

An aerial, black and white photograph of a suburban residential neighborhood. The houses are arranged in a grid-like pattern with a prominent circular driveway in the foreground. The houses are mostly two-story structures with dark roofs. In the background, there are rolling hills and a clear sky. The overall scene is a typical suburban development.

Welcome to the Dollhouse

THE MUSEUM OF CONTEMPORARY ART, LOS ANGELES
JANUARY 20 – APRIL 8, 2018

A Place for Everything and Everything in Its Place

Welcome to the Dollhouse presents works from MOCA's permanent collection that address, document, or deconstruct traditional notions of domesticity. Spanning the mediums of sculpture, photography, painting, video, and drawing, from the 1950s to the present, the exhibition playfully approaches a variety of ideas about the domestic. These include, but are not limited to, the merging of the fine arts and design, documentary or photojournalistic portrayals of domestic spaces, melancholic and romantic depictions of the home, as well as strategies of appropriation and the repurposing of familiar household objects and their representations. Some works lie outside these conceptual frameworks, while others could easily be said to move fluidly between and across them. What all of these artworks share, however, is the absence of the human form, instead positioning the viewer as the inhabitant of this home.

The exhibition's title is taken from director Todd Solondz's 1995 cult film, in which we stand witness to the brutalities of coming of age in an American suburb. Solondz's vision of suburban New Jersey, and his story of eleven-year-old Dawn Wiener, could well mirror any number of communities in the United States. Key to this exhibition's allusion to the film is the dissonance between the appearance of middle-class suburbia, replete with its wall-to-wall carpeting, wood paneling, and plush pink bedding, and what

more menacing and insidious aspects may lurk beneath this sheen of domestic bliss.

There are parallels to be made between the installation of an exhibition—the most visible and public form of curatorial practice—and the decorating of one's home.¹ Crude as such a comparison may seem in relation to the historical function of the museum and the profession of the curator, the tasks of picking paint colors, devising a lighting scheme, and selecting and arranging objects, bear a meaningful semblance to the fashioning of one's home. The parallels between interior decoration and installing an exhibition are perhaps even more apparent in the case of an exhibition such as *Welcome to the Dollhouse*, which reconstructs a middle-class suburban home within the space of the museum through the arrangement of objects.² Rather than unfold chronologically, for example by presenting the development of an individual artist's career or a historical movement over time, this exhibition unfolds according to the everyday, if not ordinary, spaces of the home—yard, foyer, kitchen, living room, bedroom, and bathroom. Structured as a series of rooms without walls, *Welcome to the Dollhouse* emphasizes the experience of the museum—and of art—as a set of spatial relations—between viewers, between viewer and artwork, and between artworks.

Crucial to the conception of the home in this exhibition are the ways in which it emerged anew in postwar America, radically shaped by suburbanization and the rise of consumer culture. In works such as Bill Owens's aerial photographs of tract housing

on uniformly tree-lined cul-de-sacs in the California suburbs, we see an image of the American middle-class home that began in the postwar period, when prefabricated and mass-produced suburbs cropped up across the nation. Arguably the most enduring symbol of postwar suburbia is Levittown, New York. Opened in 1947, by 1951 the seven-square-mile tract of farmland in Nassau County would contain an astonishing 17,447 homes.³ Levittown's lush green lawns, white picket fences, and modern furnishings and appliances represent a distinctively white, middle-class, American mid-century fantasy of domesticity, belying a history of rampant and persistent racial discrimination: William J. Levitt, one of Levittown's founders, refused to sell homes to African Americans, even after 1948, when the Supreme Court ruled that housing segregation was unconstitutional. Levittown remains a potent symbol of the impossibility of reconciling the representation of suburbia in the American historical imagination with the policies of racism under which it was born and flourished in the 1950s and beyond.

