

Critical Perspectives on Art, Politics and Culture

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KRISTYNA AND MAREK MILDE *In Loving Memory*

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PERMANENT INSTALLATION AT NURTUREART

In Loving Memory, Kristyna and Marek Milde’s strangely sweet homage to the discarded, now permanently occupies NurtureArt’s rooftop space. Stepping out onto the gallery’s deck one scorching August afternoon and waiting for my eyes to adjust to the shocking sunlight, I initially thought this exhibition looked like any Brooklyn rooftop hangout, with mismatched, weather-beaten chairs strewn about the space in conversationally-logical groupings. My eyes adapted and I noticed, in a far corner, THE PANEL: that iconic, graphically subdued piece of common museum/government/historical site signage that screams “official informational document” or, plainly, “read this sign and understand why you’re standing here reading this sign. On this unmistakably official-looking panel is an appropriately staid map of the greater NYC area, an assortment of quite legible fonts, a polite color palette, some rather entertaining clip art, and a number of graphic clues informing us that these apparently unremarkable chairs littering the rooftop here each have a personal history, a point of origin, and the tiniest fragment of a back story. The map clearly states the location from which the artists procured each object—its intended final resting place on some curb. That is, until the Mildes intervened and resolutely designated it ART instead of garbage. The very presence of this conspicuous emblem of things historical and monumental transforms the space from crumbling urban rooftop and unremarkable summertime sanctuary into (rather absurd) Important Site.



The chairs themselves, described in bold on the panel by the neighborhood in which each was found, range from common plastic dollar store model to luxuriant, sun-faded teak specimen, yet none would seem unusual or out of place on any randomly surveyed city rooftop, fire escape, courtyard, or balcony. The artists, the panel states, refurbished and “sanitized” the “mostly still useful” chairs they’d salvaged, with an eye toward preserving those characteristics that best described each piece’s history. And from this point they added plaques.

Detail, “In Loving Commemoration of the Obsolete,” - Flushing, Jewell Avenue, between 147th and 150th Streets. Image courtesy of Krystina and Marek Milde.

Yes, plaques: wee medallions affixed prominently to the chair's back (where its original owner once surely rested his or her shoulders), conferring some type of meaning and honor upon this rescued castoff. "In Loving Honor of the Broken," reads the inscrutably-worn refuse from 73rd Street between First and Second Avenues. "In Loving Commemoration of the Wash Out," states the heavily corroded specimen found along the shore of the Long Island Sound Beach, a dingy Winnie the Pooh plush toy lashed to its mottled arm, a desperately pathetic reminder of its former life as something claimed by some specific human. Each plaque juxtaposes some idyllic human sentiment—love, honor, fond remembrance—with that of the presumed callous aesthetic response that led to each object being jettisoned.

There are, of course, the eco-warrior overtones here of the wasteful carelessness of humanity, and city life specifically—that a perfectly habitable rooftop deck could be made so by simply hunting for what has been deemed worthless but still has life or meaning left inside it. Yet the Milde's work doesn't read as preachy or, worse, as validation for the impulse to hoard (in spite of references that basically ask if the dumpster diver is the modern, market-subverting hunter-gatherer). Their use of visually loaded cues like memorial plaques and a giant informational panel feels more like winking at the viewer than furiously pointing out his deplorable chair-wasting tendencies, simply because these particular visual cues are so patently absurd. Examining whatever history can be gleaned from these broken or otherwise rejected objects, then restoring their functionality, seems to imbue them with a sort of anthropomorphic pathos. In the hands of Kristyna and Marke Milde, rusty, sun-bleached chairs become as peculiarly heartbreaking and gently humorous as awkwardly-mended one-eyed teddy bears or cracked and carefully glued porcelain dollies.