburbs, it becomes occupied by escapists, idealists, and freaks.

LOG: The suburbs were impenetrable zones that talked a lot about freedom and democracy, but their reality was a trap for emotional and intellectual impoverishment. In both their physical and their figurative construction, they embodied the American dream and its wreckage. These were the lands of the individual, in which the outdated yet ever-present dream of owning a home came to exist. These homes proliferated as identical objects with unmitigated ordinariness, distinct from each other through a picket fence, presenting an ownership model that disbanded the collective into single families. Their banality is a rather disguised form of urbanism that creates a powerless and strange geopolitical location to inhabit and be active from, further dividing families into individuals. In those areas, identity is created through the consumption of goods. This is the American Delusion, a chronic disorder based on the distortion of a logic that was made for an expanded economic space and applied to life itself. This seemingly autonomous project has transformed into a state of serial narcissism and over-identification with one's occupation, obliterating any inclination toward the collective. The American mythos created by this delusion already burst a housing bubble; it's only a matter of time before the start-up economy, in which valuation is not based on real revenue, will go through its drought.

AFF: The book analyzes in particular the centrality of this annex space in the perpetuation of neoliberal narratives within the domestic. Two chapters in the book are titled "Domestication of the Garage" and "Garageification of Space."

LOG: The phrase "domestication of the garage" comes from a J. B. Jackson essay with the same title. His piece talks about the importance of looking at the everyday, the critique of which is the only way to understand a society. He describes the garage as an American vernacular. Jackson expressed an innate confidence in the ability of people of small means to make significant changes in their surroundings. But I have problem with this self-reinforcing narrative of the ordinary turned extra. In a way, choosing that title was a way of rewriting that history that Jackson lays out, or his position even, so in our version what is exposed is the dark history of how the garage came to be, rather than its status as cultural marker. We talk about how corporations and covenants created the racially secluded zone of the suburb.

The invention of the architectural technology of the garage and its spread as a suburban necessity just points at how shallow American history actually is. It also roots the white heterosexual male in the neoliberal narrative of the *ordinary* American that falls through the automatic garage doors with hopes and dreams to come out as a capitalist hero thirsty for liquidity. This is a poisonous myth that constantly gets mistaken for reality. The swindle is always in the *ordinary*; the self-made entrepreneur is never particularly self-made. The notion of an ordinary American as a white man is not the reality now, and it was not the case in the 1970s, either. But this pervasive narrative has turned the space into the id of America, in which the real personality of the home lives.

Garageification is a term I came up with in my thesis to talk about a suburban postindustrial society in which the language and aesthetic of home and work borrow from one another. It described the process of appropriating leftover industrial spaces as a means to define a new way of life, one that defied the system from which it originated. But it also points toward a larger symbiotic condition in which home and work entangle, blurring the lines between industrial and residential space.

OE: Domestication, the process by which you take a wild animal and tame it, is the same process that the garage underwent as it moved from a stable for a horse and carriage to a bedroom for the car. As we shifted away from agrarian lives with farms that would be tended to by many hands, to homes that did not necessarily need to be productive outside of sheltering the nuclear family, the needs of the individual superseded those of the collective. This perpetuates or potentially aids in the development of neoliberal ideologies of radical individualism. When you only have to tend to yourself, the narrowness of survival becomes tantamount. The garage itself is a blank canvas of sorts, a kind of haptic architecture waiting to amplify its users' projections. The ability to garageify space is best highlighted by Steve Jobs, who was known for his ability to distort reality. In this way the garage also teaches its users how to garageify other spaces, and the devices created within, mythologically born from the space, perpetuate this reality distortion.

AFF: Steve Jobs and Apple, HP, Gwen Stefani, Kurt Cobain, and the development of rock music are used as cases to investigate the strong correlation between counterculture and post-capitalism via the garage.

LOG: I like to think that this idea of being punk and its relationship with the mass became a vortex in a very exciting way. I mean, I can sit here and tell you about how counterculture is always transforming into the predominant mainstream production of capital and depress the shit out of you, but honestly everyone wants to dip their toes in the currents of the mainstream. What is important is how far away from yourself you will let them take you. I think it's incredible—I'm addicted to these moments by which things shift. Yes, maybe they make the system stronger or whatever, but these stories sketch out tactics, ways of being outside, carving out a new way of being even if for a short moment. The garage scratches the underbelly of the outside.