The discriminatory practices enacted by Levitt were in no way exceptional. The G.I. Bill of 1944 assured that veterans of World War II would receive low-interest mortgages to purchase starter homes. Despite such laws, African Americans were consistently denied financing unable to make use of such benefits due to racially targeted provisions and endemic individual and institutional racism. The legacy of discrimination and housing inequality inform Rodney McMillian's *Untitled (...On Love)* (2007). McMillian's discarded loveseat has been drenched in a rich and

muddied palette of latex paint. Splashes of crimson and blood red suggest a scene straight out of a horror film. In works such as *Untitled*, McMillian highlights the home not as a safe haven, as it is often conceived, but as a site of emotional and social trauma. The work's crude, messy, and degraded appearance hints at the insidious aspects of domestic space, functioning as a powerful reminder that the very notion of the home is tied to both privilege and prejudice.

While television, Hollywood films, magazines, and advertisements of the 1950s propelled mythic and romanticized depictions of suburban life, the more menacing dimensions of this new domesticity also came into focus in popular culture, poetry, art, and journalism. If the millions of Americans who fled the cities for the suburbs had left behind "slums, crowded streets, vacant lots,"⁴ they traded these inconveniences for the social alienation and dislocation felt in communities absent of history and tradition. Starting in the 1950s, numerous articles and exposés sought to chart this new "Disturbia,"⁵ investigating the latent and overt racism of mortgage screening processes and housing practices, as well as the ways in which concepts of domesticity and femininity were being shaped, even fabricated by, American consumer culture. Christopher Williams's *Kodak Color PORTA 100T (PRT) Process C-41 Printed on Ultra III Paper, Process RA-4 Surface F, glossy, March 10, 2000* (2000), which depicts a matching set of bright yellow plates arranged in an open dishwasher, resembles a style of image-making typically associated with commercial advertising. Crisp, oversaturated, and capturing a familiar household



Above:
Lynn Aldrich, *Subdivision*, 1990, wood and exterior enamel, 36 x 50 x 50 in. (91.4 x 127 x 127 cm), gift of an anonymous donor

Right:
Rodney McMillian, *Untitled (...On Love)*, 2007, latex paint, blanket, and love-seat couch, 32 x 77 x 56 in. (81.28 x 195.58 x 142.24 cm), gift of Kourosh Larizadeh and Luis Pardo



Left:
Christopher Williams, *Kodak Color PORTA 100T (PRT) Process C-41 Printed on Ultra III Paper, process RA-4 Surface F, glossy, March 10, 2000*, 2000, C-print, 10 1/8 x 12 3/4 in. (25.72 x 32.39 cm), gift of Councilman Joel Wachs

Below:
Robert Gober, *Drains*, 1990, cast pewter, 3 3/4 x 3 3/4 x 1 3/4 in. (9.5 x 9.5 x 4.4 cm), gift of Christopher Wool



appliance, the image calls to mind any number of reproductions found in the pages of mid-century lifestyle magazines like *Good Housekeeping*, *Ladies' Home Journal*, or *Better Homes and Gardens*. Aimed directly at women, the advertising of household goods in general, and kitchen appliances in particular, proposed a vision of the home as a techno-utopia with the potential to liberate women from manual domestic labor. Yet, while advertisers promised to ease the burdens of this labor, they had, in effect, constructed the very image of the modern housewife and the ideal home.

Nearly three decades after the mid-century heyday of suburbia, the white, heteronormative, middle-class fantasy of domesticity—depicted in the pages of lifestyle magazines, disseminated in Hollywood films, and beamed into living rooms and dens each night on television—was cracked wide open by the onset of the AIDS epidemic. Made only two years after President Ronald Reagan would finally publicly address the crisis, Ross Bleckner's *Fallen Object* (1987) is filled with symbols of life's impermanence and the inevitability of death, such as a chandelier, urn, and flowers. The large oil on linen painting is a moody and evocative depiction of light and its reflection across an assortment of domestic objects that might be found in the foyer of an upper-middle-class home. Made during the early plague years of the HIV/AIDS crisis, the work is infused with an air of melancholy and mourning that is visible in both its hallucinatory rendering of space and murky palette of blues and blacks suggestive of twilight. Here the home emerges as a space one might seek out or be confined to in illness and despair, a space for grief and the



Above:
Ross Bleckner, *Fallen Object*, 1987, oil on linen, 48 x 40 in. (121.9 x 101.6 cm), partial and promised gift from the Collection of Laura-Lee and Robert Woods

Right:
Bill Owens, *Untitled*, 1972/98, gelatin silver print, 8 x 10 in. (20.3 x 25.4 cm), gift of Gary A. Richwald, MD, MPH in memory of Ann and Marvin Richwald

memorialization of loved ones, and a space where we let our ghosts out to haunt us.

