*Erin Curtis, Model Drawing for Tabletop Sculpture, 2007*

# ART ♛ PALACE

## Tabletop Sculpture
by Amanda Douberley

1.  See Carol Herselle Krinsky, *Gordon Bunshaft of Skidmore, Owings & Merrill* (New York: The Architectural History Foundation and Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 1988), p. 182.
2.  This statement more or less sums up the subject of my dissertation, "The Corporate Model: Sculpture, Architecture, and the American City, 1954—1969."
3.  For more on contemporary sculpture fabrication, see Patsy Craig, ed., *Making Art Work: Mike Smith Studio* (London: Trolley Ltd., 2003) and Mia Fineman, "Looks Brilliant on Paper. But Who, Exactly, Is Going to Make It?" *The New York Times* 7 May 2006.
4.  Susan Stewart, *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1993), p. 65. Stewart's book, but especially her chapter on the miniature, has influenced much of my thinking about this exhibition.
5.  Rosalind E. Krauss discusses this notion in her oft-cited essay, "Sculpture in the Expanded Field," in *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths* (Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 1985). First published in *October* 8 (Spring 1979).
6.  The distinction between size and scale articulated here is based on the artist Michael Heizer's discussion of the terms in an interview with Julie Brown in *Michael Heizer: Sculpture in Reverse* (Los Angeles: The Museum of Contemporary Art, 1984).
7.  See Thomas de Monchaux, "Bunshaft House Demolished," *The Architect's Newspaper*, 22 August 2005. The 1963 Travertine House on Long Island was willed to the Museum of Modern Art in 1994 along with Bunshaft's art collection. MoMA sold the house to Martha Stewart, whose botched renovation job eventually led to demolition of the house by new owners.

## Tabletop Sculpture

Richie Budd, Hunter Cross, Bill Davenport, Katalin Hausel, Mark Schatz, and Jared Steffensen
Exhibition Design: Erin Curtis
Exhibition Curator: Amanda Douberley
July 14 - Aug 22, 2007
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Wed 7-9 • Sat 12-5

It seems the simplest way to introduce "Tabletop Sculpture" is by way of a photograph, of mid-century architect Gordon Bunshaft's living room.[1] I cannot reproduce it here, so I will try to describe it for you: On one side of the frame, there is a low white sofa. In the back, right-hand corner, an Eames lounge chair. At the center of the image hangs a large tapestry by Pablo Picasso, which is flanked by a couple of small, late Surrealist paintings. But outnumbering all of these things, covering nearly every available surface, the room brims with a type of object one wouldn't necessarily expect to encounter in such profusion, at least not in a collector's home today: Bunshaft's living room is full of sculpture. There are ancient near Eastern sculptures, ancient Mesoamerican sculptures, ancient Mediterranean sculptures, and ancient sculptures from everywhere in between—but there are also sculptures by twentieth-century artists, including Henry Moore and Jean Dubuffet. All of these artworks are relatively small. Many rest on petite rectangular blocks or else sit directly on the furniture, from a long, narrow sideboard to a low glass coffee table. Some are cast metal while others are made of stone, ranging in color from white to polished bronze to a soft green patina or a dull grey. The mix of ancient and contemporary art is typical of a high modernist sensibility prevalent at the time. Yet, more pertinent to this exhibition than the architect's eclectic taste are the tiny sculptures by Moore and Dubuffet. Unlike their ancient counterparts, they are not autonomous objects, but small-scale models of larger works.

Bunshaft was among the first architects to include monumental sculptures in his building projects. Beginning in the mid-1950s, many of the corporate skyscrapers, cultural centers, and suburban business campuses designed by Bunshaft featured colossal sculptures created by so-called "modern masters" of the twentieth-century. These commissions led to a proliferation of large-scale sculptures across the United States after the establishment of the National Endowment for the Arts' Art in Public Places program during the late 1960s.[2] Bunshaft is responsible for Isamu Noguchi's *Red Cube* (1968) at Marine Midland Bank in Manhattan, Moore's *Reclining Figure* (1964) at Lincoln Center, and Dubuffet's *Group of Four Trees* (1972) at Chase Manhattan Bank, among many other commissions. For all of these projects, the model was an initial step in a long process: experimentation to arrive at a preliminary form for the work; consultation with the commissioning institution or individual for approval of the design; fabrication of the sculpture—usually by an outside contractor—with any necessary adjustments made along the way, including engineering problems, wind tunnel tests, and finding the right proportions at a large scale; transportation of the massive completed object via flatbed truck; and installation, often with the help of a crane, of the finished sculpture.[3]

