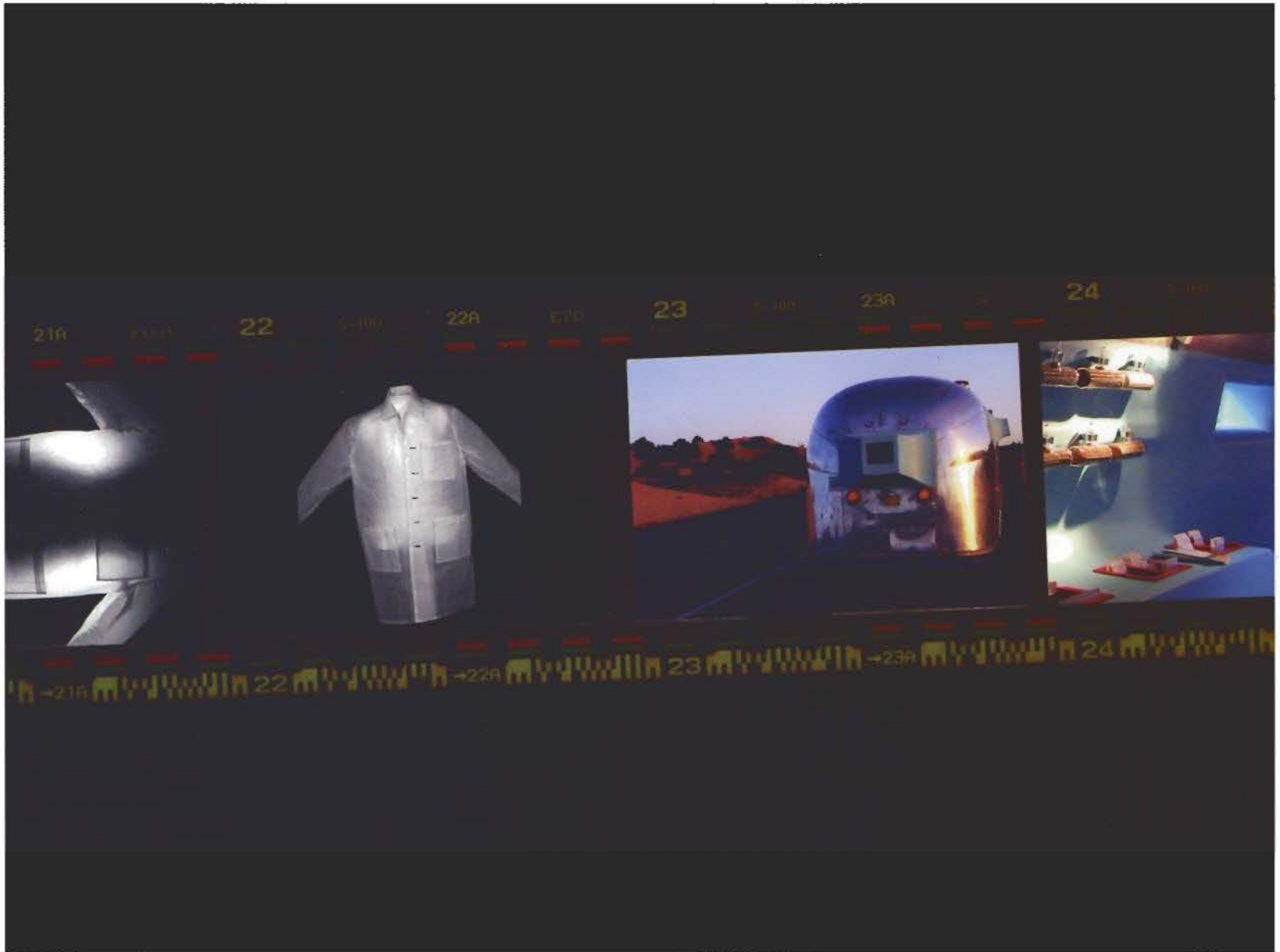


KATE CATTERALL & LOIS WEINTHAL

TRACES OF HOME



WOMEN & THEIR WORK

OCTOBER 3 - NOVEMBER 9, 2002

AUSTIN, TEXAS



Lois Weinthal, *House Coat #1*. Trace paper, thread.
2001 Size 8 (USA)

