



HOUSEWARMING

NOTIONS OF HOME FROM THE CENTER OF THE UNIVERSE



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Njideka Akunyili
Sonya Blesofsky
Drew Hamilton
Katarina Jerinic and Chad Stayrook
Esperanza Mayobre
Abraham McNally
Garry Nichols
Margaret Reid Boyer
Keisha Scarville
Vargas-Suarez Universal
Nathan Wasserbauer

Curated by Elizabeth Ferrer
October 3–December 15, 2013

BRIC Arts | Media House
647 Fulton Street
Brooklyn, New York

This is the place of places and it is here.

– Gertrude Stein

After a long absence in Paris, the writer and American expatriate Gertrude Stein returned to her childhood home in Oakland, California in the 1930s, while on a lecture tour. It was not how she left it. The big house and garden, the eucalyptus trees and rose hedges—all were gone. “There is no there there,” said Stein, on confronting her demolished childhood home. Although Stein meant this statement quite literally, the phrase has developed a much more abstract definition. To the dismay of many Oaklanders, the quote has become one of Stein’s most enduring, a stand-in for describing a lack of meaningful identity or a lost connection to one’s surroundings.

However, this abstract definition ignores Stein’s complex relationship to home as a long-term expatriate. Born in Pittsburgh in 1874, she spent time in Europe as a young child before moving to Oakland at age 5, where she lived until she was 18. After attending schools in Boston and Baltimore, Stein moved to Paris in her late twenties, and except for brief travels, she remained in France the rest of her life. She referred to Paris as her hometown, America as her country. Paris as the place where she made art but America as the place that made her. Perhaps it was this complex relationship to home that compelled her to bring together so many intellectuals and artists, many of them expatriates themselves, in her famous salons on 27 rue de Fleurus. Indeed, it was her salons, those “places of places” where Stein established a sense of family and was able to find her way home again, however complicated and nuanced the route.

BRIC has also taken a complicated route back home. The inaugural exhibition at BRIC Arts | Media House, *Housewarming: Notions of Home From the Center of the Universe*, acts as a celebratory “housewarming” of the new gallery space, as well as an exploration of notions of home, a fitting theme as we return to BRIC’s original location in downtown Brooklyn. BRIC’s contemporary art space, the borough’s oldest, was founded in 1981 as the Rotunda Gallery thanks to its original location in the rotunda of Brooklyn’s Borough Hall. It was the organization’s second major initiative after the Celebrate Brooklyn! Performing Arts Festival which had begun two years earlier.

The Gallery’s early years coincided with an era of tremendous change in the New York art world. As more and more baby-boom generation artists arrived in the city, an alternative art scene in the East Village arose to challenge the well-established commercial galleries in SoHo and 57th Street. Forerunners to the current Bushwick scene, many of these galleries were owned by artists, and the work shown in their small, storefront spaces was often brash, political, and contrary to the cool, post-minimalist aesthetic that predominated the more established art world. Many young artists in the 1980s were drawn to Brooklyn neighborhoods like Williamsburg and DUMBO because affordable studio and living space was still readily available. Nevertheless, these pioneering Brooklyn artists had few local venues in which to show their work.

Rotunda Gallery filled that gap. Later relocations to the Brooklyn War Memorial in Cadman Plaza in 1984 and to a space designed by architects Smith-Miller + Hawkinson in Brooklyn Heights in 1993 allowed for ever more ambitious exhibitions and the addition of an arts education program for public school students. As the Gallery moves yet again, this time to its permanent home, we remain steadfast in our mission to reflect the “here,” the diversity of the borough’s contemporary art scene, and to be the “place of places” for Brooklyn artists.

Housewarming expresses notions of home from broad vantage points. At its most intimate, home is literally where the heart is; it is the memories and feeling of intimacy we each carry of our own, individual sense of home. It also refers to the domestic sphere, the places we lived, the things that surround us, and the accumulation of material objects that constitute the physical markers of home. In the social sphere, home is our neighborhood, the urban and social fabric, and the physical structures that define all but the most intimate aspects of our lives. In the broadest, universal, and most poetic sense, home is the cosmos; it is the sphere of the unknowable and of relentless search.