If the model is a place to test ideas, to work out problems, and to dream; a way to sell a project and to gain a commission; a

device to communicate with a fabricator or foundry; it can also be one object among many others, as is the case with my photograph of Gordon Bunshaft's living room. In this context, the model might be considered a miniature, and the dreams associated with it take on an entirely different character from the planning of a larger sculpture. As literary critic Susan Stewart has observed, "the reduction in scale which the miniature presents skews the time and space relations of the everyday lifeworld, and as an object consumed, the miniature finds its 'use value' transformed into the infinite time of reverie." The active potential of the model as projection, as device, is tempered by the miniature's provocation of a state of idle contemplation. Looking at this photograph, I wonder: Did Gordon Bunshaft sit on his white couch and imagine himself striding through Dubuffet's model? Or lying down beside Moore's reclining figure? Or was the model simply a token of these larger projects, a stand-in for work that could not be contained within the collector's living room? Perhaps all of these notions are true. Perhaps I am an historian taking liberties with the past by imagining these things. Regardless, within my own reverie lies the kernel of this exhibition.

"Tabletop Sculpture" brings together small works by six artists who work in large-scale sculpture and installation. None of these artists has made a sculpture in need of a flatbed truck for transportation, but they all make big things—objects at, or larger than, life size. The parameters for this exhibition were to produce an object, roughly twelve-by-twelve inches, that could stand on a flat surface, such as a shelf or tabletop. Some of these objects are models for unrealized projects, while others are models made after the fact, or miniatures; still other works have no relationship with a big idea whatsoever. Therefore the exhibition addresses process only up to a point, leaving room for imaginary journeys and a certain amount of ambiguity concerning what counts as a model and what might be something else entirely.

In this regard, **Mark Schatz** and **Bill Davenport** can be taken as polar opposites: Schatz is a model-maker, while Davenport is not. Davenport says he gave it a go once, but found the finished installation so radically different from his meticulous scale model, he deemed the experiment a waste of time. Today he makes drawings to plot his installations but remains interested in the tactile quality of small-scale objects, which were a mainstay of his practice until opportunities arose to create larger work. Combining found objects, everyday materials such as plywood, and clay, Davenport crafts somewhat abject sculptures that, paradoxically, draw attention to the handmade characteristics of his detailed carved foam installations, which are faux-painted to resemble architectural details. Schatz, on the other hand, creates precise models for his sculptures, which are often professionally fabricated. He, too, works with foam (Davenport has used polystyrene insulation board, Schatz Styrofoam) to produce freestanding works that mimic everyday objects. "Tabletop Sculpture" features maquettes for two sculptures realized at their full scale, including *Monument to Fatigue* (2006), a stack of carved Styrofoam moving boxes currently on view at Arthouse in Austin.

Another pair of contrasts: **Jared Steffensen**'s models after the fact—or miniature versions—related to older work, and **Hunter Cross**'s model for a speculative project not yet executed at full scale. The model can be a template as well as a stand-in for, or reminder of, a temporary installation. Steffensen has made such installations in friends' current homes, which replicate the environments of their hometowns. For one friend from Hawaii, the artist created a beach; for another from Maine, a forest. The wish that we might take familiar surroundings with us as we move from place to place, which these installations articulate, is furthered in the miniature versions Steffensen made for "Tabletop Sculpture"—unlike the works they reference, the miniatures are inherently portable. While Steffensen looks back, Cross looks forward. *Cornucopian Tubes* (2007) is a scale model for an artificial environment comprised of seven cone-shaped cylinders tinted blue. Each tube is a comfort zone meant to be occupied by a single viewer, as demonstrated by the tiny person inserted into the maquette. Cross's presentation model was 3D printer-manufactured in plastic, a material that symbolizes both abundance and waste for the artist, whose fascination with contemporary industrial capabilities is tempered by his skepticism regarding their real benefits. In miniature, *Cornucopian Tubes* offers a transcendent perspective of installation art that is often physically encompassing at its full scale and at times difficult to visualize as a whole. Whereas an installation can be occupied and experienced in real time and space, however, the model tends toward tableau, arrested time and stillness.

