

PETER MARCUS: *Horsehead Series*

March 16 – April 14, 2007

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THE HORSEHEAD SERIES

By Jane DeLynn

Peter Marcus's recent series of collagraphs are based on the Horsehead Building in Jamestown, a large shingled Victorian of the kind you see by the sea in New England. These houses, with their odd turrets towers and belfrys and other asymmetries, speak to us of another kind of time and another kind of life, and in some fashion these works function as a kind of elegy: not so much to this house but to this kind of architecture and a kind of time it connotes, all emblematic of an America—or, at least, the idea-- of an America that has ceased to exist.

Each of the prints contains a central image of the house, chine colle'd (pasted) onto the paper during printing. This image is photographic, but collaged: a compilation of various photos or sections of photos of the house combined in a way that feels coherent but is, in fact, visually inconsistent. Sections of the house are jumbled together, rearranged, doubled, perspectives askew in the Cubist sense--as if you are viewing at the house from various places (or distances) at once. The background, also, is collaged, with some sections of ground that seem like "close ups" of dirt or gravel or dry rivulets, others of a more "neutral" / "natural" view of lawn. Although the house is by the seaside, the water is never shown.

A more obvious disruption is made by the graphic white lines in many of the prints, as if masking tape had been placed, somewhat haphazardly, over the photos. Although clearly geometric (you can sometimes see the ruler markings that govern their making), they often possess an antic, anarchic quality, and are most effective when they cease to be merely graphic superimpositions and become tables or stools

or androids poignantly (and somewhat spookily) trying to climb over the houses. While further fracturing the initial images, these images also add to the "horror house" aspect Victorians always seem to evoke.

The use of color is minimal. The photograph images themselves are in black-and-white, and the occasional blue bit of sky, or the bright orange yellow of a window glowing intensely (from light or sunset, it is up to the viewer to decide) stand out particularly strongly for their contrast to the otherwise muted colors.

In their concern with architecture and old, perhaps soon-to-be-torn-down buildings, these works obviously have a close relation to the series on *Grand Street* displayed last summer at the Contemporary Art Museum in St. Louis. But Rhode Island is where Peter and his wife spend their summers, and this series seems both more personal and elegaic. You can see this in a few prints—an occasional tiny but naturalistic photo of the house, embedded amidst the larger deconstructed one. That whole and perfect house existed only for a few, and a long time ago. The rest, for us, is just dreams.

Written by Jane DeLynn

DeLynn is a writer and the author of several novels, including *Don Juan in the Village* (1990), *Bad Sex Is Good Sex* and *In Thrall* (both 1998) and, *Leash* (2001). Her work has met with critical acclaim for its comic and thoughtfully transgressive portrayals of lesbian lifestyles. She currently a Visiting Associate Professor at the Sam Fox School of Design and Visuals Art at Washington University in St. Louis.

This essay is a series of introductions to the gallery's exhibitions written by fellow gallery artists and friends.