

ALLISON WIESE

Come To Find Out



WOMEN & THEIR WORK

JUNE 24 JULY 31, 2004

AUSTIN, TEXAS

ALLISON WIESE
Come to Find Out

INFUSING THE CITY WITH
THE COUNTRY

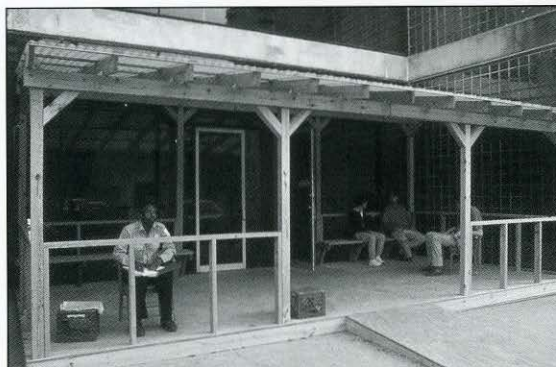
For her installation *Come to Find Out* Allison Wiese has filled the starchy confines of an urban art gallery with the dislocating aroma of the countryside. Entering the space flush from the noise and fumes of the city, visitors are confronted by bales of hay nestled against walls and staggered atop one another, creating an impromptu theater for sitting, watching, interacting, and performing. The sight is uncanny — familiar to city-dwellers in that it is a plaza for public interaction, but disconcerting because the arena is made out of straw rather than brick. In this work, as in others, Wiese draws out the similarities and tension between the urban and the rural.

Working with a wide range of media, Wiese has made a practice of inserting elements traditionally associated with country living into metropolitan art spaces. For *Porch* (2003) she built a temporary, old-fashioned wood and fiberglass portico onto the façade of the Glassell School of Art in Houston, Texas. Those entering the glassy modernist building first had to pass through the homey space Wiese superimposed over a concrete slab that usually welcomed people. This layering of an updated version of the old onto the decidedly new brought the two types of entryways into stark contrast, highlighting their similarities and differences. Both structures serve as portals — the one a rustic place encouraging pause and interaction, the other designed to harmonize with the building and to be passed through.

Initially this insertion, like Wiese's others, seems rife with a nostalgia that privileges the old (rural) over the new (urban). Yet Wiese's gestures are impermanent. Rather than bettering existing structures (plazas, porches) through enduring countrification, her temporary insertions amplify difference. They imply that, while the essence of our needs stays the same, the specifics are mutable. How we build structures to satisfy our desires changes according to place and over time. Rather than simply reversing the prevailing paradigm that places city life at the center and country living in the margins, Wiese's installations complicate the equation and romanticize neither.

In *Still No. 1* (2002), a home-made working whiskey still, Wiese reminds us that two realms often seen as opposing in fact have common denominators, and lie much closer than we lead ourselves to believe. In the work, a sexy copper tube runs from clean white buckets into a galvanized crock-pot through a modern camping cooler, finally resting in a mantle-perfect glass jug. This is not your grandpa's hooch. Absent are the ancient wooden barrels and rusty pipes one might expect. *Still No. 1* is a 21st century, Home Depot version. This hip, urban twist on the old standby

Porch, 2003, Construction at Glassell School of Art, Houston, TX.



suggests that, no matter where, when, or what is prohibited, people innovate in order to solve problems. This occurs in contemporary cities just as it did when alcohol was forbidden. Today's bootleggers are skateboarders who fashion provisional practice rinks in backyard swimming pools and graffiti artists who jump tracks and scale walls to practice their craft.

Wiese's recent work with hay palpably connects country with city, but lately she has further amplified this relationship by infusing city-sited art galleries with the ultimate signifier of country life: farm animals. For *Flock*, her contribution to a 2004 sculpture exhibition at Johns Hopkins University's Evergreen House in urban Baltimore, Maryland, the artist arranged to have a small herd of sheep graze on the institution's grounds for the duration of the show. Wiese's bold gesture insists that the contemporary art space's visitors and employees confront the sight, smell, sound, and feel of the agrarian life that exists for most people in the world, even while municipal streets and subways



become more crowded for the proportionally few. The piece proposes that the green spaces we do have left in cities are pregnant with possibilities.

While Wiese's works spotlight the agricultural present, they also bring forth apparitions from the past. The wood beams of *Porch* conjure up visions of the type of building that occupied the plot of the Glassell School a hundred years before artists walked through its doors. The re-fashioning of *Still No. 1* stimulates images of what a night on the town tasted like before the choice was between an ice-cold bottle of beer and one from the tap. *Flock's* live animals stir up ideas about who tended what on this Baltimore street before the urbanization and specialization of labor banished the need for each of us to raise our own food. Like palimpsests, Wiese's installations evoke what once was, and has since vanished.