TRACES OF HOME

Home decor has been an expression of personal taste and economic standing since the dawn of history, but it was not until the time of William Morris (1834-1896) and his leadership of the British Arts and Crafts Movement that the domestic realm achieved new sociopolitical relevance. In response to rapid industrialization, Morris called for a return to a simpler way of life when utilitarian objects were hand-made and true to their materials. He viewed art as capable of changing society: interior surroundings of grace and integrity would foster behavior of equivalent virtue. More than a century later, artists Kate Catterall and Lois Weinthal explore this concept of the home as a source of individual identity by obscuring established boundaries between art, clothing, interior furnishings, architecture and design.

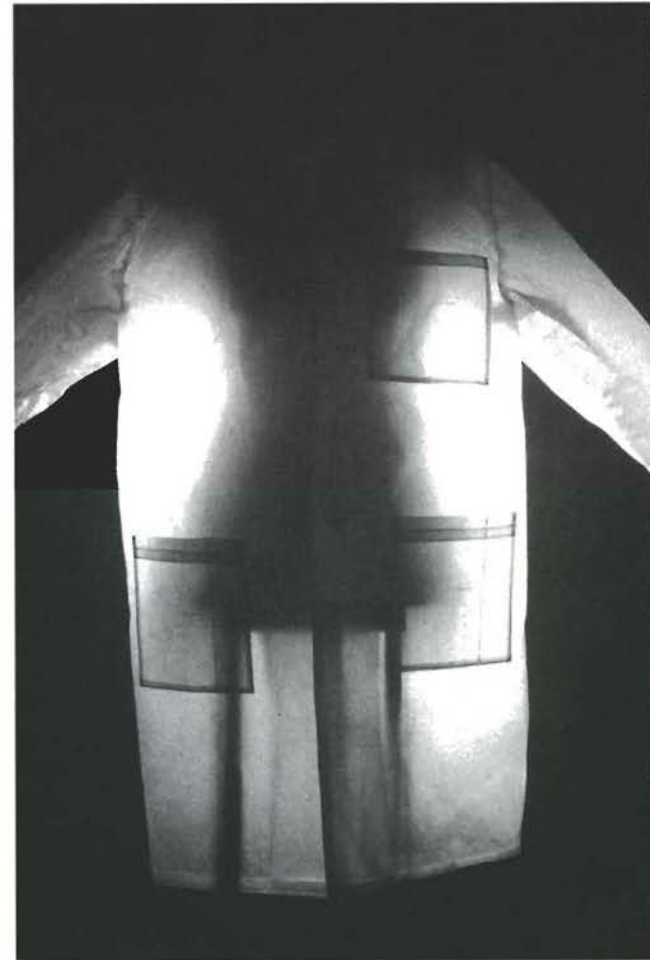
Irish-born Kate Catterall arrived in Texas in 1997 and soon thereafter procured a 1959 Airstream Travel Trailer, now known as *The Traveling Home*. The artist removed the trailer's vintage interior fixtures and replaced them with a pale, futuristic fiberglass form that more closely resembles a sculpture-turned-inside-out or the clinical interior of a space ship than it does a kitchen/living room combination. By "peeling away the habitual space of the home,"¹ Catterall compliments the trailer's streamlined exterior and enforces its connection to the machine age, and to that period's trademark belief in the boundless power of humankind. The artist added three windows; the pane at the trailer's front is perforated by a monitor displaying footage of the Irish landscape. Thus, *The Traveling Home's* inhabitants encounter views of Europe framed by views of their current location. The immediate surrounds the remembered, like a windshield pierced by a movie screen. Because the vehicle is constantly moving to and through new landscapes, one image is ever changing and the other is of a far-away place, and both are visible from the familiar and relatively static confines of "home."