Photographer Keisha Scarville expresses intimate notions of home in her black-and-white images. In her series “i am here,” she explores the body as “the primary site of belonging,” as she states. “A home lives and breathes. It suffers, rejoices, and dies,” notes Scarville, a Brooklyn native whose parents are from Guyana views this series as her own personal journey towards understanding the concept of home. In high-contrast black and white, Scarville photographs staged scenes that weave together themes of memory and transformation, ritual and daily experience. All of the images are close-ups, many focusing on a particular part of the body or small objects endowed with ceremonial significance. Fragmented in this way, the images force viewers to find their own sites of belonging in what is often overlooked. As with other artists in this exhibition, Scarville negotiates an in-between space in her photographs, whose ritualistic objects often allude to family and to her Guyanese heritage.

Like Scarville, Abraham McNally conceives of home in deeply personal terms, where the physical architecture of a home becomes a container for memory. This is especially evident in *8 Cords*, 2010, a large site-specific sculpture that has acted as a catalyst for the artist’s later work. Like Stein, McNally was faced with the destruction of his childhood home, a small cabin in Wheelock, Vermont. However, unlike Stein, McNally was able to salvage the home before its demolition, repurposing it as a monumental artwork. He filled the empty interior with eight cords of firewood, symbolically endowing it with meaning, memory, and an incongruously elegant geometry. In continuation of this work, the artist created a large-scale graphite rubbing of one side of the home and has continued to make small-scale sculptures, some included in this show, that reference the form and materials of domestic architecture. The works, often appearing fragmented or incomplete, have a purposeful unfinished quality. A nail juts out or wood grain peeks through a shoddy paint job. Wooden blocks are left unsanded and stacked unevenly.

Other pieces lean precariously against the wall, threatening collapse. In all these works, McNally shows physical space as a springboard for intricate associations and deeply personal memories.

Like McNally, Margaret Reid Boyer suggests the domestic as a site of competing desires of belonging, although in a very different medium, photography. Her large-scale color photographs focus on the chaos and clutter lurking beneath the idealized shiny surface of affluent Brooklyn homes. In *Breadwinner*, 2011, a closet of neatly arranged and carefully polished dress shoes gives way to piles of plastic sandals, cheap sneakers missing their mates, and hastily discarded hygienic supplies. In *Boy, Age 13*, 2011, a teenager's orthodontic rubber bands and old deodorant bottles appear alongside his own portrait as a young child posing with the family dog. For Boyer, the domestic is less a space of idealized notions than a surface, a kind of mirror which provides the "illusion of belonging". If McNally's work lets us enter an abstract world of personal memory, Boyer's instead brings us soberly back to reality.

Njideka Akunyili's large-scale mixed-media paintings also feature an array of juxtapositions within depictions of the domestic space. However, here that juxtaposition informs rather than undermines a sense of belonging in the domestic sphere. Rendered in a combination of flat acrylic strokes and densely layered photographic transfers, Akunyili's work not only features divergent materials but divergent symbols as well. In *I Always Face You, Even When it Seems Otherwise*, 2012, she creates a large-scale depiction of figures in a domestic space, using acrylic, pastel, charcoal, colored pencil, collage, and Xerox transfers. For Akunyili, home is where one makes sense of the larger cultural forces that threaten to overwhelm the domestic. It is a middle-ground, a connecting point for the personal with the political, the singular with the social.

Redefining her current life in Brooklyn in relation to her Nigerian roots, Akunyili's work also expresses notions of the home as multiple and global. Like Akunyili, the artists Garry Nichols and Esperanza Mayobre have also migrated from other places. For them, home is not a singular or a fixed locale but a concept that brings together "the here and the there," Stein's "place of places." In his vibrant, large canvasses and weathervane sculptures, Nichols creates symbolic links between his native Tasmania and Brooklyn. Many of Nichols' compositions contain depictions of convicts and aboriginal people, alluding to histories of displacement and migration that marked the colonial histories of Tasmania. In *Fifty Miles Puzzle*, 2007, Nichols eschews the depiction of domestic or architectural spaces, instead focusing on the trope of the ship, typically, masted sailing vessels that recall a much earlier era, as its own type of home. In Nichols' painting, home is passage, the process of self-discovery that comes from exploration, as represented by his implied waterways. His imagery veers towards the fantastic and surreal; it is flat and decorative rather than dimensional, with exaggerated colors and stylized imagery. For Nichols, home is in an imagined landscape; it is this place between "the here and the there" that shaped his identity. His weather vanes, too, reference this in-between notion of home: they are here, but always pointing to some indeterminate there. The conception

of home is in constant flux. To find home, one must look backwards and forward, and to disparate geographic realms, a process that is also reflected in the work of Venezuelan artist Esperanza Mayobre.