OE: We both started with the question: What is counterculture anymore? Identity has become so inextricably linked to commodity that people are their brand, and their lives function only as their brand narrative. Where can subversion, or an existence outside a constant stream to a public of intimate moments and "shared locations," live? With garage bands and surf and skate culture you can see how these small dialogues among kids, who band together to create new sounds or modes of transportation, become co-opted by the mainstream. The garage is the space to incubate and grow together. But what starts as fringe always moves toward the center. I see this accelerated through our interconnectivity, as we are increasingly more aware of and knowledgeable about each micro shift in culture. It feels as if culture is ever differentiating, becoming increasingly more nuanced just to become commodified again through our participation in the production of these miniscule boundaries.

AFF: *Garage* is also a documentary film, premiering in October at the ICA London. What is its relationship with the book?

LOG: Adaptation—a change in environment and context. We began filming while we were writing the book, so the processes influenced each other. The garage is such a cultural construction, with cameos in film and TV, and presenting itself as a central space for deviation in American mythology. This multiplication of an icon, far from diluting its cultic power, rather increases its fame. So it's interesting to then document and record how that image has influenced the contemporary American psyche. What's blown me away is how most of the people we've talked to have connections to the historical characters we sketched out in the book: a power to distort reality. But honestly being able to spend time with people who are actually still using their garages for other purposes—starting businesses or feminist permaculture movements, finding ways of surviving—was inspirational to see and be surrounded by while writing. It cast a positive light on what in my mind was a defunct space that was perpetuating a culture of despair. Amid the cheesiness, there seems to be hope.

OE: What the book achieves so perfectly is a nonlinear history of the garage. As we discussed turning the book into a documentary film, it was clear that the most important contribution a documentary could make would be to make visible contemporary users of the space. I realize the strength of this narrative is as much within the people who use the space as in the architecture itself, and suggested the film be character driven. We set out to outline seven archetypes of garage users. In the end we found subjects whose identities and lives are more complex and thrilling than either of us could have ever imagined.

The people we interviewed, our garage-subjects, contest the idea of the suburbs as a predominantly white, heteronormative space. Neither of us is charmed by the current nostalgia for a 1950s *Leave It to Beaver* suburbia, and in fact it never existed. We are representing complex men and women who, rather than be seduced by the American dream, have to engage with the delusion for their own survival. They are struggling with pressures we all face, financial and familial, that are extremely relatable and sometimes disturbing. The documentary dives into the multiplicity of identity and touches on pertinent themes around religion, family, feminism—all by just asking, what is in your garage?

AFF: What's been your favorite part of the entire project?

LOG: Focusing on the things that I believe in.

OE: This project hijacked my life, and thank god! I moved across the country to finish both the book and the documentary, and started working in an entirely new medium, film. My favorite part of the book when we explicate the Conspiracy of the Garage.

Frieze, 2017

Frieze

20 JUL 2017

World Premiere of BMW Open Work at Frieze London 2017

Olivia Erlanger to create a new multimedia artwork, for the inaugural BMW Open Work curated by Attilia Fattori Franchini

BMW and Frieze enhance their long-term partnership with a new artistic initiative to be premiered at Frieze London 2017. Curated by **Attilia Fattori Franchini** and emerging out of Frieze Sounds, BMW Open Work brings together art, design and technology in pioneering multi-platform formats, inspired by BMW technologies. The artist chosen to create the first BMW Open Work for Frieze London 2017 is **Olivia Erlanger**.

The Concept
Curated by Attilia Fattori Franchini, BMW Open Work annually invites an artist to develop a visionary project that creates an immersive experience for the viewer. Drawing inspiration from BMW design, engineering and technology, commissioned artists will consider current and future technologies as tools for innovation and artistic experimentation. Premiering annually at Frieze London, the artwork will have the potential to unfold across physical spaces, such as the fair's BMW Lounge and Courtesy Car Service, as well as digital platforms.

The initiative's title 'Open Work' is inspired by Umberto Eco's literary essay 'Opera Aperta' (1962) which proposes the idea that artworks are constituted in part by the public or by chance, and are therefore open to a wide range of interpretations.

Franchini has selected international artist Olivia Erlanger for the inaugural BMW Open Work commission.

About the artist
American artist Olivia Erlanger (born 1990) is the first artist to be commissioned for BMW Open Work. Known for her sculptures, Erlanger's work has been exhibited in a variety of solo and group shows. She recently coauthored *Hate Suburbia* with Luis Ortega Govela, the second edition of which is forthcoming in Fall 2018. Titled Body Electric, her concept for BMW Open Work proposes an immersive, sensory exploration of natural phenomena and their relation to humankind's technological achievements.

'As humans begin a mutative synthesis with our machines, *Body Electric* considers the changing relationship that we have to the environment, as our embodied experience of the "natural" becomes increasingly mediated and distorted by objects of our own design', Erlanger said of her creative approach. She is now beginning to develop and produce her commission for BMW Open Work, which will be premiered at Frieze London in October 2017.