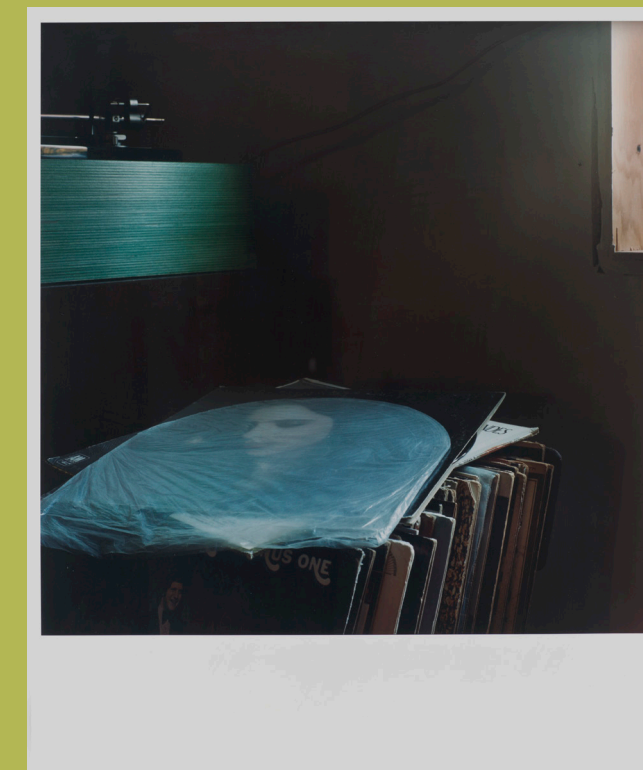
Heteronormative and gendered constructions of domesticity had already come under scrutiny by the 1970s, alongside the rise of women's liberation groups and feminist discourses. Over the next decades, long-held conceptions of women's work—the cooking, cleaning, and child-rearing involved in keeping house—were increasingly eroded. Works by Mary Kelly, Anna Maria Maiolino, and Carolee Schneemann, among many others, encouraged the airing of one's proverbial (and sometimes literal) dirty laundry. The legacy of their work can be found in photographer and writer Moyra Davey's series of photographs taken in the artist's own home. In works such as *Floor* (2003), *Nyro* (2003), *Pilon* (1999), and *Glad* (1999), Davey documents the details of daily life. Focusing her lens on the spaces we inhabit, the living and lived in, Davey draws our attention to the fragmentary, intimate, and often overlooked areas of the home—corners, counters, shelves, and floors. Clusters of dust, as in *Floor*, overcrowded cabinets and counters (*Pilon*), the deteriorating spines of records or books (*Nyro*), these seemingly banal scenes depict objects as they languish, unattended. What Davey documents are those nasty bits of domestic life and its maintenance—or the refusal of this maintenance and its associated labor—that we tend to both literally and figuratively sweep under the rug.