Like Nichols, Mayobre makes work that conjures both the "here and there." Physically in one place while speaking to another, her site-specific installations often reference fictive architectural spaces, even cities. Mayobre's work suggests a notion of home that is time-specific yet geographically vague. As with McNally's work, Mayobre's sculptures use common construction materials and have an unfinished quality. They seem both dismantled and in the process of construction, solid yet precariously leaning. Minimalist in its bare geometry, the work nonetheless is perceptually tricky, playing with scale and point of view. Such ambiguities reflect Mayobre's own sense of displacement as an immigrant, her own movement from one home to the next. "The street of my homes, the turning corner, the noisy neighbor, the local deli, the trees, the tree from my window, the ceiling, the steps, the doorway, they were mine once, but now belong to someone else," states the artist, recollecting details from her former homes. For Mayobre, home is not stable or singular but is instead constantly updated, revised, discarded, and replaced; a home is not ours to keep. Like Mayobre's own installations, home is impermanent.

Social notions of home come to the fore in the works of Drew Hamilton, Sonya Blesofsky, and Katarina Jerinic and Chad Stayrook. Hamilton's exacting 1:4 scale model reproduces in meticulous detail the Bushwick street corner he once viewed from his studio. Unlike other *Housewarming* artists, for whom home is evasive, illusory, or abstract, Hamilton's definition is literal and remarkably well-defined. It is also gritty. Home is discarded lotto tickets, cigarette butts, and a yellowing copy of the *The New York Times* crumpled across a grimy fire hydrant. It is also a neighborhood that is home to disparate and changing populations, represented by the Mexican food truck parked on the street corner. Through his use of scale, Hamilton invites viewers to share in both his neighborhood and his individuated viewpoint. The common and banal becomes so richly detailed and specific that it becomes a source of fascination, a portrait of the individual as much as of his neighborhood. Just as Akunyili's work connects the domestic to the social, Hamilton's connects personal and individual notions of home to the social sphere.

Like Hamilton, Sonya Blesofsky is heavily influenced by her surroundings, specifically her commutes through the city and research of specific architectural spaces. Her temporary sculptural installations and interventions deal with architectural history and development, renewal and gentrification. As in McNally's work, she purposefully leaves construction flaws exposed to highlight the work's temporality. For Blesofsky, architecture and social space are not stable and singular but subject to the ravages of social forces, changing fashions, and obsolescence. The home is temporary and ephemeral, its instability tied more to chronology than to geography, as was the case with previous artists discussed. In a site-specific work commissioned for *Housewarming*, Blesofsky created a large replica of the original Strand Theater marquee out of

vellum, activating it with hand-drawn stop motion videos and animation. The piece helps us envision the neighborhood and history of BRIC House itself while questioning notions of stable institutional memory. BRIC's newly renovated building that was once home to the Strand Theater, which opened in 1919 as a vaudeville theater. Since that time, it has also been used as a Spanish language movie theater, a bowling alley, and a manufacturing space, reflecting the changing demographics and fortunes of Brooklyn over nearly a century. For Drew Hamilton, home is a moment frozen in time, a snapshot. Blesofsky's home, in contrast, is more like the stop-motion videos she projects onto her installation, an accumulation of still images conveying the illusion of time's relentless passage.

Just as Blesofsky's work uncovers the past and hidden histories, Katarina Jerinic and Chad Stayrook do something similar in their investigations of geography. Jerinic and Stayrook do everything to deconstruct the neighborhood's familiarity and to re-examine conventions of the social sphere. In *Street Signs Became Flags That Mark Mountaintops*, presented in the Project Room at BRIC House, Jerinic and Stayrook explored the many streets of New York City with the name "summit" as strangers or foreigners, meticulously documenting and keeping logs of their discoveries during their travels across the five boroughs. In doing so, they suggest new ways of navigating our own neighborhoods and homes, of being critical while remaining open to new experiences. Home is not just the record of one's journey or an accumulation of memories as it is for Blesofsky; for these artists, home is a place for social interactions and reporting on discoveries and experiences, a site of exchange. In *Street Signs*, Jerinic and Stayrook have created just such a social space of exchange.

