

...And I Live Here

Porch Gallery, Ojai, presents landmark exhibition



Senon Williams, Untitled (Deep Cuts), 2021, hangs above the fireplace; Ben Todd, Monument and New Relic, placed on top of the mantle; Beatrice Wood, Dinner Set #2, c. 1960, on table; furniture supplied by Whatever Gallery includes six DSX fiberglass chairs by Charles and Ray Eames, 1951, and a dining table, After Arthur Espenet Carpenter, California, 1973, photo by Ingrid Bostrom



By Grace Miles

With its sunlit porch and broad windows opening onto the streets of downtown Ojai, the Porch Gallery's unique role as both a residential and community space became the inspiration behind the gallery's latest exhibition, *It's My House!* Bringing together an eclectic mix of artists and mediums, the exhibition is a testament to the importance of collectors and the joy of collecting. Visitors are encouraged to consider collecting not as a financial machine that funds the larger art world, but as a deeply fulfilling practice that can satisfy our creative and artistic spirits when we incorporate art within our most intimate spaces.

It's My House! was curated in close

collaboration with CURA Art, an organization that seeks to support collectors in the care and management of their acquisitions. Founded by Georgia Powell and Liza Shapiro, they keep their approach simple but essential, advising prospective collectors not to start with what they think will make a good investment or warrant name recognition, but simply something they like. With such genuine affinity at the heart of collecting, collectors themselves are able to contribute the legacy of an artwork, as they strive to care for and preserve the cherished items in their possession.

As a historic home well integrated in the local community, the Porch Gallery was always the intended venue for the exhibition. Established

in 2013 by owners Lisa Casoni and Heather Stobo, the pair sought to fulfill the area's need for a gallery that specifically catered to contemporary artists. After careful restoration, the gallery now occupies much of the house's ground floor, though it retains the distinctive flow and atmosphere of a residential space.

Designed to fit these domestic contours, the exhibition perches atop fireplace mantles, squeezes between windows, and trots up the staircase. With slight direction from the Porch Gallery and CURA Art, a number of the artworks were created especially for *It's My House!* and incorporate the artists' perspectives on housing and domestic life on both societal and personal levels.



above, from left: Firoozeh Neman, *Ivy*; Ben Todd, *Monument* and detail of *New Relic*; Beatrice Wood, *Detail, Dinner for Two*, photos by Ingrid Bostrom

at left: Sean C. Flaherty, *Baldwin Hill Stool*, two *Butaque* chairs, *After William Spratling*, Mexico, 1950s, provided by *Whatever Gallery*, photo by Ingrid Bostrom



at left:
Hormazd Narielwalla, *The Beloved*

below: Senon Williams,
Don't Matter Who Made It,
photo by Ingrid Bostrom

Motivated by issues of wealth inequality, visual artist Michael Shaw works in the unconventional medium of cyanotypes. Using fragments of masking tape and layers of photographic negatives to assemble the design, his *Above and Below* illustrates the harsh divide between the housed and unhoused, and the injustice that lies beneath the attractive facades of gentrification.

Rebecca Farr's *Earth to Shore I* then takes the notion of home outside of the constructed house and into nature. Rendered in soft oils, impressions of trees and foliage form a muddled cradle of greenery reminiscent of Ojai's hiking trails.

Similarly inspired, London-based artist Hormazd Narielwalla acknowledges the town's cultural

history in his collage series, *The Beloved*. Composed from repurposed sewing patterns, the circular cuts of these iridescent panels cause them to appear as moons in orbit; a tribute to Ojai's name, which derives from the Chumash word "awhay," meaning "moon."

It's My House! also features a variety of furniture pieces, such as tables, chairs and benches, so that visitors can settle down and linger with the art as they move through the exhibition. Two benches constructed from decades-old wood salvaged from the streets of Los Angeles are the work of Senon Williams. Painted black and emblazoned with bright white text, these benches engage in direct dialogue with viewers, calling for a greater awareness of the spaces we choose to occupy.

Within the past few years, homes and residential spaces have been reexamined in light of the pandemic; their influence on our mental and physical health has never been more apparent. By simulating the experience of a home curated through attentive collection, *It's My House!* demonstrates the joy that we can create for ourselves when we make space for the things we care about.

It's My House! is open from January 13 to March 21, 2022. Proceeds from selected works will be given to local charities with an emphasis on homelessness.





*Jonathan Prince, Detail, Pixel Block
(Maquette), plywood and archival glue,
photo by Ingrid Bostrom*