About the Partnership
Further information on BMW Open Work here.

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Financial Times, 2017

Architecture

How the suburban garage has driven creativity and invention

As a space offering flexibility and escape, it has helped launch many dreams and start-ups, from Hewlett-Packard to Apple

Bill Hewlett and Dave Packard at the 1989 dedication of their garage as the 'Birthplace of Silicon Valley' © Hewlett-Packard

Edwin Heathcote FEBRUARY 24 2017

Apple, Google, Amazon, Hewlett-Packard and Walt Disney. What do they have in common? Multibillion dollar turnovers? Rapacious capitalism? Sure. Yet perhaps more interestingly, every one of them started off in a suburban garage.

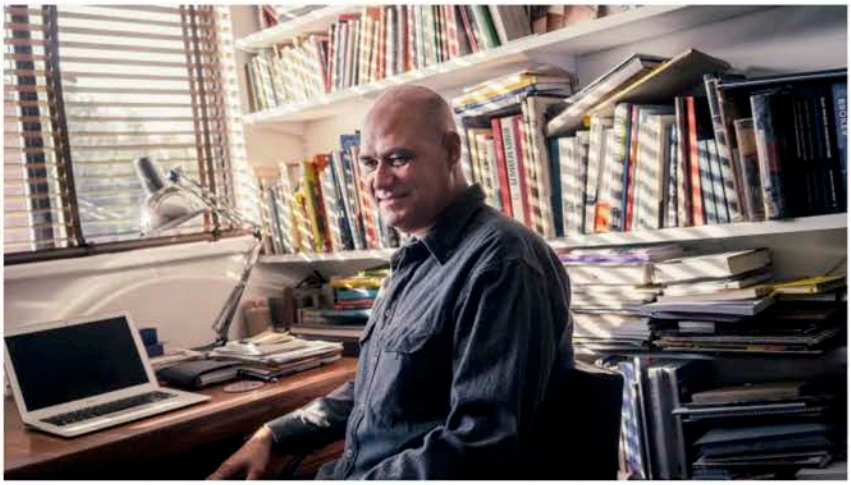
The garage is the most prosaic, the most functional, the least insulated and probably the messiest place in a house. Yet perhaps precisely because it is so marginal a space, it has been able to accommodate an almost limitless range of uses. A garage can be adapted, adopted and reimagined as anything from workshop or music studio to fetish dungeon and it has become, in a way, the nexus of contemporary culture and commerce. Disney and Hewlett-Packard's original unassuming sheds are now museum pieces, preserved and restored as cultural artefacts.

This cultural status is counter-intuitive. When we think of creativity we tend to think of cities, of the serendipitous collision of classes and races, the sparks of inspiration that occur when people are crammed together in diverse communities and the most brilliant minds are drawn to the multicultural magnet of wealth. That, at least, is the contemporary urbanist consensus.

Yet, weirdly, it may just be the suburbs — the bland, boring, ecosystem of identical houses and undifferentiated closes — that have been the engine behind the developments in tech, music, film and engineering which have been driving growth all these years.

I'm writing these very words from a space that was once my own garage. Its walls are now lined with books but behind those spines are the 1960s-era, bare engineering bricks that once

contained a car and an oily concrete floor. In fact, it was the reason I bought this house, the idea that this unloved space would make a perfect office.



Edwin Heathcote in his garage-office in Putney, London © Tom Jamieson

Oddly, at exactly the moment we are potentially realising the value of the garage, it is going out of fashion. New urban developments (at least in the west) tend to disdain the car in favour of public transport.

