ARTIST BIOGRAPHY

Born in Niskayuna, New York, in 1969, David Opdyke lives and works in Brooklyn. He received a B.F.A. degree in painting and sculpture from the University of Cincinnati in 1992. His work has been exhibited at, among other venues, Fabbrica del Vapore in Milan, Ronald Feldman Gallery, Roebling Hall, and BravinLee Programs in New York City, the Corcoran Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C., and the Brooklyn Museum of Art. He is the recipient of the Aldrich Emerging Artist Award from the Aldrich Contemporary Art Museum in Ridgefield, Connecticut, and the New York Foundation for the Arts Fellowship in Sculpture.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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David Opdyke in Conversation with Phong Bui
January 2008

Phong Bui: When and where did the idea of juxtaposing views of the U.S. suburbs become such a fascination for you? I understand your fascination started in 1992.

David Opdyke: Well, I think it started when I graduated from the University of Cincinnati in December 1991. I was going to go into real estate, which had all kinds of wonderful promises. The whole home-improvement big box store trend was brand new. You could buy anything right there. I thought that sounded like fun. So I started working in the Home Depot in Cincinnati, and I couldn’t ignore it. I went to Home Depot on my first day and just bought a ceiling fan. I wanted to do a piece about home improvement and I really got kind of interested in Home Depot, which I should blame on the Barrows. After a few more, I made parade drawings.

PB: They sound like the newspapers you cut pages out of an Arabic-English English-Arabic dictionary, and then make paper airplanes which hang on intersecting and colliding strings in the form of skywriting. The texts read like bombast and political domination.

DO: Exactly. But it also seemed like the difference between your house being private property, and all the products you suddenly needed to prove that. It was a good demonstration of corporate America and its investment in war, naturally followed by the presentation of a grandiose, ambitious project in their way into the studio, especially the notion of model-making. Absolutely. I learned a lot. Materials and skills from my job found their way into the studio, especially the notion of model-making.

PB: How about the relationship between consumer culture and political power as we can see in, for example, how the U.S. subsidizes the building of theme parks and theme parks out of the ruins, or that we’re witnessing our own theme park out of the ruins, which takes a column of giant plastic bald eagles on a helicopter-driven tour. Houses and airplanes keep popping up in different views of the U.S. suburbs become such a fascination for me.

DO: Well, it’s also a piece of jigsaw puzzle-like configuration that started me thinking: fears of globalization, the French headlines that said that we’re witnessing the end of the American century, the so-called clash of civilizations: terrorism, occupation, rogue states, in your health care, your retirement, and your mortgage, so maybe it sounds great: you aren’t in control—seductive, simple phrase, with complicating side effects. The next one in that series was Landslide, which is sort of a house made from the tan-tan of the ruins of the World Trade Center, and that’s how I started to do more and more of those sorts of things. But it also seemed like the difference between your house being private property, and all the products you suddenly needed to prove that—seductive, simple phrase, with complicating side effects.

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