

GALERIE MARIA BERNHEIM

Denis Savary

Ithaca

January 15 - February 27, 2021

Denis Savary knows that art is a territory without limits or dimensions. Once again for this exhibition, he makes ghosts appear. The name of the exhibition Ithaca refers to the American city home to the famous and liberal Cornell University, one of the main areas of development of the American film industry, which owes its name to the dreamed homeland of Odysseus.

Three disproportionately large dollhouses are displayed on antique rugs, based on models of very common houses, a typical Swiss Villa. They seem pushed to the limit of their stability, revealing the weakness and the narrowness of their original suburbs, like those cut out by Gordon Matta Clark. Their intentional blandness lets through glimpses of strange interior scenes, forcing the viewer to approach them cautiously. Their dimensions, the meticulousness of their structures and the effects of distortion open them to our interpretation; simultaneously art historical and literary references come through, a room is plastered with a wallpaper based on Marcel Duchamp, who painted a reduced version of the "Nude descending a staircase" for the dollhouse of one of his collectors. One thinks of Robert Gober, whom Denis Savary had already evoked a few years ago, when he appropriated the gallery owner's doll house, realizing a full exhibition as an extension of this work in a space whose architecture echoed it (La Villa, villa Bernasconi 2010), publishing as the only exhibition catalog views of the interior of this dollhouse. These new sculptures also recall early videos by Savary that seemed to be shot from the window of his family home, located on the outskirts of a small town with no specific quality.

The houses appear to be the center of a system. Although empty, the houses are also possible spaces of condensation of our mental images. They accumulate a proximal strangeness. We get lost in them. We project ourselves into them. We could even lock ourselves in them. Suddenly we notice that they all already have a domed room with a closed off window, they suddenly become less hospitable, feeding our nightmares. They take us behind the sharp diagonals of the decor of Dr. Caligari's office. Perhaps these houses are writhing with pain. Maybe they crack all over like haunted houses. What is certain is that they are by no means peaceful resting places for dolls in their Sunday best.

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As always in Savary's exhibitions and narratives, the stories intersect. These flayed houses become more opaque. Fiction intrudes into the interstices of the vernacular. Banality solidifies itself. Mystery gains a disconcerting stability. There is no key, no barrier. We have to make do with our own library, be content with our own references. Denis Savary has never been to Ithaca, but in this city that formed so many intellectuals and artists and that the cinema industry thought of as its first capital, this city is also ours.

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