

GAGOSIAN GALLERY

Whiteread exhibit dwells in domestic affairs

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From across the Museum of Fine Arts' Foster Gallery, "Amber Floor" looks like a dirty Slip 'N Slide.

Upon closer inspection, the orange strip, fashioned by British sculptor Rachel Whiteread and now lying at our feet and bending to meet the white gallery wall, bears the outlines of floorboards and whorls of woodgrain. This is the translucent rubber fossil of a rough-hewn and well-worn corridor, the space just above the space between some living room and some bedroom, a slice of the everyday made thick, visible and weirdly flexible.

Whiteread, whose work appears in an exhibit that opened yesterday at the MFA and runs through Jan. 25, does not work with moments frozen in time but with years and decades. When she appropriates other people's work, it is not merely the work of those who designed and manufactured the ordinary objects she casts or arranges, but also that of the unknown homeowners and apartment dwellers who performed the long, slow work of using these things, living with them and leaving traces of life all over them.

"Circle" is a riddle - a solid, colorless slab bearing straight ridges and mysterious round shapes. The former suggest corrugated cardboard; the latter, an impression left behind by heavy bowls or jars, and then cast in relief - a ghost of a ghost of moving day.

Leaning idly against nearby walls, "In-Out-VI" and "Double Doors II (A+B)" are molded doors turned uneasily inside-out.

Chiefly known for her plaster casts of closets, rooms and whole houses, Whiteread takes on her domestic concerns from a different angle - not to mention a considerably different scale - in the installation "Place (Village)."

Culled from secondhand stores and eBay, the couple hundred dollhouses that make up the latest and largest incarnation of “Place (Village)” vary in architectural style, craftsmanship and condition. Many share familiar floor plans, plenty betray their origin in mass-produced kits, but all of them bear witness to the varied circumstances of their creation and the aspirations of their owners.

Some interiors are swathed in delicately detailed wallpapers with doll-sized patterns, others in leftover scraps of human-sized interior decorating. Some front doors are framed with painted ivy. Other exteriors extend into gracious verandas, gated yards, garages, greenhouses and widows’ walks. One tiny house is whitewashed and unadorned, its windows yielding a David Lynch-like glimpse of black-and-white flooring and a wisp of threadbare curtain.

Tiny fixtures within each structure provide the only lighting. A few of the smallest are mounted on the walls like house-shaped sconces. The resulting shadows and silhouettes lend these motley neighborhoods a tenuous, twilighted unity that would vanish in the unlikely event of sunrise.