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After a museum collects—most often through individual gifts of artworks—and before we display an exhibition for the public—we arrange.⁶ Embedded in this delineation of the process of curatorial display is the conception of the museum as a stage to be set. The same process—collect, arrange, display—could easily describe that of the interior decoration of the home as well. “As an expression of personality, the domestic interior is always necessarily theatrical,” writes German scholar Juliane Rebentisch. “Even interiors that seem at first glance to glorify intimacy always also indicate its construction.”⁷ Rebentisch's claim that, in the home, intimacy and theatricality may in fact serve as two sides of the same coin suggests that any reckoning with domesticity in the postwar period is also always a reckoning with its staging and construction—and the staging and construction of taste and class. If we take both the museum and the home as sites that also function as stages, what might the staging of domesticity within the space of the exhibition reveal about both the lived and imagined experiences of domestic space? *Welcome to the Dollhouse* contends that the very notion of the home, shaped as it was (and continues to be) by the postwar suburbanization of America, is founded on a dialectic of inclusion and exclusion, literally and figuratively. It also proposes that the staging of domesticity is always bound up with what it seeks to repress, those nasty (and necessary) bits of daily life we'd prefer remain unseen. The works in this exhibition offer up varying and at times conflicting accounts of the domestic. Yet what they collectively point to is a conception of the home as both a physical structure and a social construct, a real place and a fantasy.

Rebecca Matalon
Curatorial Associate



Above:
Moyra Davey, *Floor*, 2003, C-print, 24 ¼ x 20 ¼ in. (61.6 x 51.44 cm), purchased with funds provided by the Photography Committee

Left:
Moyra Davey, *Nyro*, 2003, C-print, 24 ¼ x 20 ¼ in. (53.98 x 51.44 cm), purchased with funds provided by the Photography Committee

- 1 See *Interiors*, ed. Johanna Burton, Lynne Cooke, and Josiah McElheny (Annandale-on-Hudson, NY: Center for Curatorial Studies and Berlin, Germany: Sternberg Press, 2012) and Richard Meyer, “Big, Middle-Class Modernism,” *October*, vol. 131 (Winter 2010): 69–115. A compendium of texts addressing interiority—domestic, institutional, psychic—and published on the occasion of the exhibition *If you lived here, you'd be home by now* at CCS Bard's Hessel Museum of Art, *Interiors* reflects the increased interest in the relationship between the space of domesticity—conceived as private—and the space of the museum—conceived as public. The exhibition, which was organized by artist Josiah McElheny in 2012, presented artworks from the collections of Marieluise Hessel (both private and public) in galleries that corresponded to a set of rooms in the collector's home.
- 2 A key aspect of *Welcome to the Dollhouse* is its specificity as an exhibition of works drawn almost exclusively from MOCA's permanent collection. The museum's collection, which currently holds over 7,000 works of art dating from the postwar period to the present, is in many ways a collection of collections. It is built upon the generous donation of artworks from the private collections of individuals, artworks that may have once hung in the foyers, living rooms, or bedrooms of their previous owners—behind chandeliers, above sofas, or between bedposts.
- 3 Bruce Lambert, “At 50, Levittown Contends With Its Legacy of Bias,” *The New York Times*, December 28, 1997.
- 4 Harry Henderson, “The Mass-Produced Suburbs: I. How People Live in America's Newest Towns,” *Harper's Magazine* (November 1953): 25–32.
- 5 Lynn Spiegel, “The Suburban Home Companion: Television and the Neighborhood Ideal in Postwar America,” in *Sexuality and Space*, ed. Beatriz Colomina (Princeton, NJ: Princeton Architectural Press, 1992), 202.
- 6 “After one collects—and before one displays—one arranges. One puts things in their place. . . .” writes Helen Molesworth in an early essay on artist Louise Lawler's landmark series *Arranged by Mr. and Mrs. Burton Tremaine Sr.* (1984), in which Lawler photographed the interior spaces of the collectors' Manhattan home, replete as it was with works of art and modern furnishings. In reformulating Molesworth's delineation of the process of presentation within the home within the context of the institutional process of acquiring works, I have intended to highlight the similarity between the two activities—decorating the home and installing artwork within the museum. See Molesworth, “Louise Lawler: Just the Facts,” (1999) reprinted in *Interiors*, 20.
- 7 Juliane Rebentisch, “Some Remarks on the Interior Design of Contemporary Subjectivity and the Possibilities of its Aesthetic Critique,” in *ibid.*, 316.