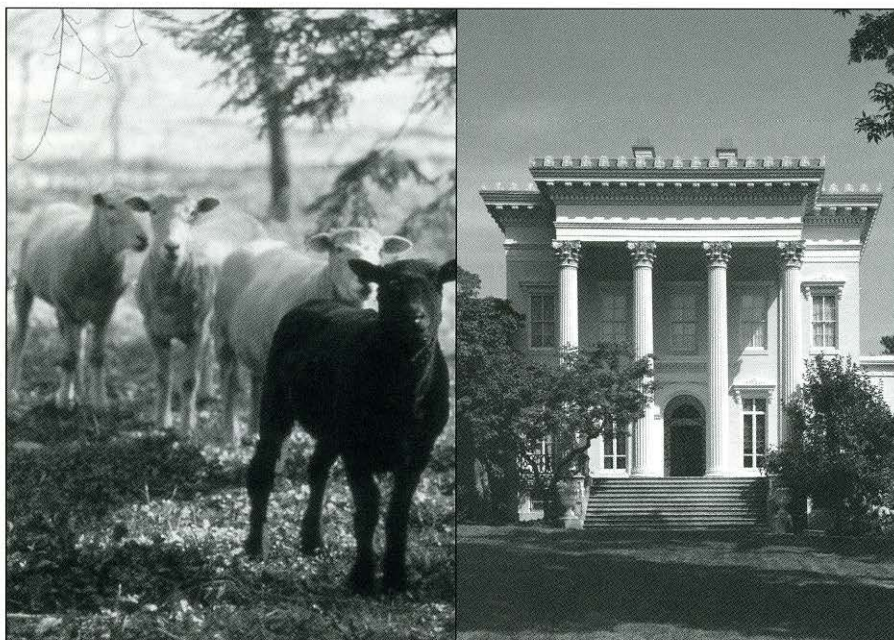
Wiese sees such imprints all over the city. Her initial proposal for *Women & Their*

Work developed out of ghosts she encountered near her home in downtown Houston. Not long ago she noticed the incongruous sight of a flock of chickens clucking around in a parking lot. With no roost or even backyard in sight, Wiese was perplexed by their insistent appearance. She asked around, and found out that several years previously houses had been razed from a nearby property that was their home. The chicks were the stubborn leftovers of history; they stayed around after the buildings and people had vanished, acting as an index of the past.

Instead of chicks in the gallery, for *Come to Find Out*, Wiese has populated *Women & Their Work* in Austin, Texas with the kind of golden straw that would make such farm animals feel right at home. Strangely, we, the urban gallery-goers, feel right at home too. Despite the initially jarring sight and smell of hay bales, the tiered set-up is familiar as the basic configuration of public squares in small towns and big cities all over the world.

Come to Find Out, like Wiese's other works, questions the assumed dichotomy between country and city, and suggests that essential requirements are the same in rural communities, (which Austin used to be,) as they are in urban ones. The structural strategies that evolve to satisfy these requirements (to have public social space, to find ways around restrictions) are the variables. Public squares, like the one Wiese has constructed, are places to sit, eat, and talk, but perhaps most importantly, to watch. Occasionally such central spaces are used for formal performances, but more often we use them to examine the drama of everyday life—to watch people in our city or town or village or neighborhood doing the same things we are: sitting, eating, talking, and watching others go by.

Kate Green
Associate Educational and
Curatorial Associate
Artpace
San Antonio, TX. 2004



Photographs by Will Kirk

Flock, Evergreen House. 2004, Baltimore, Maryland

ALLISON WIESE

Born in Brooklyn N.Y.
Resides in Houston, TX

EDUCATION

- 2000 M.F.A., Department of Visual Arts, University of California at San Diego, La Jolla, CA
1999 Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture, Skowhegan, ME
1991 B.A. with Honors in Visual Arts, Brown University, Providence, RI

SELECTED SOLO EXHIBITIONS

- 2004 *Come to Find Out*, Women & Their Work, Austin, TX
2003 *Hay Burner*, Lawndale Art Center, Houston, TX
2001 *Interventions: Flag and Folly*, Sushi Performance and Visual Arts, San Diego, CA
2000 *Gazing*, Herbert Marcuse Gallery, UCSD, La Jolla, CA
1998 *Splendors of the Quotidian*, VAF Gallery, UCSD, La Jolla, CA

SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS

- 2004 *The Salon Show*, Axix Salon, Houston, TX
Texas Prime, Diverse Works, Houston, TX
Sculpture at Evergreen, Evergreen House, Johns Hopkins University, Baltimore, MD
2003 *Site Specifics*, Dallas Center for Contemporary Art, Dallas, TX
Miniatures, Hooks-Epstein Gallery, Houston, TX
Core Exhibition 2003, Glassell School of Art, Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, TX
Plugged and Haunted, Pearl Mackey Apartments, MAK Center for Art & Architecture, Los Angeles, CA
Core Samples, Galveston Arts Center, Galveston, TX
2002 *Spring Sculpture Exhibition*, Connemara Conservancy, Dallas, TX
Core Exhibition 2002, Glassell School of Art, Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, TX
Round 1, Hooks-Epstein Gallery, Houston, TX
2000 *Faculty Exhibition*, Camino Gallery, University of San Diego, San Diego, CA
Trick Babies, VAF Gallery, UCSD, La Jolla, CA
1999 *Spaced Out*, Herbert Marcuse Gallery, UCSD, La Jolla, CA
Camouflage, L.C. Bates Museum of Natural History, Good Will-Hinckley School, Hinckley, ME
1998 *Annual Juried Exhibition*, Athenaeum Music and Arts Library, La Jolla, CA
Circus Momentous, VAF Gallery, UCSD, La Jolla, CA; Wight Art Gallery, UCLA, Los Angeles, CA; Worth Ryder Art Gallery, UC Berkeley, Berkeley, CA
1997 *Red Acrobat*, VAF Gallery, UCSD, La Jolla, CA
1996 *Bucking the Texan Myth: Scouting the Third Frontier*, Austin Museum of Art, Austin, TX
Close to the Border, New Mexico State University Art Gallery, Las Cruces, NM

