

REVIEW

FORT WORTH

Town and Country

Brand 10

Leslie Murrell

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Brand 10 art space's *Town and Country* explores eight artists' perceptions of life in its two eponymous areas, as well as where these two environments meet and overlap: suburbia. The works investigate the architecture, landscape and lifestyles associated with the urban and the rural through a variety of mediums, including three large-scale installations that dominate the gallery.

Good Neighbors by the collaborative team Todd Hayes + Joel Kiser features a seven-foot-tall wooden fence enclosing a seven-by-twelve foot plot. After a futile search for a gate, viewers peer through the small slit openings and spy a small porcelain house standing in a yard comprised of salt. The house is a mid-century ranch style house, exactly the kind that sprang up in suburban developments around the country after World War II. Though good fences may make good neighbors—as the saying goes—this fence completely cuts off any relationship to the outside world.



Todd Hayes + Joel Kiser, *Good Neighbors* (detail), 2012; photo credit: Joel Kiser; image courtesy of Brand 10.

Ideal suburbs encompass the best of both urban and rural life with the downsides of neither. Rents are low and incomes are high, with a strong social community balanced by the refreshing beauty of nature. With *Good Neighbors*, Hayes and Kiser evoke the intended utopia of suburban living—its detached homes and large yards—and subvert it. Turning the desire for utmost privacy into a prison, the artists convert suburbia's prized gardens into wastelands of lifeless white crystals.

John Frost's *Things Fall Apart* is a young willow tree comprised of wooden dowels and leaf-shaped cutouts from the Chinua Achebe novel of the same name. The branches brush the gallery's ceiling and gently sway in the air-conditioned space; a few leaves have fallen on the floor. The dowels and paper are recycled and reincarnated into the form of the tree from which they came. Just as Achebe's novel explores the changing nature of Igbo society in colonial Nigeria, Frost's installation speaks to the changing relationship of humans and the natural environment in the twenty-first century.

Josephine Durkin also explores the relationship between nature and culture in her installation *Bloom (I knew I loved you when...)*. A short wall of stacked vintage luggage connects to a reproduction of a Victorian-era loveseat via a bright orange electric cord. In the center of each suitcase is a small umbrella. The color scheme of soft blues, whites and pale oranges—reminiscent of Martha Stewart interiors—unifies the disparate elements. The small loveseat is just big enough for two, and when visitors fill both seats the miniature umbrellas begin to open and close, as if blooming in response to whatever social situation unfolds before them. Umbrellas that function to protect us from the rain are here acting as flowers who have benefited from a nurturing shower. Bridging the divide between interior and exterior, the social aspect of this work speaks to the sense of community found in all types of lived environments.



Josephine Durkin, *Bloom (I knew I loved you when...)*, 2008; photo credit: Harrison Evans; image courtesy of Brand 10.

Husband and wife team Janet Chaffee & Benito Huerta collaborate on several smaller works that explore notions of private ownership and domestic architecture, such as home facades and house numbers. Most interesting is *Property*, a small-scale version of the footprint of one of Chaffee's and Huerta's properties. The tiny plot is about two feet square and features live grass that continues to grow for the duration of the show. These works deconstruct the notion of what defines and constitutes a home: the actual land, the numbers that set it apart from the houses on either side, the overall architectural form, or, perhaps, none of the above. In stark contrast to Durkin's installation, *Property* does not offer a home based on domestic experiences cultivated by the people who live there.

Many of the works in *Town and Country* imply that the distinctions between the various environments boil down to degrees of interaction with nature. All of the described spaces involve a balance between the domestic and the natural, but each does so to a different extent. The exhibition both celebrates and thwarts the ideals of suburbia, comfortable domestic interiors tame the chaos of city life, and the rural experience is not necessarily so far removed from the lives of those residing in other places.

Leslie Murrell received her MA from the University of California, Riverside. She is Assistant Curator of Education at the Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth and a member of Subtext Projects and 500X Gallery.

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