The concept of the artist/explorer in America dates to the days of the Western frontier and Catterall continues this lineage. European-born nineteenth century American landscape painters such as Albert Bierstadt and Thomas Moran traveled West in search of exotic subject matter, and then returned to the East Coast to the comfort and familiarity of their studios, where they translated and embellished their plein-air sketches into grand-scale paintings. These depictions fueled public excitement for this uncharted territory, giving birth to the myth of the West and the good life it represented. By the mid-twentieth century, after the shock and destruction of the World Wars, many

middle-class Americans were weary of foreign "adventures" and remained close to home. The suburbs represented the new utopia, one removed from urban blight and stress, and freed from the restrictions and crowds of public transportation. It was a time when the automobile and the shopping mall reigned supreme, and "hitting the road" for a family vacation was the pinnacle of entertainment and success.

The Traveling Home and its associated works allude to each of these elements of the American experience. Catterall shares Bierstadt's and Moran's European origins and fascination with the vast and rugged landscape west of the Mississippi. But Catterall's studio literally traverses

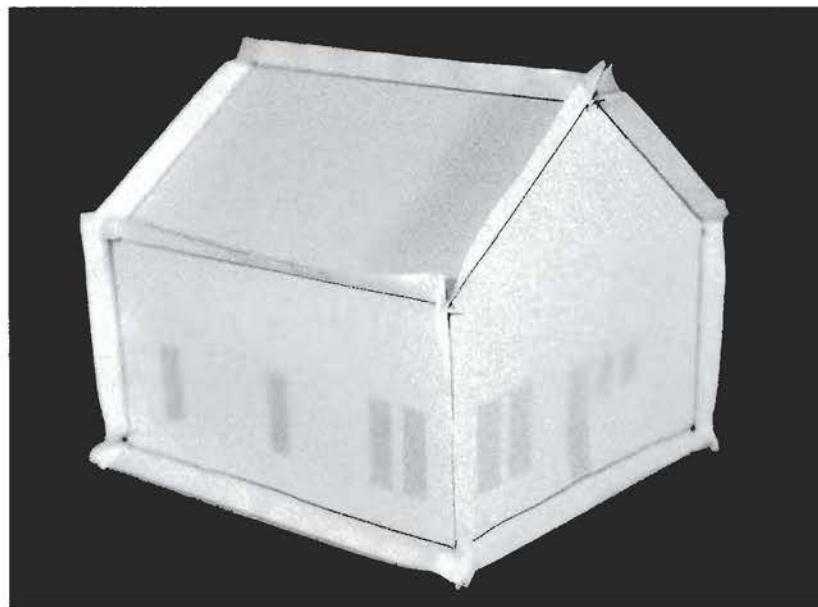
Lois Weinthal, *House Coat #1*. Trace paper, (backlit)
2001 Size 8 (USA)



her subject, like the wagon trains of the last century and the RVs of today. *The Traveling Home* also doubles as exhibition space, and a private realm becomes public and derives further conceptual depth from the artwork displayed within it. Each of Catterall's *Landscape Narrative: Landscape Paintings*, for example, is formatted to replicate the ubiquitous strips of sample colors marketed by contemporary paint supply retailers, connecting the recent home improvement craze with a well established painting genre. For *Landscape Narrative: Soil Samples*, Catterall fills Pyrex vessels with soil samples gathered from areas she visits in *The Traveling Home*. She then systematically stores them on its walls and open shelves. These specimens adorn domestic space, like trophies from unfamiliar lands and souvenirs of past adventures, ironic parallels to Moran's sketches. Catterall's art work is her mobile home and studio; the physical result of her artistic inquiry is also the space where she temporarily lives and works, and where she stretches William Morris' idea to new territory.

So did the teachers at the Bauhaus, a school founded by Walter Gropius in Germany in 1919 based on principles similar to, but more forward-thinking than, those put forth by the British Arts and Crafts Movement. The instructors at the Bauhaus embraced the capabilities of industry, and taught that weaving and ceramics shared equal ground with painting and color theory. Gropius emphasized the connection between art and daily life and stated, "No longer can anything exist in isolation. We perceive every form the embodiment of an idea, every piece of work as a manifestation of our innermost selves."²

Artist Lois Weinthal follows this theoretical trajectory by interchanging the creative practices of clothing design and architecture. For example, she constructs miniature houses from fabric and has used mylar, the plastic film used for architectural drawings, to fabricate one of her many *House Coats*. The coats' materials dictate their boxiness and angularity; the form of the body and sleeves are stiff rather than supple, and the seams between them recall the unmovable corners where two walls join. Each *Coat* provides a volumetric space within which the wearer resides.