Home can also be considered in its broadest sense, the sphere of the universe. In Nathan Wasserbauer's diptych, he simultaneously relates intimate, social, and cosmic notions of the home. Visually, this large-scale work references bodily vessels, the domed architecture of ancient Rome, and ultimately, imagined extraterrestrial structures. For Wasserbauer, home is a kind of conceptual architecture where we can connect our individual psychology with the collective and universal. It is both contained and open, a conduit that allows other materials (or thoughts, dreams, fears) to pass through. In this way, Wasserbauer's transitory, if monumental, notion of home is very much related to the social space of exchange created by Jerinic and Stayrook, where explorers may come and go imparting new information and lending their personal mark to the spaces they traverse.

For his large-scale wall drawings and paintings, Vargas-Suarez Universal, often relies on data sourced from space flight programs. The intricate linear and geometric arrangements allude to a home we can't see through ordinary means. Like Wasserbauer, Vargas-Suarez Universal is notable for the way he layers and confuses points of view, making it difficult to tell whether we are looking at something up close or far away. His work appears simultaneously as both macroscopic and microscopic, elemental or cosmic. Viewed from an extreme vantage point,

home becomes uniform and consistent, orderly and synchronized. It lacks the grime of Hamilton's work, the clutter of Boyer's. Seen as a microcosm, home is abstract and chaotic. Nor does the work express home as a hybrid collision between the here and there, as do Nichols or Akunyili. Instead, home is all-encompassing; it is everything all at once.

As Vargas-Suarez Universal suggests, we might not be able to see all that encompasses home, but it is there, enveloping all of space, and all of time. For these twelve Brooklyn-based artists, home ultimately becomes an accumulation of places – New York, Texas, Ohio, Vermont, Venezuela, Tasmania, Nigeria, and stops in between. It is urban, suburban, and rural; First World and Third World; and even expanses of time and space beyond our grasp. It is a gritty Bushwick street corner or an imagined landscape, within the physical body or scattered throughout the five boroughs of New York. Home is an utterly flexible, variable concept and as this exhibition suggests, it can be revealed in a myriad of ways. It is found in our memories and rituals, or lurking beneath the idealized surfaces of seemingly flawless domestic interiors. It is also revealed through creating fictive spaces or examining the familiar more objectively. Home is viewed through a microscope, a telescope, or the naked eye; instantaneously, or slowly and methodically over time.

Vargas-Suarez Universal's *Star Chamber*, a monumentally scaled work on the façade of BRIC House, exemplifies such contradictory notions of home. A site-specific work commissioned for the opening of BRIC House, the work is also part of an ongoing series where the same image is reproduced in vastly different scales and contexts. Each piece is unique and site-specific—as Stein said, "it is here." But it is also references the cosmos and the universality that connotes the multiple, Stein's "place of places." Like Gertrude Stein, we each bring with us a complicated understanding of home informed by the universal and the particular. But it is somewhere in this space, between the place of places and the here, between what is common experience and highly personal, that we find our own sense of belonging, our own centers, our own notion of home.

Elizabeth Ferrer and Emily Greenberg

Works in the Exhibition

All works courtesy the artist unless otherwise noted.

Njideka Akunyili

Tea Time in New Haven, Enugu, 2013
Acrylic, colored pencil, charcoal, collage,
and transfers on paper
84 x 111 in.

Sonya Blesofsky

Marquee: Study for Strand Theater, 2013
Foam core board, vellum, and glue with
two-channel stop-motion projection
144 x 72 x 24 in.
Courtesy of the artist and Mixed Greens, NY

Margaret Reid Boyer

Unplugged, 2009
Chromogenic print
30 x 40 in.

Dress Code, 2011
Chromogenic print
30 x 40 in.

Breadwinner, 2011
Chromogenic print
30 x 40 in.

Monogamy, 2011
Chromogenic print
30 x 40 in.

Boy, Age 13, 2011
Chromogenic print
30 x 40 in.

Drew Hamilton

Street-Corner Project, 2013
Mixed media
120 x 60 x 84 in.