Through its relationship with the miniature, we might also find a link between the model and the toy. Here the work mode of the model-as-template is transformed into play; the pure opticality of the model-as-tableau into physical engagement through digital manipulation. **Richie Budd** uses found objects in small sculptures that encourage us literally to "toy" with his work. Budd creates multi-sensory experiences by appealing to sight, sound, taste, touch and smell with his work, which he hopes will make a strong enough impression to impact the viewer's future memory. Budd's sculptures are a mix of home electronics, Cheetos encased in plastic globes, bones, and more all held together by hot glue. The telephone, Caller-ID, light bulb, and tape recorder embedded in *Creepin' Deep in Ava's Leaps* (2007) actually function, but in combination also are rendered as just so many gadgets with buttons and switches to press, and then watch to see what happens. This temptation to play with Budd's sculpture exacerbates the tension within the entire exhibition between the eye and the hand, between imaginary journeys and physical interaction.

The eye-hand dichotomy is essentially a function of distance, or the actual space between viewer and object. The model can narrow this gap by offering a transcendent perspective of large-scale sculpture, as well as a small version of larger work that can be physically contained, but it does not close off the ideological gap implied by the logic of the monument. Perhaps all sculpture, but especially large-scale sculpture, has a distinct connection to the monument.[5] Schatz's *Monument to Fatigue* makes an overt reference to this relationship, while **Katalin Hausel** takes a more oblique approach with *Spread* (2007). She uses texts in temporary, environmental installations to reflect on politics and the social realm. For "Tabletop Sculpture," Hausel presents a container filled with letters that spell out a quotation from a recent issue of *Artforum*. In one sense, this box could represent a gallery space, which Hausel has packed with letters in the past. Yet, the container's oblong shape reads more like a tomb, and her model on the whole as an indoor monument. Although *Spread* can be moved—while the monument is traditionally rooted to a specific place—the sculpture maintains something of the monument's stately grandeur, even at a less than monumental size. Here the difference between size and scale seems particularly relevant: while size is actual, scale is an aesthetic measurement.[6]

Questions about scale implied by Hausel's work are taken up by the exhibition as a whole. Installation designer **Erin Curtis** decided to create a mid-century modern interior at two-thirds scale, effectively transforming the gallery space into a scale model of a living room that is, at the same time, habitable. Curtis employs paintings on canvas, architectural elements, and trompe l'oeil effects within her larger practice to skew space in environmental installations. She regularly uses old house and garden magazines as source material, translating photographs into her own artistic vocabulary and enlarging combinations of images into mural-size paintings stapled directly to the wall. Curtis has adopted a similar strategy for "Tabletop Sculpture." But, in addition to mining old photographs, she also references the actual space outside of Art Palace in her paintings of the view from two invented floor-to-ceiling windows. Curtis brings Mark Schatz's *Untitled Landscape Device* (2005), which occupies the gallery's front yard, into her landscape view, combining this sculpture with another, historical reference to Ludwig Mies van der Rohe's Barcelona Pavilion.

The living room in the gallery brings us full circle to the photograph with which I began this essay. As is the case with Bunshaft's living room and the models in it, the installation at Art Palace Gallery creates a space for Davenport, Schatz, Steffensen, Hausel, Budd and Cross's tabletop sculptures to take on new meanings and associations. Fantasy, reverie and imaginary journeys all come to be possible, along with some notion of these artists's process in plotting their larger work. But also much like Bunshaft's house, which was demolished just a few years ago, Curtis's living room installation won't outlast this exhibition.[7] It will, however, persist in a model.