Checklist

YARD:

Lynn Aldrich (b. 1944, Bryan, Texas; lives in Los Angeles)
Subdivision, 1990
Wood and exterior enamel
Gift of an anonymous donor
93.16

Judy Fiskin (b. 1945, Chicago; lives in Los Angeles)
Untitled, 1973/98
Untitled, 1973/98
Untitled, 1973/98
Untitled, 1973/98
Untitled, 1974/98
Untitled, 1982
Untitled, 1982
Gelatin silver prints
Gift of the artist
98.72.1-2, 98.72.4-5, 98.73.4, 96.14.1, 96.14.3

Robert Frank (b. 1924, Zurich, Switzerland; lives in Nova Scotia, Canada)
Covered car - Long Beach, California, 1956
Gelatin silver print
The Ralph M. Parsons Foundation Photography Collection
95.28.34

Bill Owens (b. 1938, San Jose, California; lives in Hayward, California)
Fourteen years ago Dublin, California was a crossroads on U.S. 50 and Highway 21. The population was less than 1,000 (most of them cows). Today Dublin is the crossroads of Interstate Highways 580 and 680 with a population over 25,000 people. We now have fifteen gas stations, six supermarkets, two department stores, and a K-Mart. And we're still growing., 1972/98
Gelatin silver print
Gift of Gary A. Richwald, MD, MPH in memory of Ann and Marvin Richwald
2004.69.114

Bill Owens (b. 1938, San Jose, California; lives in Hayward, California)
I enjoy cooking, dogs, cats, kids, soccer, and living here., 1972/98
Gelatin silver print
Gift of Gary A. Richwald, MD, MPH in memory of Ann and Marvin Richwald
2004.69.11

Jack Pierson (b. 1960, Plymouth, Massachusetts; lives in New York)
Palms Hollywood, 1990
Color photograph
Gift of Ruth and Jacob Bloom
2006.106

Joel Shapiro (b. 1941, New York; lives in New York)
Untitled (House), 1975
Cast iron
The Barry Lowen Collection
85.86

FOYER:
Ross Bleckner (b. 1949, New York; lives in New York)
Fallen Object, 1987
Oil on linen
Partial and promised gift from the Collection of Laura-Lee and Robert Woods
91.70

Jorge Pardo (b. 1963, Havana, Cuba; lives in Los Angeles)
Untitled, 1998
Four glass light fixtures
Gift of The Kwon Family
2011.206A-D

KITCHEN:
Moyra Davey (b. 1958, Toronto, Canada; lives in New York)
Glad, 1999
C-print
Purchased with funds provided by the Photography Committee
2010.12

Moyra Davey (b. 1958, Toronto, Canada; lives in New York)
Pilon, 1999
C-print
Purchased with funds provided by the Photography Committee
2010.13

Robert Gober (b. 1954, Wallingford, Connecticut; lives in New York)
Drains, 1990
Cast pewter
Gift of Christopher Wool
2000.88

Mike Kelley (b. 1954, Detroit, Michigan; d. 2012, Los Angeles)
Mooner, 1990
Afghan, pillow, double cat food dish, and four cat toys
Gift of the artist
93.11

Roy McMakin (b. 1956, Lander, Wyoming; lives in San Diego, California)
Refrigerator, Table, Shelving Unit, 2000
Maple, plywood, and enamel paint
Gift of Hudson
2005.24A-C

Christopher Williams (b. 1956, Los Angeles; lives in Los Angeles, Chicago, and Cologne, Germany)
Kodak Color PORTA 100T (PRT) Process C-41 Printed on Ultra III Paper, process RA-4 Surface F, glossy, March 10, 2000, 2000
C-print
Gift of Councilman Joel Wachs
2003.64

LIVING ROOM:
Moyra Davey (b. 1958, Toronto, Canada; lives in New York)
Nyro, 2003
C-print
Purchased with funds provided by the Photography Committee
2010.15

Guy de Cointet (b. 1934, Paris, France; d. 1983, Los Angeles)
Untitled [1], c. 1969
Untitled [3], c. 1969
Untitled [6], c. 1969
Untitled [7], c. 1969
Untitled [9], c. 1969
Untitled [10], c. 1969
Untitled [11], c. 1969
Untitled [12], c. 1969
8 mm film transferred to DVD
3:00 minutes, each
Gift of the Estate of Guy de Cointet / Air de Paris, Paris
2015.27-34