Lois Weinthal, *Paper House*. Mylar, thread. 2002 8" x 8" x 9"

By applying the methods and materials of the tailor to that of the architect and vice versa, Weinthal raises our awareness of how interior space changes with human presence. Just as a piece of clothing hangs on a wearer, a painting or decoration hangs on a wall; the effectiveness and form of the covering is determined by that which it masks. In *Muslin Wallpaper*, Weinthal "dresses" door molding by covering it in fabric and, in her words, "seeks to bring the notations and construction of clothing to the surfaces that line the interior."

Weinthal's application of a fabric skin calls attention to the structure beneath: Her wallpaper reveals rather than conceals. In the drawing *Portrait of a Seated Coat*, an image of a chair serves as the skeletal inner structure for a seated, dressed figure in a comment both on the figurative quality of furniture and on the impact of a room's furnishings on its user's inner state. In an earlier piece, Weinthal cloaks a steel chair in protective muslin wings. The chair literally deconstructs to be a flat circle of fabric bifurcated by its metal frame, and serves as a floor covering that creates new terrain of the area it drapes.

Weinthal was trained as an architect and most of her work is three-dimensional. *Perspective Drawer Wall* is an exception. Here lines and areas of color compose geometric forms that together denote a piece of furniture. Weinthal reverses the concept of the Japanese *tansu*, sets of drawers custom-made to fit under a staircase and to become integral to the architecture. Antithetically, *Perspective Drawer Wall* is actually part of the wall but optically extends into the room and seems to occupy

volumetric space. In a reference to historical and contemporary site-specific wall murals, the artist overlays the implied depth of Veronese with that of Sol Le Witt. In *Drywall Drawings*, she draws on and carves into sheet rock to create a singular work that is simultaneously image and object, blurring the line between faux and actual dimension.

Both Catterall and Weinthal are fine artists who draw upon their backgrounds in design to construct environments and



Kate Catterall, *Traveling Home* - interior

sculptures that consider the import and metaphor of domestic space. Weinthal explores how interiors transform and are transformed by their contents, both human and inanimate. Catterall connects interior and exterior worlds in a trailer that she altered to be an artistic laboratory where work and leisure are intertwined, and where elements and images of the outdoors are recontextualized as conceptualized decor. Both

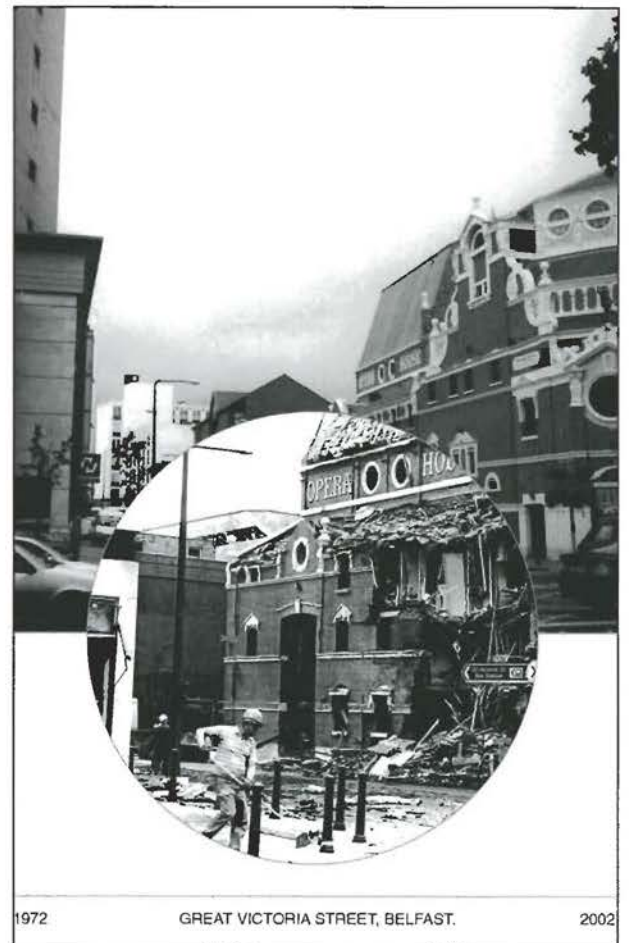
artists take a holistic approach that alludes to the history of art and design, and to the connection between domestic life and creative expression. They recognize the aesthetics of home eclipse the personal.