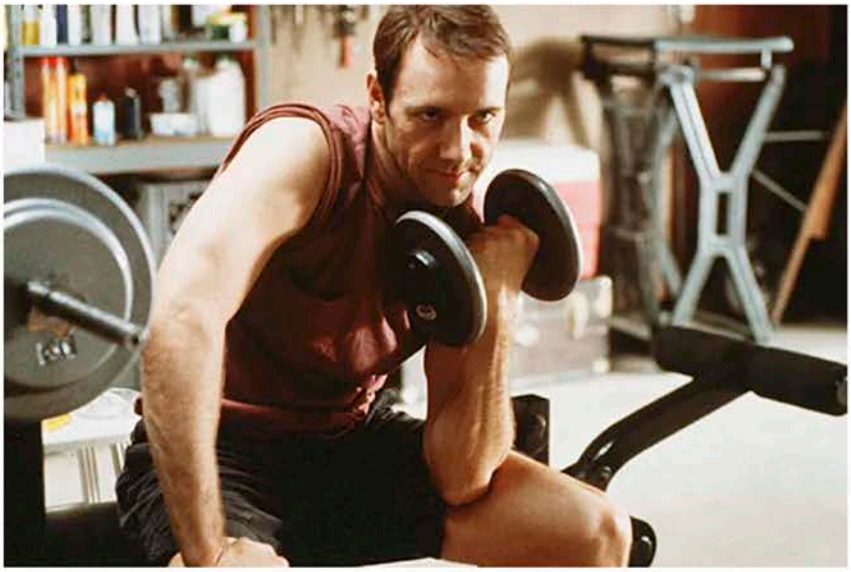
It is an angle that developers can hold up as a virtuous commitment to walkability and urban intensification but one which, coincidentally, saves them a huge wad of cash. Meanwhile, suburban development of the type that drove huge postwar growth in the US and Australia but also on the edges of most historic European cities, is frowned upon as sprawl. The result is an unprecedented housing crisis in popular cities such as London, New York, Paris and elsewhere.

Hewlett and Packard in their garage workshop © Hewlett-Packard

This is not a defence of the suburban, rather an elegy for the idea of a space that can be anything you want it to be.

Financial Times, 2017

The title of a small new book by the artist Olivia Erlanger and architect Luis Ortega Govela is *Garage: Hate Suburbia*. The lovely, slightly whimsical (self-published) book proposes the garage as "the silent hero of the 20th century". Erlanger and Govela bring together an illustrious cast of characters to illustrate the garage's status in contemporary culture, from Frank Lloyd Wright to Lester Burnham, Kevin Spacey's character in *American Beauty*. For Burnham, they say, the suburban garage is a place where he can "light up, work out, jerk off", the ultimate man cave to accommodate a midlife crisis.



Kevin Spacey in 'American Beauty' © REX/Shutterstock

Frank Lloyd Wright enters the story as perhaps the first major architect to recognise the life-changing potential of the car. His Robie House (in Chicago, Illinois) of 1908-1910 was, according to the authors, the first to integrate a garage into the structure of the house itself. Cars had previously been stored in separate outhouses more akin to stables as they were considered a serious fire risk. Work started on Robie House in the same year that the first Ford Model T rolled off the production line, so the history of the suburban garage and of avant-grade architecture are surprisingly intertwined.

Financial Times, 2017

Robie House in Chicago, by Frank Lloyd Wright, 1908-10 © Alamy

Yet other characters roll in and out of the story, too. There is Steve Wozniak, Steve Jobs' hairy early partner, who is said to have developed Apple's early products in a garage, even though he himself relates that the garage was mainly used for warehousing (sometimes the myth becomes stronger than the reality).

Steve Wozniak (left) and Steve Jobs © Getty

There is Gwen Stefani and Kurt Cobain and the rise of garage bands. And, of course, there are garage sales, home gyms, recording studios, artists' studios and galleries. The garage, it seems, is an empty vessel, capable of accommodating almost any fantasy.

Architecturally, even when they are integrated into the highly finished, commercial product of the modern house, the garage tends to have a raw, unfinished quality at odds with the domesticity of the dwelling that engulfs it. With its exposed brick walls, concrete floors, steel-

rack shelving and heavy mechanical door systems, it represents the encroachment of industrial space into the domestic.

Appearing unfinished, a place where the structure of the house is frankly revealed rather than obsessively concealed, it remains one of the few spaces (perhaps together with the cellar and the loft) which allow the imposition of imagination and the boundless possibilities of reinvention.

If the garage is the space of invention, it is also a site of existential angst. Lester Burnham suffers his midlife crisis in his man-cave garage. There are countless other films in which the garage becomes a transformational space, such as *Back to the Future*, where it doubles as a lab. It is also the scene of real-life tragedies, with people using this hidden space to kill themselves by leaving the engine running and slowly letting the fumes overcome them. The garage is the one room in the house that has no windows, it is the most private and, consequently in a strange way, the most intimate room.

It can become the space of obsession. There is the almost sexual desire for the car in the garage, think of *Ferris Bueller's Day Off* or another, older but just as magically transformational version in *Chitty Chitty Bang Bang*. Or even Batman's bat cave — the essential high-tech man cave and a glorified suburban garage and space of transformation.

Dick Van Dyke in 'Chitty Chitty Bang Bang' (1968) © Alamy

The reason the garage is so open to adaptation is that it is, effectively, redundant. Designed for an era when cars would rust and leach oil when left out in the open, they are not really needed for modern cars.

