

Petzel

Alex Kitnick, "Design Beyond Reach," *Artforum*, Summer 2013, p. 121.

ARTFORUM
I N T E R N A T I O N A L
SUMMER 2013

SAUL LEITER

ANTONIO BLAIR,
MARIE KARLBERG,
AND STEWART UOO

ARCHITECTURE AND
SUBNATURE

CARL ANDRE: POEMS

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ON SITE

Design Beyond Reach

ALEX KITNICK ON STEPHEN PRINA'S *AS HE REMEMBERED IT*



Stephen Prina, *As He Remembered It*, 2011,
acrylic enamel on
polyurethane on
plywood, linen, metal.
Installation view,
Los Angeles County
Museum of Art, 2013.
Photo: Brant Brogan.

LOS ANGELES'S DEVOTION to midcentury modern architecture has reached something of a fever pitch in recent years, perhaps because so much of the city flourished at the midcentury mark. An aesthetic of sliding glass doors, patios, and conversation pits now appears as a point of origin to which we are forever trying to return. Even if the automobile will always remain the city's flagship status symbol, today a Porsche or Bentley is no match for a place to park it by a Lautner or Neutra hidden in the hills. While the latter icons may be

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stationary, images of their acute angles and spectacularly framed views travel far and wide in films and photo spreads. Perhaps it is here, then, in the cultural imaginary, that this architecture has enjoyed its most robust life.

Amid this archimania comes the second part of the Getty Foundation's massive "Pacific Standard Time" program of exhibitions and events. While last year's iteration was dedicated to art produced in Southern California between 1945 and 1980, the current incarnation is committed to architecture constructed during approximately the same period. A number of this year's exhibitions position the city as an arbiter of progress and experimentation: "A New Sculpturalism," at the Museum of Contemporary Art, is expected to focus on the history of the curvy, muscular forms that dominate the contemporary

Lacking a fixed site with which to work, Prina has forged a strange hybrid between past and present that is by necessity out of place.

global landscape (although at the time of writing, it is unclear whether or not this exhibition will be staged); "Overdrive: L.A. Constructs the Future, 1940–1990," at the Getty Center, argues that the city's ever-growing sprawl is less spontaneous and deleterious than sustainable and planned. For its contribution to the mix, however, the Los Angeles County Museum of Art is presenting something rather different: Stephen Prina's installation *As He Remembered It*, 2011, which first appeared at Vienna's Secession. Prina not only presents historical architecture through the lens of artistic practice, bridging the gap between the two, but, rather than considering how it might serve as a blueprint for future development, he imagines how past forms inhabit cultural memory in affectively complicated ways.

As He Remembered It comprises reproductions of twenty-eight units of furniture devised for two LA houses designed by the Austrian architect Rudolph Schindler: an artist's studio and a widow's residence, both now demolished. Explaining the work's genesis, Prina describes walking up La Brea Avenue in the 1980s and noticing a pink Schindler desk—or was it a bookcase?—spotlighted in a store window; obviously originally a built-in design, it appeared to him, he has said, as an "amputated limb." Prina's current installation reformulates this memory by offering reconstructions of a wide array

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Rudolph Schindler,
Mrs. George (Rose)
Harris Residence, 1944,
Los Angeles. Interior.
Photo: Julius Shulman.

of additional “limbs,” including daybeds, cupboards, and closets, all based on plans and photographs of the houses to which they belonged. The artist and an assistant subsequently painted them Honeysuckle Pink—Pantone’s 2011 Color of the Year—the saccharine hue bringing Prina’s memory into strange alignment with the current moment. Rather than resituate these uncanny part-objects in a domestic framework, Prina has installed them on the third floor of LACMA’s airy Broad Contemporary Art Museum according to both the coordinates of a modernist grid and an alphabetic typology (by room, Bathroom before Bedroom), adding a further element of institutionalization. This system of displacements is complex—a migration from house to shopwindow to memory to museum, not to mention the series of returns and homecomings between Vienna and LA—but perhaps most significant is Prina’s desire to give dislocation physical form. And yet this physical form is itself attenuated: In contrast to Rirkrit Tiravanija’s 2002 silver reconstruction of Schindler’s Kings Road House, which attempted to reanimate the collective desires behind Schindler’s own residence, Prina’s installation has a ghostly presence. Both history and architecture appear here less as reconstituted bodies than as a strange phalanx of phantom limbs.

Having studied at CalArts in the late ’70s, Prina was immersed in discussions surrounding the first generation of site specificity, and he was instrumental in pioneering its second wave as well. In his important 1995 essay “The Functional Site,” James Meyer marked this generational shift. While the notion of site specificity had been initiated by artists who intervened in architectural spaces, alternately marking or recuperating their histories, Meyer relates Prina’s work to a strain of practice that “may or may not incorporate a physical place. . . . Instead, it is a process, an operation occurring between sites, a mapping of institutional and textual filiations and the bodies that move between them.” Surely such things happen in *Remembered*, too, but Prina’s emphasis on coupling the mnemonic with the material points to a particularly important twist in this legacy. Lacking a fixed site with which to work, Prina has forged a strange hybrid between past and present that is by necessity out of place.

If an investigation of what the French historian Pierre Nora called *lieux de mémoire*, sites of physical and discursive memory that span everything from museums to archives, informed much of what we have known as site-specific art, Prina’s Proustian project engages what I want to call *mémoires de lieux*, or memories of sites. Memory functions as form giver here, but instead of leading to repetition and reenactment, it leads to new realms of singular, even misfit, being. Rather than project an image of an innovative LA solidly into the future, Prina has perversely rendered midcentury modernism in a discordant, millenarian late style. At a moment when history is often treated as simply another thing to be collected, here the work of memory has rendered objects that are pleurably—and emphatically—elusive. □

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