

# ARTFORUM

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PORTO

## "THRESHOLD" FUNDAÇÃO DE SERRALVES

Without a doubt, the artistic genre that has undergone the most radical transformations in recent decades is sculpture. In the '60s and '70s, these metamorphoses were formal in nature and they contributed to what became known as the "expansion of the sculptural field." In the '80s and early '90s, on the other hand, it was sculpture's role as public art, its relation to social spaces, and to everyday life that was the object of debate.

Because the revolutionary and utopian visions of the avant-garde have yet to be fulfilled, it is necessary to raise the question of sculpture's place once again. It is this question that Dan Cameron lucidly addressed in "Threshold: Ten American Sculptors," an exhibition of work by the youngest generation of American artists.

For these artists, the "extension" of the sculptural field cannot be resolved simply by adding new "nonsites." In effect, it seems that no site—no matter how strange, marginal, or borderline—remains that has not already been invaded by sculpture. It seems that, rather than attempting to transcend the boundary between art and life, the place from which sculpture may most effectively exercise its symbolic power is on the border between the two.

The Fundação de Serralves is surely the best of all possible places to mount such an exhibition, given the palace's own architectural rhetoric; it was a private palace at the turn of the century and was recently converted into a public cultural foundation. Surrounded by a series of ravishing gardens—from the Baroque to the Romantic—and farmland, this palace seems to embrace the distance that separates heaven from earth, public from private, and utopia from reality.

The dynamic between interior and exterior was the fundamental tension explored in this show, and it was this tension that Cameron asked the artists he selected to address. With greater or lesser success, the artists produced a series of pieces that, if they did not elude the already academicized concept of the site-specific, also did not limit themselves to engaging the history of the place or the country. Thus, with the exception of a few knowing winks to the very well-informed viewer—for example, the piece that Tony Feher placed in the garden comprising "typically Portuguese" trash cans, or Millie Wilson's piece that referred to the private life of one of the palace's previous inhabitants—the various sculptures seemed divorced from any specific cultural references. Three of the most suggestive works were Daniel Oates' sculpture—an ironic sublation of the interior/exterior dialectic—Meyer Vaisman's *My Parent's Closet*, 1995, placed in one of the gardens and definitely one of the best pieces he has ever created; and, most especially, Kristin Oppenheim's identical interior and exterior audio and video installations. The exquisite poetic sensitivity of Oppenheim's work encouraged us to wander through the house and garden, to surrender to a place marked by that unmistakable *saudade* (yearning) that is the Portuguese form of melancholy.

—José Luis Brea