Perhaps that redundancy chimes with the contemporary crisis in masculinity. What was once the male space is now defunct. It needs to be reappropriated and what was once the site of the male midlife crisis is now having to adapt to another kind of crisis altogether.

Financial Times, 2017

The batcave in the 1960s TV series of 'Batman' © REX/Shutterstock

The surge in property prices across many cities has led to young adults staying far longer than ever before in their parental homes. Garages are now being adapted and expanded as accommodation for grown-up children. A sort of diametric opposite to the granny flat. The baby flat, perhaps.

As garages themselves are adapted, their very substance has become the stuff of architecture.

Architect Teddy Cruz, working on the urban cross-border phenomenon which is San Diego/Tijuana, pointed out to me how many Mexicans, often involved in the construction industry over the border, have taken the detritus from demolished and defunct garages from the postwar suburban building boom in the US and repurposed them south of the border as elements in remarkable self-built dwellings. Colourful, distinctive mid-century garage doors now appear as walls and lean-tos, as gates and porch shelters in some occasionally brilliant examples of adaptive and inventive reuse.

The suburban garage truly is, it seems, the gift that keeps on giving.

Edwin Heathcote is the FT's architecture and design critic

So where to park the car?

"Politics ain't worrying this country one-tenth as much as where to find a parking space," US actor Will Rogers once said. While this is probably no longer the case, Americans can still seek solace in a number of architecturally interesting parking garages should the worry recur, *writes Katy Fallon.*

The Michigan Theatre parking complex in Detroit, for example, offers a dashboard view into a forgotten world of the roaring 1920s. Parking spaces are set in the old theatre hall, beneath the crumbling but still decadent ceiling.

Those in search of something newer should visit 1111 Lincoln Road in Miami, designed by Herzog & de Meuron and built in 2010. An example of "tropical modernism", the garage

resembles an unevenly layered *mille-feuille* and is billed as a "shopping, dining, residential and parking experience". Elsewhere in Miami, the Ballet Valet parking garage in South Beach has enough vegetation to create its own microclimate.

1111 Lincoln Road, Miami © Alamy

European parking enthusiasts need look no further than the Parc des Celestins (1994) in Lyon, France. Designed by Michel Targe, Jean-Michel Wilmotte and artist Daniel Buren, the structure has a towered well in its centre to capture light from the street above. A rotating mirror at the bottom bounces light up to the seven parking levels above.

London, meanwhile, has the Grade II-listed Stockwell Bus Garage. Opened in 1952, the building features a vast ceiling of long vaulting arches, interspersed with glass strips. The author Will Self says it is somewhere he could "live in for a year".

Photographs: Tom Jamieson; Getty; Lorey Sebastian/DreamWorks/20th Century Fox/Greenway/REX/Shutterstock; CSU Archives/Everett Collection/Alamy; Hewlett-Packard

CURA, 2017

OLIVIA ERLANGER

BY CLÉMENT DELÉPINE

In 1972, the English novelist J.G. Ballard journeyed through Germany. Driving an old Mercedes along the Rhine River, he explored the suburbs which started sprouting up shortly after the war ended. Passing the opulent houses and the cars bought to match, the motorboats sitting on their trailers, Ballard couldn't help but notice the obsessive cleanliness of these areas. Not a cigarette butt to be found on the sidewalk. It was as if a leaf falling from a tree might have been too much of a nuisance.

Fascinated by this world under control, where happiness seemed to be replicable and consumerism limitless, he imagined the future as a suburb of Düsseldorf.

Born in New York in 1990, the American artist Olivia Erlanger partially grew up in suburbia. Her memories are tainted with feelings of alienation and isolation in an area where the lack of culture was only matched by the lack of people. Her work investigates how the different patterns of collapse in economics or ecology systemically influenced the recent fracturing of middle class identity.

In the context of her 2015 exhibition *Dog Beneath the Skin*, at Balice Hertling's project space in New York, Erlanger installed a full-size garage door in the gallery space. Facing the entrance, the work appeared like a portal to an intimate dimension, reminiscent of Dan Graham's *Homes for America*, a series of photos documenting serial houses in New Jersey and Staten Island, that examined the permeable frontier separating the private from the public.

Titled *Palimpsest*, evoking something reused or altered but still bearing visible traces of its earlier form, this work questioned whether the garage attached to suburban houses could function as a place producing discourse and identity. Beyond its primary function, Erlanger identifies the garage as a territory where one can potentially express his or her idiosyncrasy by rehearsing with a punk band, playing video games, maybe running a gallery, or inventing the computer.

In fact, in the past two decades, Silicon Valley, start-up culture, and MTV have consecrated the garage as the true birthplace of American genius.