Kate Bonansinga
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 The University of Texas at El Paso

¹All artists comments are quoted from conversations with the author during the summer 2002.

²Walter Gropius, "The Theory and Organization of the Bauhaus," originally published in 1923 and reprinted in Herbert Bayer, et al., editors, *Bauhaus: Weimar 1919-25, Dessau, 1925-28* (Boston: Charles T. Branford Company, 1959), 20.

Kate Catterall, *Postcard Collapse: The erasure of time, history and memory in the urban landscape of Belfast, Northern Ireland. Great Victoria Street, Belfast. 1972-2002*

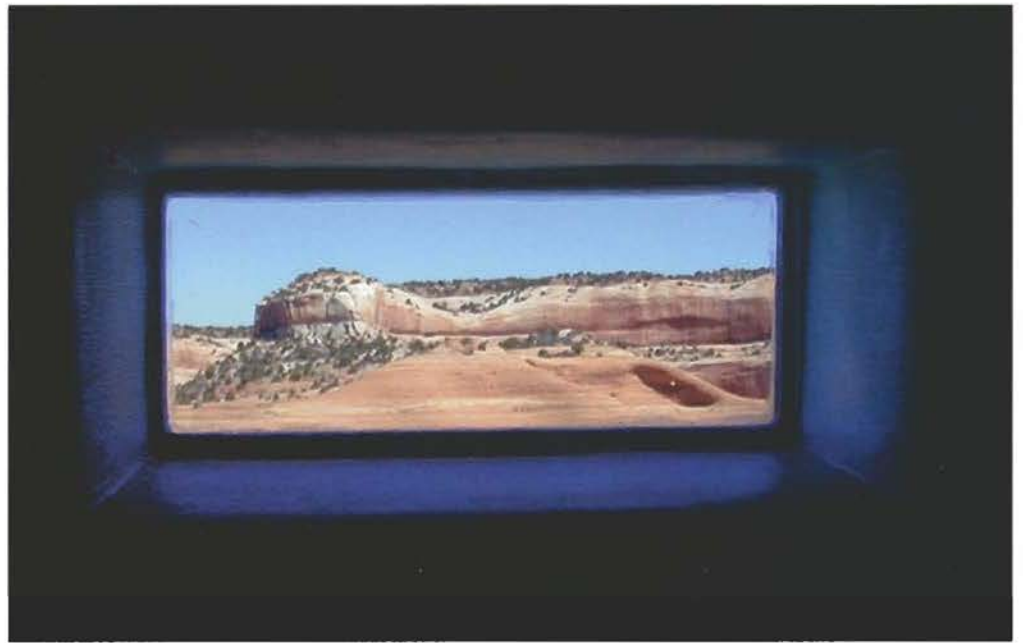


1972

GREAT VICTORIA STREET, BELFAST.

2002

Kate Catterall,
Traveling Home window view - Utah



Kate Catterall,
Traveling Home in New Mexico

Cover Panel: Lois Weinthal, *House Coat #1*. Trace paper, thread. 2001 Size 8 (USA)
Kate Catterall, *Traveling Home*: a laboratory for the study of the American Landscape. 2002.
The transformation of a 1959 Airstream travel trailer lab and installation space.
Back Panel: Lois Weinthal, *Portrait of House Coat Seated*. (Detail) 2002 Pencil on paper.



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