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this artist has forged over the years to ply his poetic trade: the scale shifting, miniaturized inserts, and peephole wonders that he has been honing over time. The main motel building was a large aggregate of walls and roof occupying the corner of the main gallery and spilling out onto the floor. Cobbled together with discarded materials such as corrugated metal panels, battered doors, boarded windows, and signs, it was surrounded by an assortment of odd machine parts and tools. Embedded in this dilapidated façade, McMillen presented visitors with three doors that denied passage but encouraged, by the flickering of light, visual exploration. Each fisheye lens opened onto a separate space that gave onto a realistic scene—the sparsely populated dream worlds that have become McMillen's signature. A disheveled work room sported some kind of machinery suspended from the ceiling. In its recesses, an extremely large fish swam behind what appeared to be the rear exit. Another peephole revealed a flickering television set jump-cutting

Los Angeles

Michael C. McMillen

LA Louver

The latest large-scale installation by L.A.-based assemblage artist Michael C. McMillen, *Red Trailer Motel*, foregrounded the modes

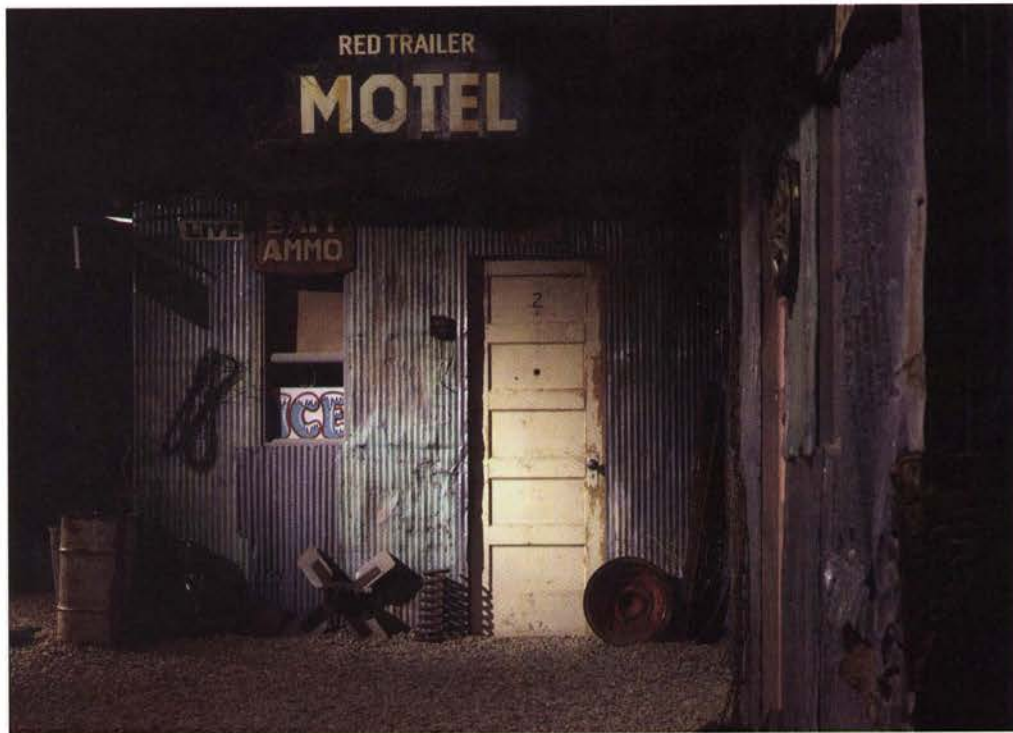
between fragments of vintage home and commercial clips with the raggedy zigs of the mid-'50s networks. In the last opening, a ceiling fan spun slowly over the table of a recently abandoned pool game, while intermittent snippets of radio, coming from different directions, filled the gallery with sound.

In the adjacent gallery, functioning as a counterpoint to the full-scale *Motel*, the wall-mounted *Time Below* featured a miniaturized aerial tableau of the motel and the hypothetical surrounding area. Placed perpendicular to the floor, it confounded the viewer's orientation and sense of gravity. By looking carefully, it was possible to reconstruct the privileged viewpoint of the main installation. It was tempting to imagine clambering up into the transposed space and walking in through it, unfettered by the force of gravity. That, to a large extent, is the measure of success of McMillen's sleight of hand—shrinking down and entering these works seems desirable and plausible. The work induces a complex range of emotional and psychological responses in the viewer and overcomes the potential nostalgic edge of much assemblage art.

My acquaintance with McMillen's work dates back to when I was studying abroad and read Edward Lucie Smith's description of West Coast art's paradoxical relationship to entertainment culture. The thought of combining hybrid special effects and miniature sets with installation art was hard to imagine from the viewpoint of someone focusing on Arte Povera. In retrospect, and now residing on this coast, I would say that Smith's interpretative axis was right, but only for the formal part of the work. The divergence between a Hollywood miniaturized set and McMillen's application of some of those techniques in his installations is clear in how the imagination works differently in each. The Hollywood set tricks the eye into believing the impossible and

is built to accommodate camera angles. McMillen's works cajole the imagination into dreaming up the impossible and then wishing the body into it. It is a satisfying bodily experience. The poetry that McMillen evinces with his work shares in the imaginative strength of those American writers who conjure up frontiers and ghost towns without turning them into theme parks. This ride is not remote controlled; it is the viewer's responsibility and pleasure to enter into McMillen's enigmatic visual works.

—John O'Brien



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