A common friend, knowing their shared interest for urban problematics and the avatars of domesticity, sent a photograph of *Palimpsest* to the architect Luis Ortega Govela and encouraged him and Erlanger to exchange ideas. This dialogue led them to co-write *Hate Suburbia: The Conspiracy of the Garage*, a book published in 2016 which retraces the history of the garage and analyzes its influence on the fabrication of a cultural identity.

Their research identifies Frank Lloyd Wright as the first architect to attach the garage to a home, specifically for his client Frederick C. Robie, whose eponymous house was built in 1910. Now a landmark, this house epitomizes the Prairie Style, the first architectural style considered uniquely American, and essentially introduces the concept of suburbia in general.

In his research, Ortega Govela found that the footprint of the Robie House was later used by the real estate developer Joseph Eichler to construct a lot of similar houses across California. Erlanger, whose work circles around network culture and the use of digital technologies, became enthralled when they discovered that it was within the footprint of one of these houses that Steve Jobs and Steve Wozniak assembled the first personal computer and founded Apple.

CURA, 2017

CURA, 2017

The myth surrounding Jobs was that he had the ability to distort reality. One of the original members of the Apple Macintosh design team coined a term to describe this ability: *reality distortion field*, or RDF. Jobs, with a subtle mix of charm, charisma, and bravado, could notoriously make an audience, as well as himself, believe that what seemed impossible was in fact possible. Through RDF, he could generate desire and build support for his ideas.

Erlanger later argued that all the tools Steve Jobs ended up creating allow us to further distort reality, and observed that the financial demise of the garage is now propagated through technology that was created within it. The tools allowing for the digitization of currency which were created in a garage turned out to be instrumental in manufacturing a massive crisis of the housing market and home ownership.

Erlanger developed this reflection in the work *I Am No Viper, Yet I Feed*, a sound piece created for her 2016 exhibition, *The Oily Actor*, at What Pipeline in Detroit.

Programmed to pick up data from the real estate valuation website Zillow, the work collects daily the five most recent data points (i.e. number of rooms or square footage) for foreclosed homes within the boundaries of the city where it is installed. These data points then speed up or slow down a musical playlist of twelve songs, each of them released on a year that legislation was passed to indirectly facilitate the 2008 financial crisis.

Titled after William Shakespeare's play *Pericles* and referring to the incestuous relationship between King Antiochus and his daughter, *I Am No Viper, Yet I Feed* denounces the cannibalistic nature of capitalism as a system eating its young. Automatically adjusting to the area where the work is exhibited, the program translates physical and long-lasting space into something ephemeral, therefore echoing the instability of home ownership.

Translation of materials, space, and data, are recurring interests in Erlanger's practice. Data translation was further explored in the work *April Heat*, shown in her 2016 exhibition, at Mathew NYC, *Dripping Tap*.

The sculptures, office-like filing cabinets meant to preserve both private information and public records, are partially cut out to expose their components. These do not emit sound, however, they have a breathing mechanism and use the same engineering at the core of *I Am No Viper, Yet I Feed*. Although the principle doesn't change, this time the program is calibrated on the price of oil and the red light emanating from the sculpture adjusts to the variations of its market value.

In 1973, a year after Ballard's exploration of the German suburbs, the world's economy was shaken by its first oil crisis. It led the writer to conclude that the American dream "ran out of gas" and that the one certainty about the future was that it would be boring. Ironically, for the following generation of suburban teenagers, the sole means to escape boredom was, as Erlanger would put, "maybe the inside of a car. Driving somewhere and getting high or driving somewhere to get away from parents, teachers, and ultimately ourselves."

In whatever way, the system doesn't let go. Addressing the cyclicality of capitalism, Olivia Erlanger often compares this phenomenon to an *ouroboros*, a symbol dating as far back as Egyptian iconography, which depicts a serpent eating its own tail.

In *Dripping Tap*, the visitors were also confronted to a pair of forked tongues coming off the wall. Maximized vipers tongues, petrified yet intimidating, sensing their surroundings, possibly for a prey to catch, just like snakes use their tongues for olfactive purposes. Titled *Slow Violence*, this sculpture reminds us that the ferocity of a system might be discreet, that fury can be quiet, but mostly that if the threat is only coming slowly, it surely keeps getting closer.

Slow Violence, 2016 (opposite page) Sideways Time, 2016 (p. 110) Raft for Lotophagi, 2016 (p. 112) Raft for The Doll in Glass, 2016 (p. 113) All images Courtesy: the artist

ARTFORUM

CRITICS' PICKS

View of "Wormwood," 2017.

