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A Dollhouse for Adults Opens at Friedman Benda

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By Hannah Martin

"Blow Up," a human-scale dollhouse decorated by *PIN-UP* magazine's Felix Burrichter and Charlap Hyman & Herrero, is no small feat.



"How about this for scale?" *PIN-UP* editor Felix Burrichter asks me. He's holding a giant plastic

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spoon to his mouth, pretending to eat a ceramic faux pastry. The childlike act is fitting, considering that he's walking me through an almost-human-scale dollhouse—constructed and decorated with the help of firm *Charlap Hyman Herrero* —for "Blow Up," a show Burrichter guest-curated for the New York gallery Friedman Benda.

The project, hatched in the summer of 2017, started as a contemplation of just that: scale. "I realized that all designers are thinking about it," Burrichter explains. "And most of them start out working with models." But it was a studio visit with Brooklyn-based Katie Stout that solidified the concept: "She said, 'You know I made a dollhouse for my RISD graduation project?'" he recalls. The framework of the dollhouse encapsulated the concept perfectly. Why not blow an idealized miniature world up to human scale?



In the bedroom, a bed by Jonathan Trayte is covered in a blanket by Oona Brangam-Snell. A cabinet by Gaetano Pesce is in the corner.

Photo: Timothy Doyon

Burrichter, who grew up with the Sindy House (the poster child of the exhibit), explains: "It's meant to be the perfect home—a model domestic model teaching kids—mostly girls, it's very gendered—how to keep a perfect home. I thought it would be interesting to examine what kind of value—what kind of wrong value—we embed in furniture."

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As soon as the dollhouse concept was on the table, an obvious collaborator came to mind: Adam Charlap Hyman of firm Charlap Hyman & Herrero, whose paper and gouache models of Yves Saint Laurent and Pierre Berge's *Rue de Babylone apartment* wowed attendees of the Chicago Architecture Biennial in 2017. Charlap Hyman took the concept to a new level. By painting books, widow treatments, moldings, throw pillows, rugs, a fireplace, kitchen wares, and more in watercolors, blowing them up to human scale, printing them on vinyl, and applying them to cardboard, he created all the bits and pieces that make a house a home. In doing so, he evolved this show about scale into a show about context: When placed into faux versions of real rooms, furnishings took on different meanings.



For the nursery, Soft Baroque created a revolving crib in walnut, and Wentrcek Zebulon cut a cushy nursing sofa out of foam.

Photo: Timothy Doyon

"That Gaetano Pesce cabinet has never looked more like a sock drawer," observes Burrichter as he inspects the Italian design legend's *Felt Cabinet*, which stands next to a molding-clad doorway in the pale pink bedroom. And he's right: Placed inside a sweet pink room with Jonathan Trayte's curlicue steel bed and a trompe l'oeil night stand, lamp, and window framed in even sweeter floral curtains, the usually-radical Pesce creation becomes somehow, ordinary—domesticated. The same goes for Sam Stewart's weird, skirted breakfast table that slides off the wall in the quintessential linoleum

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kitchen, or those oversize spoons and forks by Chen Chen and Kai Williams, laid on a simple oak table by table by Luca Cipelletti and surrounded by Stout's pudgy oak dining chairs.

"It's a show about domestic typologies," Burrichter explains. "I was thinking: What chair looks the most like a chair? That's what a dollhouse is like. It's never a weird chair or a cantilever chair. It always has four legs. It's almost archaic, typological." The space reads like that too: There's a kitchen, a bedroom, a nursery, a living room, a dining room. "There's almost no ambiguity in the components, but when you look closer there's a lot of weirdness happening."



A Campana Brothers bubble-wrap chair, a Wendell Castle Cloud desk, a Leon Ransmeier aluminum lounge, and Sarah Ortmeyer paintings in the library.

Photo: Timothy Doyon

Much of that "weirdness" is thanks to Charlap Hyman's set dressings: a copy of André Gide's subversive *Corydon*, tucked away in the desk drawer; the chainsaw in the top shelf of the kitchen; the copy of *PIN-UP* in the fireplace; the spilled ashes of his friend Cynthia Talmadge on the mantel. "I made that when we were in a fight," he jokes. "We're good now."

Throughout the house, items from the 1970s and '80s—when so many Postmodernists updated the normal and old-fashioned by tweaking proportions or material (think: Robert Venturi's cartoonish Queen Anne Chair)—are thrown in with works by emerging and established contemporary talents, a nod to the sort of nostalgia that Burrichter thinks has set in on the current generation.

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In the dining room, chairs by Katie Stout are pulled up to a table by Luca Cipelletti, covered in ceramic pastries by Larry Randolph and oversize flatware by Chen Chen and Kai Williams. Photo: Timothy Doyon

In the living room, a pair of steel mesh sofas by Shiro Kuramata from 1986 ("Talk about the quintessential sofa," says Burichter. "It's like a cartoon") surround a slick hot pink table by Odd Matter, while a balloony Misha Kahn mirror hangs over the faux fireplace. In the library, an oversized Cloud desk by Wendell Castle is paired with a waxed pine chair by BNAG, plucked from the set of the children's show *Teletubbies*. In the kitchen a 1988 prototype by Wolfgang Laubersheimer for the Pentagon Group stands kitty-corner to Sam Stewart's burl-walnut table, which Burrichter describes as "breakfast table meets Persian woman."

Everywhere you look, there's an element of the surreal: the strange telephones of Camille Henrot, the cardboard art pieces (all imagined works by Modernist painters of Noguchi playgrounds), the faux throw pillows, the melting ceramic clock and nightstand by Woody De Othello, the fake food. In this dollhouse—not unlike our uncertain times—the real and the fake are almost indistinguishable.

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In the trompe l'oeil kitchen, a 1988 prototype by Wolfgang Laubersheimer for the Pentagon Group is topped with ceramic chicken carcasses by Larry Randolph.

Photo: Timothy Doyon

"My watercolors actually look less like doll things than the furniture," observes Charlap Hyman.

"The Kuramata sofas are so small. The Castle desk is so big. It really looks like this ham-fisted little child putting together this room with whatever things they had."

But that blurred line of reality is something we're getting used to. Burrichter, at least, seems to be. As I'm about to leave the gallery, he emerges from the kitchen: "Sorry, I was in the living room," he says with a laugh. "I keep having to remind myself it's not *actually* a living room."