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'Happiness, at a Cost': Art in the Fly-Over States at KMAC's 'The 7 Borders' Exhibit

By [ERIN KEANE](#) (@PEOPLE/ERIN-KEANE)



Credit Kentucky Museum of Art and Craft [Enlarge image \(http://mediad.publicbroadcasting.net/p/wpl/files/201308/prefab.jpg\)](http://mediad.publicbroadcasting.net/p/wpl/files/201308/prefab.jpg)

"Pre-fab(ulous) Environments," Leticia Bajuyo, styrofoam and other materials.

Kentucky Museum of Art and Craft's exhibit "[The 7 Borders.](http://www.kentuckyarts.org/the-7-borders/)" (<http://www.kentuckyarts.org/the-7-borders/>) which explores the regional identity of Kentucky's seven border states, closes Sunday. But first, two of the artists will give talks on their work on Saturday at 1 p.m. Designer Mark Moskovitz and sculptor/installation artist Leticia Bajuyo will discuss the Midwest's influence on their work.

Bajuyo, an associate professor of art at Southern Indiana's Hanover College, grew up in Metropolis, Ill., across the Ohio River from Paducah, Ky. Bajuyo contributed an installation of toy-influenced houses to "The 7 Borders" titled "Pre-fab(ulous) Environments," which explores the contradictions between value and trash in the creation and deconstruction of the American dream in the so-called "fly-over" states.

The installation contains four houses that decrease in size, from a children's playhouse-sized sculpture down to Monopoly game piece-sized houses. One sculpture that evokes a dollhouse contains a video animation created from Google maps information culled from neighborhoods specific to the community in which the installation travels. Patrons can contribute to the installation by decorating and assembling a small house that resembles a McDonald's Happy Meal carton when finished. The primary material used throughout the installation is Styrofoam.

"The majority of Styrofoam ends up in landfills, but it's one of the primary building materials for insulation," says Bajuyo. "The piece actually started with thinking about landfills. Thinking about how much stuff is there and how many things have been bought, used and then no longer wanted, and thrown away."

"We're encouraged to buy, to help build a solid, strong, consumer-confident economy, but the other downside of that is where does the other material then go to?" she adds. "[The installation is] made out of what is in most considerations trash, worthless."

One characteristic of the region is space -- corn and soybean fields are open space until they're transformed, nearly overnight, into new construction housing developments.

"Next thing you know there's a path, and that's the road, and new driveways come off of it and new houses get built on top of it. It seems both fresh and exciting, but in some ways difficult and sad, because these homes do feel pre-fabricated," says Bajuyo. "They all look the same, and it's hard to know which one is which until they have a little more individual personality over a couple of years. For me, it's a desire for the American Dream, while at the same time, everyone has the same American Dream."


The thinking behind Bajuyo's installation is heavy, but the execution is also playful, drawing on toy tropes to raise questions about the tensions Bajuyo sees between personal and large-scale economic forces. It feels like a game, she says, but not necessarily fun.

"At some moments it might feel like we can conquer it all, that we're really big and we're in control, we actually have a say-so, and the next moment it feels like we have no say-so, and we're inside one of those playhouses that other people are moving around as if we don't even matter, as a home next door gets foreclosed on while somebody else is trying really hard to boost up their credit rating by saving more," she says. "Using the references to toys and the soft blue color that reminds me of Tiffany blue boxes [says] that there's this promise of happiness, but it comes at a cost."

Bajuyo will be joined by Cleveland-based furniture designer and sculptor [Moskovitz](#) (<http://fiftytwothousand.com/>), whose work has been featured in Dwell, Art Review, The New York Times and other international design journals.

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