DUBLIN

"Wormwood"

ELLIS KING
Donore Avenue White Swan, Unit 7
July 7–August 12, 2017

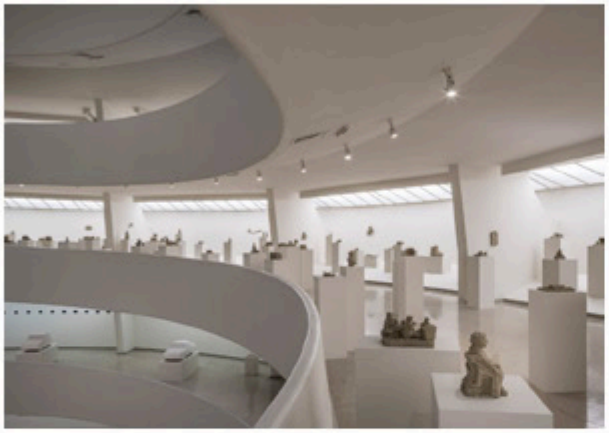
Amid the B-movie monstrosities of the Book of Revelation lurks the Wormwood star, destined to hit the earth and poison a third of its waters upon impact. This doomsday comet shares its name with *Artemisia absinthium* (absinthe wormwood), the bitter medicinal herb responsible for absinthe's curious coupling of extreme clarity and hallucinogenic stupor.

Organized by Todd von Ammon, this group exhibition mingles decadence, delirium, and decay in a cocktail best sipped slowly. Associations with prophecies and poisons align in the forked tongues of Olivia Erlanger's *Slow Violence*, 2016, a duo of carved-foam sculptures coated in resin and carbite grit, which impart the mottled gloss of river stones in clouded shades of cornflower blue and gray. Their imperfect twinning echoes in Oscar Tuazon and Elias Hansen's *Hadlock Boomlog*, 2016, two slices of an ancient tree trunk, exquisitely riddled by shipworms. Across the room, Donald Moffett's *Lott 052817 (Titanium White)*, 2017, precision-cuts perfect circles through densely layered wood, its surface capped by a stiff pelt of white paint.

Having slipped under the skin, infestation quickly cedes to intoxication and disintegration. Kris Lemsalu's dual tabletop ceramics—both titled *Immaterial Material Love*, 2017—offer abject coagulations, crawling with larvae, tentacles, tongues, and loose nipples, while Helmut Lang's sculptures, *Untitled*, both 2015–17, sprout stems of shellacked resin, suggesting the smoked-flesh finish of rawhide chew toys. The unsavory aura is reinforced by David Seth Moltz's fragrance *Locust*, 2017, a concoction with the bittersweet tang of crushed insect wings. While certainly intriguing, the overall effect is to leave one wary of drinking too deeply of these waters.

— *Kate Sutton*

Flash Art, 2016



From top, clockwise:
Peter Fischli, David Weiss
"How to Work Better,"
installation view at Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York (2016)
Courtesy of the Artist and Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation
Photography by David Heald

Olivia Erlanger
Rattfor Lotophag (2016)
Courtesy of the Artist and What Pipeline, Detroit

Adam McEwen
Staircase (2016)
Courtesy of the Artist and Petzel, New York

Fischli and Weiss

The Guggenheim / New York

For their retrospective at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum in New York, Fischli & Weiss have managed something truly amazing: they've made the venue feel like an actual art museum. Generally, exhibitions there have to take a stance, either battling or submitting to the building itself. For their part, Fischli & Weiss simply take advantage of the building's oddly linear exhibition space, treating it like the inclined plane from *The Way Things Go* (1987), letting the everyday mechanics of gravity impel viewers through the overview, a scaled-up version of one of their own numerous attempts to organize and catalogue the world around them.

Fischli & Weiss short-circuit the ascendant metric by which the museum gauges public engagement: the work presented is either too small to be seen from the lobby or looks like it might be merely construction materials and gallery detritus (*Polyurethane Objects*) — there's nothing to take a selfie with. Shutting out the experience economy from a contemporary museum exhibition calmly points out the kind of noisome hassle major exhibitions have become. It feels like an antidote to the spectacular displays of, say, Carsten Höller, Philippe Parreno or Olafur Eliasson.

The duo's work is uniquely persuasive when viewed as a career-spanning retrospective. From their second project onwards, the collaboration has been about figuring out exactly how they will spin the tale of their collaboration when finally asked. Projects like *Suddenly This Overview* (1981), *The Least Resistance* (1981) and *Visible World* (1997) evince not only their concern for the way history (art, social, natural and otherwise) constructs itself, but also a comic hubris wherein they imagined themselves in a central role.

