GALLERY HOPPING

BY CID REYES

PRIVATE AS THOUGHT

Achingly empty of human presence, the interiors of Rene Robles' works are nonetheless animated by psychic activity, as perceived – and sensed – by the viewer.

Rene Robles trains a searching eye on commonplace objects—objects that, through his concentration and seeming obsession, transform into aesthetic puzzles. The one object in which the artist has found the most emotional and psychological resonance is the chair—an unprepossessing piece of furniture whose noble function is to carry the weight of its occupant, to release him from the exhausting pull of gravity.

Artists have accorded the chair the highest honors by portraying it in their art, investing it with dignity and decorum while, in turn, its palpable presence in an interior remains an imperturbable enigma.

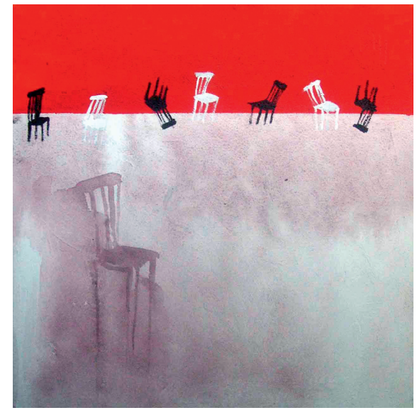
Who can forget Van Gogh's chair in that yellow room in Arles? In Vuillard's "Child in a Room," a chair towers over a child at play. Rauschenberg created a multimedia work entitled "Surroundings," a silkscreen of multiple images of chairs. But it is in sculpture where the chair has been turned into a scared and secretive object. Sculptors as diverse as Giacomo Manzu, Miro, Christo, Lucas Samaras and Edward Kienholz have transformed the chair into an object of meditation, a worthy seat of wisdom.

How are the chairs dispersed in space? The talent for placement is critical. The object sinks into its predestined place and enacts its own internal drama. A solitary chair assumes an excruciating introspection, as though reminiscing a life of brief encounters with countless anonymous sitters. Was there even a glimmer of intimacy in that momentary embrace? Robles positions two chairs with just the right, measured distance between them, and all at once we hear a dialogue never concluded, an argument unresolved, ending with the imperious walkout of the two antagonists. An image of multiple tables and chairs explodes as though atomic particles had been sent flying in air.

Achingly empty of human presence, the interiors of Robles are nonetheless animated by psychic activity, as perceived – and sensed – by the viewer. The artist places us in a space which both our eyes and mind are reluctant to enter, so resonant of evocations of our anxious life: a sense of abandonment and an overpowering silence that does not equate to pleasurable solitude. To enter the space is tantamount to an intrusion of privacy. It seems the room will constrict at the merest sign of unwelcome presence. Certainly we are not part of the continuum of this room's existence. Our involuntary response is to flee, and yet so mesmerized are we by the disorientating perspectives that assail us: the four legs of a table awry, splayed in multi-lateral directions; the surface of the table itself is bereft and rejects all the bounty and riches of the still life tradition: no bread or jug of wine, no apples or oranges that would have delighted Cezanne. Instead, we are greeted by the objects dispersed through the space of a world turned upside down. Is the world in a state of collapse, and is this any way to welcome a guest? Only if we insist that the artist see the world the way we do.

You are always reminded of the constant presence of electric bulbs; the artificiality of light which at any moment can be so impetuously turned off. That energy of friction, that spark of anger that can plunge a friendship or marriage into utter darkness. We pay with pain when we have drunk from ecstasy.

A species of vision that partakes of its negation has been characterized as the aesthetics of absence. The various arts subscribe to this art of dematerialization, of loss, of evanescence. Ultimately, the artist reduces his vision into nothing more substantial than memory and thought, where final forms never emerge, or remain as fleeting as a glance.



EMPTY CHAIR.
(FROM TOP) "Eight Chairs", 2 x 2 feet, acrylic on canvas; "Light Bulb II", 19 x 25 inches, pastel on paper. (OPPOSITE PAGE) "Reflective Mood", 2009, 5 x 5 feet, acrylic on canvas.

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