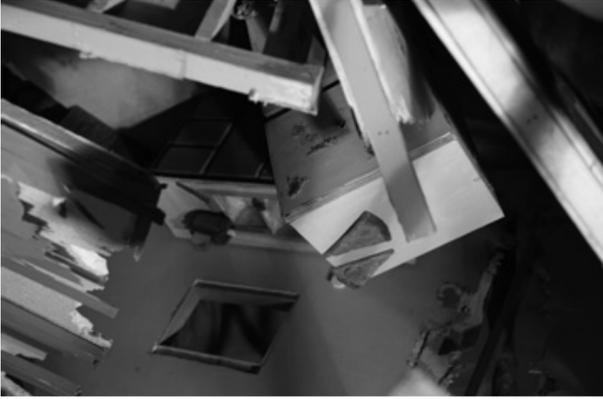


Seth Mittag was born in 1974 in Newport News, Virginia. He studied sculpture at Southwestern University and the University of Houston, earning his B.F.A. and M.F.A., respectively. Since 2001, his work has been exhibited throughout Texas and was included in the 2005 Texas Biennial.

Following the Texas Biennial, Seth moved to New York and continued to show. He also participated in a group exhibition in Berlin, Germany. While living in New York he became involved in the film industry working as both a sculptor and art director for stop animation projects. His film work has included advertising and political pieces for clients such as Michael Eisner, Progresso Soup, The globetrotters, Howard Johnson Hotels, Moveon.org, Firstavenuemachine, and AdCouncil.

His current body of work incorporates his sculptural expertise with the influences of working as a professional puppet maker and his love for storytelling. Seth Mittag lives and works in Houston, Texas.



We're Still Here...
Installation details, wood, plastic, metal, 2011,
overall dimensions 15' x 12' x 8'

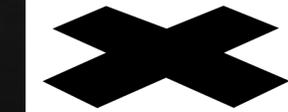
Emergency Room is generously supported by Rice Public Art.



We're Still Here...
Installation details, wood, plastic, metal, 2011,
overall dimensions 15' x 12' x 8'



The Emergency Room is the latest venture by the Department of Visual and Dramatic Arts. This new exhibition space is aimed at better serving the Houston arts community and the arts on the Rice University campus. Visiting emerging artists will develop new exhibitions, give public lectures, and interact with Rice studio arts students. Emerging artists are an underserved population within the Houston region, and the Emergency Room is an attempt to correct this by presenting the highest quality exhibitions within the context of a serious academic program.



emergency room

Seth Mittag

We're Still Here...

September 29–October 27, 2011

IT IS FITTING that the inaugural exhibition for a space called the Emergency Room—Rice University’s new single-room project space for Houston-based emerging artists—would be Seth Mittag’s *We’re Still Here...* (2010-11), an installation depicting the dramatic aftermath of a tornado. The scene is calamitous. A smaller-than-life-size model of a mobile home is torn asunder and rests precariously in the limbs of a dead tree, with fallen branches and splintered wood from the trailer’s roof and siding littering the ravaged and otherwise barren landscape.

Mittag works in a variety of media, including sculpture, photography, drawing, animation, and film. He received his MFA in sculpture from the University of Houston in 2003, and worked in New York as a set builder and puppet maker for the stop motion animation industry prior to moving back to his home state of Texas. This experience in theater design and puppetry is readily apparent in *We’re Still Here....* The rear wall of the fish tank-like gallery is wallpapered with a painted canvas backdrop that one might see in a play, and the artist’s notable skill at making scale models is evident in his remarkable attention to detail. Taking nearly a year to complete, Mittag painstakingly hand-made each component of the installation. The doll-sized clothes, lilliputian cinderblocks, the exposed, cotton candy-pink insulation of the trailer, and even the landscape’s floor are all indicators of the intense labor involved in making the work. However, the subject matter of the piece is not about construction, but rather destruction. To emphasize the storm’s destructive power Mittag himself acted with tornado-like force, stomping on his model in order to create the desired effect of damage and demolition.

Looking through the glass wall and into the modestly-sized exhibition space is akin to viewing a diorama in a museum of anthropology or natural history, in which visitors would see

various staged tableaux. The diorama is an appropriate format for Mittag, whose work explores the relationship between artifice and actuality. Narrative sculptural environments that both reference and satirize reality are at the heart of his artistic practice. *We’re Still Here...* is a visual representation of a story written by the artist. Drawing inspiration from his personal history and family background—his father and uncle run a junkyard, and he has relatives that live in trailer homes—Mittag’s story takes place in rural America. The story has a tripartite structure. With a father and son as its main protagonists, in the first part of Mittag’s tale the family decides to buy a trailer home. In the second, climactic section (portrayed here) a tornado strikes, mangling the newly purchased shelter. Indicated in the title of the installation, at the end of Mittag’s narrative the family decides to continue living there, despite the devastation from the storm. While the title *We’re Still Here...* conveys survival and a sense of hope, the absence of any human subject in the work contributes to its eerie atmosphere. Here, as in his larger body of work, Mittag employs small scale and comic relief to address difficult subject matter; there is a pronounced tension between the gravitas of the story and the humor with which it is depicted. Detailed elements such as a half eaten hamburger or the tiny pair of underwear dangling from the dead tree are amusing, until viewers begin to wonder where the people are to which they belong.

Katia Zavistovski

Katia Zavistovski is a PhD candidate in the Department of Art History at Rice University, and the John & Dominique de Menil Curatorial Fellow at the Menil Collection, Houston.



emergency room

Seth Mittag

We're Still Here...

September 29–October 27, 2011

Sewall Hall, #402
Department of Visual and Dramatic Arts
Rice University
6100 Main Street
Houston, Texas 77005