RESIDENCIES AND FELLOWSHIPS

- 2005 McColl Center, Charlotte NC (Upcoming Jan. - March)
2004 Jentel Foundation, Banner, WY (Upcoming Oct. - Nov.)
Sculpture Space Residency, Utica, NY (Upcoming Aug. - Sept.)
2003 MacDowell Colony, Peterborough, NH (Dec.03-Jan.04)
2001-2003 Core Fellowship, Glassell School of Art, Museum of Fine Art, Houston, TX

GRANTS AND AWARDS

- 2004 *Project Grant*, Cultural Arts Council of Houston/Harris County
2003/2002 *Eliza Randall Prize*, Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, TX
2002 *Sculpture Grant*, Connemara Conservancy Foundation, Dallas, TX
1999 *Full Scholarship*, Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture, Skowhegan, ME
Full Tuition and Fee Scholarship, UCSD, La Jolla, CA
1999/1998 *Visual Arts Department Research Grants*, UCSD, La Jolla, CA
1997 *Russell Foundation Grant*, UCSD, La Jolla, CA
1991 *Roberta Joslin Award for Excellence in the Visual Arts*, Brown University, Providence, RI

SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY

- 2004 J. Bowers, *Don't Fence Them In*, Baltimore City Paper, MD
Glenn McNatt, *Biennial Show Reflects the elegance of a Bygone Era*, Baltimore Sun, Baltimore, MD
Jennifer McGregor, *Sculpture at Evergreen*, catalogue, Johns Hopkins University, Baltimore, MD
Reggy Heinkel-Wolfe, "Siting Sculpture," *Art Lies*, Issue 41, Winter 2004, p.78, Houston, TX
2003 Mike Daniel, "Siting Sculpture at the Contemporary," *The Dallas Morning News*, Dallas, TX (October 31)
Virginia Billeaud Anderson, "Lawndale Art Center," *Arts Houston*, p.29, Houston, TX (June 3)
Kelly Klaasmeyer, "Party on the Patio," *Houston Press*, p.50, Houston, TX (April 10)
Steve Ausbury, "Unheimlich Maneuvers," *2003 Core Exhibition Catalogue*, MFA, Houston, TX (March 3)
2002 "Glasstire Recommends," *Glasstire*, <http://www.glasstire.com> (April 30)
Mike Daniel, "Connemara Spring Sculpture Show," *The Dallas Morning News*, Dallas, TX (April 19)
Bill Davenport, "Tire Iron #46: Core 2002 Exhibition," *Glasstire*, <http://www.glasstire.com> (April 4)
Lane Relyea, interview, *2002 Core Yearbook*, MFA, Houston, TX (March 2)
1999 Claire Caraska, "Completely 'Spaced Out,'" *The UCSD Guardian*, Vol. 98, no.5, p.23, San Diego, CA (October 14)
"Spaced Out" exhibition catalogue, *Herbert Marcuse Gallery*, UCSD, La Jolla, CA (October)
1998 Vivian Host, "Art With a Carnival Flare," *The Daily Californian*, vol.127, no.45, p.5, Berkeley, CA (March 31)
1996 "Bucking the Texan Myth" catalogue, *Austin Museum of Art*, Austin, TX (July)
Rebecca S. Cohen, "Behind Closed Doors," *The Austin Chronicle*, p.26, Austin, TX (Feb 23)



This Panel: *Still No. 1*. 2002, Mixed Media
Cover Panel: *Hay Bales*. 2004, Hay Installation



Installation Photographs by Will Evans

Hay Bales. 2004, Hay Installation

The artist wishes to thank Leon Baker, Hay Baler, Houston TX.

W O M E N & T H E I R W O R K

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Now celebrating its 26th anniversary, Women & Their Work presents over 50 events a year in visual art, dance, theater, music, literature, and film. The gallery features on-going exhibitions of Texas women artists and brings artists of national stature to Texas audiences. Since its founding, Women & Their Work has presented 1,735 artists in 225 visual art exhibitions, 102 music, dance, and theater events, 12 film festivals, 19 literary readings, and 274 workshops in programming that reflects the ethnic and cultural diversity of this region. Nationally recognized, Women & Their Work has been featured in *Art in America*, *ArtForum* and National Public Radio and was the first organization in Texas to receive a grant in visual art from the National Endowment for the Arts. Women & Their Work reaches

over 5,000 school children and teachers each year through gallery tours, gallery talks with exhibiting artists, participatory workshops, in-school performances, dance master classes, and teacher workshops.



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