The tragic underpinning of all this is that, after rehearsing this retrospective impulse countless times over the last thirty years, the untimely death of David Weiss in 2013 has drawn a line under the duo's production: nothing but retrospectives from now on.

by Steve Kado

Adam McEwen

Petzel / New York

There's a deliberately yawning gulf between the title and the announcement image for Adam McEwen's exhibition at Petzel. The press release for "Harvest" is illustrated with Jean-François Millet's *The Gleaners* (1857), which depicts women gathering stray grains of wheat. By contrast, McEwen's exhibition is austere and technical, opening with *TSA* (2016), a set of airport security trays, modeled on those used at Heathrow airport, rendered in graphite. The presence of a watchful security guard/invigilator at Petzel reminded me that people probably want to touch these graphite objects to see if they leave a gray smear on a finger. Yet what these objects represent is a kind of cleansing or inspection: the quasi-religious purification that occurs as one passes through a body scanner and is examined by nonhuman eyes.

Blocked sightlines are perpetuated throughout McEwen's exhibition. Two more graphite sculptures replicate the current manifestation of IBM's Blue Gene supercomputer, which appear almost Judd-like, yet read as more anonymous than graceful due to latches, hinges and vents. The idea of "harvesting" here appears to refer to the enormous wealth of data that such computers are able to read and process — data impossible for human eyes to pick through or make sense of. A series of printed images on kitchen sponge fabric depict the four tunnels that lead in and out of Manhattan. Unlike the airport trays, in none of these works can I fathom any particular sense or effect in the choice of material, though thematically the blindness of the images and objects build on the exhibition's theme. Lastly is an enormous wooden letter *K*, nearly six meters high, which McEwen has fabricated to create two interconnected sets of steps that lead to a viewing platform. From below, the isolated letter appears somehow arbitrary, save for a light Kafka association. Kafka did, however, remain with me as I ascended this vertiginously rickety architecture, having signed a release form. Lightly terrified, I persisted on my journey to nowhere, having set off on a certain course, somewhat blindly.

by Laura McLean-Ferris

Olivia Erlanger

What Pipeline / Detroit

"The Oily Actor," a body of work by Olivia Erlanger presented at What Pipeline, manages to compress an ecosystem of information and association into a few extremely complex objects, referred to as "rafts." In addition to a sound piece and floor installation, the show includes three of these wall-hanging fabricated steel frames that provide housing for different fields of materials. Aesthetically, they demonstrate an evolution of Erlanger's approach to presenting objects and materials in highly compartmentalized scaffoldings.

Erlanger's work contains many references, from the experimental sci-fi of Mark von Schlegell to Timothy Morton's writings on "hyperobjects" — things so large and viscous that we can only consider them as an abstract concept. The two major hyperobjects that inform the artist's work here are the ecological crisis and the global financial crisis; at twenty-six, Erlanger came of age in the current state of systemic exigency. The inextricable influence of the housing crisis is represented by a sound piece, *I am No Viper, Yet I Feed* (2016). This work utilizes live data points from the real-estate valuation website Zillow to augment a twelve-song playlist, creating a distorted soundscape that builds throughout the exhibit.

"The idea of these [hyper]objects seeping over everything, an invisible kind of viscosity that is actually a system through which we have to navigate — that was very important," says Erlanger. Her rafts are the ideal psychological vehicles for negotiation of this system, resembling floating foundations or wireframe mechanicals. These structures are packed with trade materials and strains of pollen, which speaks to trading and economy as a wider function of nature, rather than a human invention.

Haydown — an impulse facilitated by Erlanger's decision to pad the floor with a layer of cardboard panels. I imagine myself floating on a sea of crisis, oily tongues of seawater lapping at my vessel, the familiar strains of cultural excess becoming an alien shanty.

by Sarah Rose Sharp

Art

16 New York Gallery Shows Where You'll Find Exciting Young Artists This October

Casey Lesser Sep 30, 2016 5:53pm

From Chelsea to Bushwick, a strong showing of young artists fill New York's galleries this fall, spanning fresh figurative paintings, embroidered wall-hangings, and an installation that imagines a robot society.

Olivia Erlanger at Mathew

Sep. 16–Oct. 18, 47 Canal Street

Installation view of Olivia Erlanger at Mathew. Photo courtesy of the artist and Mathew.

The New York artist shows sculptural works reminiscent of building facades, but instead of windows and doors we find sheets of fabric, a chess board, or an exit sign accented with bits of porcelain, honeycomb, and printed silk. Across her body of work, Erlanger draws parallels between natural disasters and fluctuations in financial markets.

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