Jim Isermann (b. 1955, Kenosha, Wisconsin; lives in Palm Springs, California)
Untitled (Flower Chair), 1986
Wood, enamel, and vinyl
Gift of Hudson
2003.31

William Leavitt (b. 1941, Washington, D.C.; lives in Los Angeles)
Study for "The Lure of Silk," 1973
Seven black and white photographs
Purchased with funds provided by the Photography Committee
2008.67

Roy Lichtenstein (b. 1923, New York; d. 1997, New York)
Goldfish Bowl, 1981
Woodcut
Gift of The American Art Foundation
81.15

Chris Marker (b. 1921, Neuilly-sur-Seine, France; d. 2012, Paris, France)
Chat écoutant la musique, 1990
Video (color, sound)
2:47 minutes
Courtesy of Electronic Arts Intermix (EAI), New York

Rodney McMillian (b. 1969, Columbia, South Carolina; lives in Los Angeles)
Untitled (...On Love), 2007
Latex paint, blanket, and love-seat couch
Gift of Kourosh Larizadeh and Luis Pardo
2009.21A-B

Bill Owens (b. 1938, San Jose, California; lives in Hayward, California)
Untitled, 1972/98
Gelatin silver print
Gift of Gary A. Richwald, MD, MPH in memory of Ann and Marvin Richwald
2004.69.30

Richard Prince (b. 1949, Panama Canal Zone; lives in New York)
Untitled (Living Rooms), 1977
Four Ektacolor prints
Purchased with funds provided by the National Endowment for the Arts, a Federal Agency, and Councilman Joel Wachs
89.29



BATHROOM:
Meg Cranston (b. 1960, Baldwin, New York; lives in Venice, California)
Hairdryer, 1990
Plaster, acrylic, and cloth
Gift of John Baldessari and Denise Spampinato
98.77

Susan Lipper (b. 1953, New York; lives in New York)
Untitled (from the Grapevine series), 1990
Gelatin silver print
Gift of the artist
2002.84

Bill Owens (b. 1938, San Jose, California; lives in Hayward, California)
Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday... and Friday I have my hair done., 1972/98
Gelatin silver print
Gift of Gary A. Richwald, MD, MPH in memory of Ann and Marvin Richwald
2004.69.56

BEDROOM:
Julie Becker (b. 1972, Los Angeles; d. 2016, Los Angeles)
Interior Corner #7, 1993
C-print
Gift of Thea Westreich and Ethan Wagner
2005.76

Moyra Davey (b. 1958, Toronto, Canada; lives in New York)
Floor, 2003
C-print
Purchased with funds provided by the Photography Committee
2010.14

Lee Friedlander (b. 1934, Aberdeen, Washington; lives in New York)
Galax, Virginia, 1962
Gelatin silver print
The Ralph M. Parsons Foundation Photography Collection
95.32.23

Sharon Lockhart (b. 1964, Norwood, Massachusetts; lives in Los Angeles)
Covecot Cottage, Acadia, Maine, 1998
C-print
Gift of Jeanne and Dan Fauci
2002.64

STUDY:
Edgar Bryan (b. 1970, Birmingham, Alabama; lives in Los Angeles)
Untitled, 2001
Oil on linen
Gift of Matthew Aberle
2009.24

Left: Bill Owens. Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday... and Friday I have my hair done., 1972/98, gelatin silver print, 8 x 10 in. (20. 3 x 25.4 cm), gift of Gary A. Richwald, MD, MPH in memory of Ann and Marvin Richwald

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Cover image: Bill Owens, *I enjoy cooking, dogs, cats, kids, soccer, and living here.*, 1972/98, gelatin silver print, 10 x 8 in. (25.4 x 20.3 cm), gift of Gary A. Richwald, MD, MPH in memory of Ann and Marvin Richwald

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