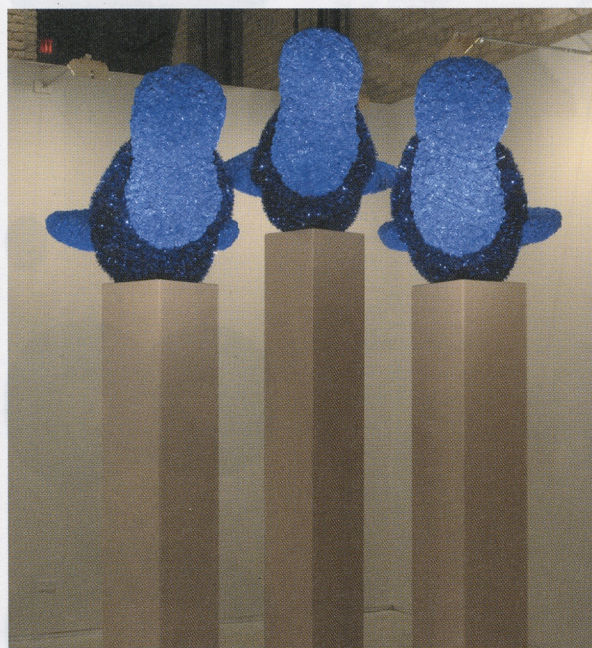


Barbara Gallucci

BY FRANCINE KOSLOW MILLER

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Baby-boomer artist Barbara Gallucci revisits Levittown, Long Island a half century after its inception as the landmark postwar development of 17,000 single family houses, in a trenchant 2000-02 series of C-prints mounted on aluminum titled "Ranch '50." Gallucci's signature ironic nostalgia for the packaged "good life" of American middle-class suburban culture is coupled with a concern for the success and failure of utopic modernism in her homage to the 1950 Ranch House, designed by Levittown's team of architects as one of five futuristic models for all-white returning GIs and their young families. In addition to 20 photographs of Levittown interiors and six prints depicting six of its nine identical public pools, Gallucci—an accomplished sculptor—lovingly created *Levittown Model Home* (2004), a scale model constructed from the original Ranch blueprint. Open roofed and painted a luscious vintage chartreuse, the wooden dollhouse "sculpture" perfectly describes the clean lines and simple plan of the four-square-room, cookie-cutter modular unit, complete with California-style carport, rear living room with large picture window, and staircase leading up to an unfinished attic. Gallucci has punched holes into the living room wall below the staircase to demarcate the cutout cabinet created in each home for that relatively new technological marvel, the TV set. Created as the focal point of the Ranch living room, this essential built-in entertainment center, or "TV wall," is the thematic thread of Gallucci's documentary-style interior photographs. Her interest in architecture as furniture or shell for the now-obsolete 1950 Admiral TV that fit into the paneled staircase wall led the artist to set up her tripod in 20 various ranch houses across from the TV wall.

For Gallucci, the Admiral TV's built-in obsolescence suggests a dystopic vision of planned conformity in modernist design. The earliest image, *TV Wall* (2000), depicts a close-up view of the only remaining Admiral TV wall, now preserved as a modernist artifact in the Levittown Historical Society. A De Stijl-like grid made up of knotty pine panels is shown punctuated with the subtle shape of the rectangular cabinet and air vents that surround and encase the goldfish-bowl-shaped Admiral monitor and controls. This muted, Minimalist composition in sandy brown tones, grays, and browns is enhanced by the strong diagonal thrust of the staircase. The urge to customize and the various solutions as to what to do with the former TV wall once the set broke or was replaced by newer models are the subjects of the other 19 interior prints. Some of the most provocative include replacing the TV hole with a liquor cabinet (*Leon and Fran*, 2002), a miniature bar (*Genette*, 2002), an upholstered cubbyhole with seating for one (*Jerry and Claire*, 2002), or just knocking out the wall completely (*Nancy and Arthur*, 2002).

The fact that Gallucci chose to title her interior images with the names of the tenants—many of them elderly original residents who gave Gallucci access to their living room furniture and memorabilia—is evidence of the strong human interest in these people-less photographs. Additionally, a ghostly original built-in TV appears in *Marilyn, Hole Revealed* (2002), which indicates how Gallucci got permission from a widowed tenant to move a large antique armoire aside, revealing the now-empty TV hole that had been covered since the set broke decades ago.

The mannerisms and personal histories of these inside dwellers are everywhere present in these passe-style living rooms—in family photographs, cork-covered lamps, needlepoint pillows, and amateur paintings. Whether intentional or not, the prints' somewhat faded hues (blacks are somewhat bluish here) manage to create the mood of an aging, disappearing world. Like the half-dozen photographs of the almost-identical Levittown public pools taken at 7AM, these silent and banal images simultaneously soothe and unnerve.