

NEW YORK**STEVEN BROWER**

LOMBARD/FREID FINE ARTS

470 BROOME ST., 10013

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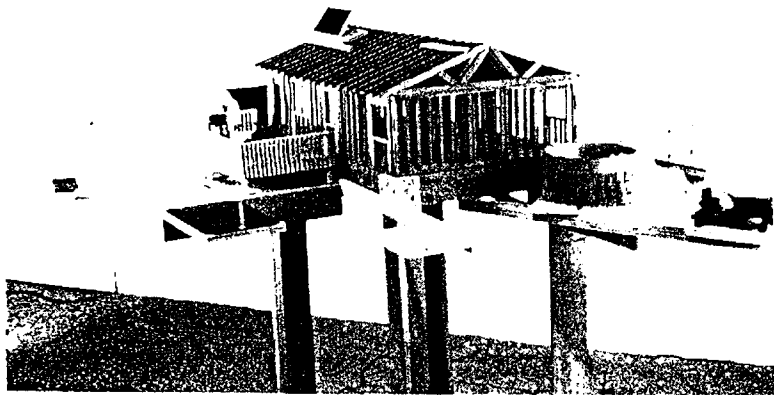
In Steven Brower's exhibition, "Downsize," scaled-down and meticulously hand-crafted sculptural installations could serve as paradigms for the limited expectations and diminished returns of our modern times.

Pine Valley Orchard Manner served as the thematic center of the exhibition. Starting with an unfinished dollhouse bought for \$20 at a flea market, the artist added a garage, shed, basketball court, platform deck, satellite dish, greenhouse, swimming pool, doghouse, birdhouse, birdbath, lawn mower, and patio furniture. These extensions, manufactured from memory with improvised materials, have transformed the dollhouse into a perverse distortion of the suburban idyll, a sort of "Home Improvement" gone awry. As well, the renovations are only for public display. A closer look into the house's unfinished, even dilapidated, interior reveals a loss of privacy and inner life that, the artist implies, is the price of success.

Architectural tropes echoed throughout the exhibition. Included in Brower's industrious interventions were a cut-out and "build-your-own" Tower of Babel, a prison made from a tool box, and an escape hatch formed out of stacked buckets. A model of Frank Lloyd Wright's Robie House fabricated from a Domino's Pizza box titled *You Are What You Eat* alluded to that pizza-chain owner's obsession with Wright and right-wing causes, while subtly reminding hungry viewers of the consequences of their consumption.

The artist's evident pleasure in building and making paid homage to the continued viability of the work ethic. At times this working-class perspective lent a nostalgic flavor that somewhat obscured the critical thrust of the exhibition. Yet when joined with personal meaning, as in *Armoire/Locker*, Brower's ironic commentary was balanced by heartfelt emotion. In this piece, a wood cabinet displayed a set of humorously dysfunctional tools, reduced in scale and customized to fit the artist's needs. Calling attention to the distinctions made between art and work, fine art and craft, this cabinet embodied both the aspirations and struggle of the contemporary artist. Frankly acknowledging the disparity between ambition and reality, practicality and daydream, life and art, and operating within the fractured dissonance of obsessive desire and frustrated optimism, Brower proved with this engaging debut that making do with less can lead to more.

SUSAN M. CANNING



STEVEN BROWER

Pine Valley Orchard Manner, 1995. Wood, plastic, metal, paint, dimensions variable. Photo courtesy of Lombard-Freid Fine Arts.