



GIVING SHELTER

A sister exhibition to *The Cradle Project*

Shelter and its many connotations is the subject of this exhibition. *Shelter* can mean many things: a dwelling place, a haven from incrimination, a place under cover, protection, or a refuge. The route of curating this show has been an organic one—a call and response from fifty artists across the country, including an architectural firm from Spain—in no way exhausting the examination of what the definition of shelter may encompass. For some, the practice of art making in itself is the refuge. One artist in the show spoke of the physical act of painting as an emotional shelter during a profound personal loss. Other artists speak similarly about the creative process being an avenue to a meditative place, a kind of sheltering state of mind.



The work in *Giving Shelter* divides (with some crossover) into two categories, physical/literal structures and metaphysical/conceptual shelters. Some of the physical/literal types are a childlike drawing of a “house”, a construction of memory—a lamented place in a home, a cardboard box, a blanket and a dollhouse. Metaphysical/conceptual kinds of shelters include a painting of abstract space, a saint, an unrealized sustainable housing project, a rocking horse and a “temple of love.” Overall, there is a global awareness to this work.

A significant number of the artists created their works in collaboration with other countries, bridging cultures in response to a need to link their work to people and places outside of themselves. Refuge is of course intrinsically related to refugees. It is these concerns, the human elements, that are the heartstrings of this exhibition. Here are just a few examples from *Giving Shelter* addressing this basic human need.

A Roof Over Our Heads

When Naomi Natale photographed orphans in the slums of Kenya in 2003, the experience profoundly changed the direction of her art and her life, inspiring the conception of *The Cradle Project*. Two precious children wrapped together in abject poverty, one sheltering the other, compose her poignant image titled *Sisters*. The older child dressed in a ragged long sleeve t-shirt carries the younger one,



smudges of dirt and flies on their dear faces. Yet, in spite of their apparent destitution, it is clearly evident that the older child wears a smile. If only for a moment, she offers a nurturing place, a safe haven to her little sister.

Thousands of miles to the west of Kenya across the continent of Africa lies Senegal. Tambacounda is the capital of Eastern Senegal, the location where architects Iván Juárez and Patricia Meneses created *Tambabox* in collaboration with Senegalese craftsmen, carpenters and tailors. This project is realized as an “object-space” wrapped by an assemblage of industrial textile canvasses, layers of boldly colored patterns from the great tradition of textile design in Senegal. From the inside of *Tambabox* on a sunny day, the patterns appear brilliantly illuminated, reminiscent of a stained glass window. From the outside, this three-dimensional “abstract painting” is an open structure where different artistic disciplines can be performed in woven space.



Installation artist and poet, Ana María Hernando travels between her home in Colorado and her birthplace in Argentina gathering the embroidered flowers she incorporates in her work. Responding to the increasing visibility of suffering in the world, Hernando’s work is a quiet activism, it has what she calls a “sense of mothering.” The piece she created specifically for this exhibition is made of elements that speak of her homeland, petticoats from women in Peru and embroidery she commissions from cloistered nuns in Argentina. “The women in the Andes pray to Mother Earth (*Pachamama*) ...with every weaving they make; the nuns spend most of their day praying, and that is their vocation,” offers Hernando. There is a trust in their exchange that she will hold the dignity of their work in the process of her own.

Three monks and a hut in Northern Thailand compose Meridel Rubenstein’s photograph *Luang Pau Forest Ecology Monks*. A simple pitched-roof structure houses two monks between the forest and the sea, while a third monk walks along the beach toward the viewer. Caretakers who live at the edge of things like Khidr, the “Green Man” from Sufi literature, these monks appear more archetypal than concrete. They seem to exist outside of time and space, watching to see what we do to Mother Nature and if we recognize her nature as sanctuary.

Nature as Temple, Body as Temple

Within the tradition of Tibetan Buddhism, *skyabs ‘gro* is the practice of *Taking Refuge*. Known as the foundation stone, one takes refuge in the Buddha as the teacher, in the Dharma as the path, and in the Sangha as companions along the way. For Carol Hoy, Buddhist meditation teacher and artist, her practice and her painting are interconnected. Hoy’s studio space and the space where she teaches, Copper Mountain Institute, are literally connected in her home in Corrales, New Mexico. She paints in an atmosphere filled with prayer bowls, Tibetan Thangka paintings, encaustic waxes and a library of Buddhist books that alchemically combine in her work. Her mixed media piece *Child of Majesty* materialized in part from a rubbing she did at a sacred shrine in Nepal. Like the monks in Rubenstein’s photograph, this child seems more archetypal than concrete, more energetic than real. He/she seems to emerge from the space of the painting in



an ethereal way, belonging to the celestial spheres and describing in some regard the nature of taking refuge in the Buddhist path.

In the practice of yoga, there is an *asana* or posture called *Malasana: Garland Pose* in which the body is in a squatted position, arms draped through the knees and around the back. Mary Daniel Hobson uses a modified variation of the Garland Pose in an image from her series *Evocations*. Like a resting marionette, the figure, a photo within a photo, is suspended from a string inside a glass bottle, suggesting a state of peaceful inner containment and/or the imprisonment of confinement.

Many of Pipo Nguyen-duy’s photographs speak about home in a symbolic way. Childhood loss pervades the sense of atmosphere in *Pumpkin Field*. There is a quiet foreboding to the child’s rocking horse circa 1950s that sits out of place in the middle of a ravaged field. The abandoned toy horse in this image, like a number of the objects and figures in Nguyen-duy’s series, *East of Eden*, suggests something emblematic of our times—a sense of being displaced, “out of the garden” of our true home.



Steve Barry’s photograph *Practicing Our Democracy*, demonstrates a conceptual type of shelter in a literal way. Staged in the rocky landscape at the Petroglyph National Monument in New Mexico, twelve people dressed predominately in white “hide” behind clear plastic bulletproof shields. In this small piece, Barry presents us with the opportunity to question what our democracy offers in

terms of shelter while living in these uncertain times: a haven from incrimination? A place of protection? A refuge for the disenfranchised?

One way to move through this exhibition is to view the work as a group of nouns, in other words as a harbor, a lodge or a house. But looking again at this work as a group of verbs in action may be the best approach to consider this basic human need. In or out of the garden, may we all find shelter from the storm. And finally, consider this: the sheltering archetypal image of the Madonna and child suggested by Naomi Natalie’s Kenyan sisters embodies nature and mother earth—the sentient shelter of comfort, care and love to whom we must return for refuge and protection. The ultimate cradle.

— Deborah Gavel
Exhibition Curator

Left to right, top to bottom: Meridel Rubenstein, *Luang Pau Ecology Monks, Thailand 1/5*, archival pigmented ink print (pre-ambertype-vegetable pigments on tree bark paper coated with gum arabic with mica), 23” x 46”, courtesy LewAllen Contemporary; Jim Scott, Still from *Saved Voice Mail*, wall mounted digital video, 23” x 32”; Mary Lance, Still from *Blue Alchemy: Stories of Indigo*, video; EX.Studio (Iván Juárez & Patricia Meneses), *Tambabox* (detail) photograph; Elizabeth Fritzsche, *True Rest*, cast iron, porcelain, casein, 18” x 16” x 10”; Pipo Nguyen-duy, *Pumpkin Field* (detail), c-print mounted on sintra, 24” x 20”; Steve Barry, *Practicing Our Democracy* (Petroglyph National Monument) (detail), digital print, 11” x 21”.