Katarina Jerinic and Chad Stayrook

*Street Signs Became Flags That Mark
Mountaintops*, 2013
Inkjet prints, HD video, paper, map pins, wood,
mailbox, vinyl fence, artificial turf and plant,
taxidermied squirrel, and found objects
Dimensions variable

Esperanza Mayobre

Hueco, Palo, Bloque
(Hollow, Stick, Block), 2013
Vinyl, wood, and paint
120 x 144 x 38 ¼ in.

Golindano #1, 2012
Collage, mixed media
10 x 5 in.

Golindano #2, 2012
Collage, mixed media
8 x 5 ½ in.

Abraham McNally

Vermont, 2013
Cedar shingles
9 x 4 x 4 in.

Untitled Sculpture 6, 2013
Hydrocal and birch sticks
9 x 4 x 2 in.

Untitled Sculpture 7, 2013
Hydrocal, birch, and foam core
9 x 10 x 2 in.

Untitled Sculpture 9, 2013
Hydrocal, cedar shingles, and birch sticks
20 x 8 x 2 in.

Untitled Sculpture 10, 2013
Hydrocal, foam core, and leather
9 x 10 x 2 in.

Garry Nichols

Fifty Miles Puzzle, 2007
Oil on linen
96 x 42 in.

Francis Drake's Revenge Weather Vane, 2010
Oil on wood, steel base
114 x 44 x 24 in.

Ship of Fools Weather Vane, 2010
Oil on wood, steel base
114 x 44 ½ x 24 in.

Contraption, 2013
Acrylic; mural
112 x 234 in.

Navigating Tasmania, 2013

Oil on canvas
72 x 108 in.

Keisha Scarville

Untitled, from the series "i am here," 2012
Digital print
24 x 24 in.

Untitled, from the series "i am here," 2012
Digital print
24 x 24 in.

Untitled, from the series "i am here," 2012
Digital print
24 x 24 in.

Untitled, from the series "i am here," 2012
Digital print
24 x 24 in.

Untitled, from the series "i am here," 2012
Digital print
24 x 36 in.

Untitled, from the series "i am here," 2012
Digital print
24 x 36 in.

Vargas-Suarez Universal

Star Chamber, 2013
Archival inks on vinyl
360 x 300 in.

Expedition 36 Russian EVA 34. 7 Hrs. 29 Mins.,
2013
Oil on enamel on polypropylene canvas
60 x 48 in.

Expedition 36 Russian EVA 35. 5 Hrs. 58 Mins.,
2013
Oil on enamel on polypropylene canvas
48 x 48 in.

Nathan Wasserbauer

Corpus Planeta/ Planeta Corpo, 2013
Silverpoint and white ground on linoleum cork
and wood mount, diptych
144 x 144 x 26 ¼ in.

About BRIC Arts | Media House

BRIC Arts | Media House is BRIC's new multi-disciplinary arts and media complex which opened to the public in October 2013. The \$33 million project is now a 40,000-square-foot destination and anchor for the arts in Downtown Brooklyn. The renovation of the historic 1919 Strand Theater and creation of BRIC House was designed by the Brooklyn-based architect Thomas Leiser. BRIC House serves as a true home for artists and audiences—a place where emerging and established artists can create work that deepens their practice and engages the diverse communities of Brooklyn. It includes new, state-of-the-art facilities for BRIC's contemporary art, performing arts, and community media programs and features:

- A 3,000-square-foot contemporary art gallery with soaring 18-foot ceilings, and an adjacent monumental interior stoop for public gathering.
- A performance space with flexible seating that can accommodate 240-400 people.
- State-of-the-art public access television studios and a media-training lab.
- An artist studio and rehearsal space.
- An adjoining café, enhancing the visitor experience.

For more information about BRIC House, visit our website BRICartsmedia.org.

Rendering by Leiser Architecture



Acknowledgments

Since our inception in 1979, BRIC has enriched the cultural landscape of Brooklyn by presenting, producing and enabling a wide array of quality contemporary art, performing arts and community media programs. As a non-profit arts organization, we have been a leader in innovation in the arts and media, a proud participant in the revitalization of Prospect Park and a champion of arts education through our programs. In 2013, our permanent home in downtown Brooklyn, BRIC Arts | Media House, opened its doors. For the first time, BRIC's community media, contemporary art, and performing arts programs are located under one roof.

BRIC reaches upwards of a million Brooklyn residents each year with compelling and accessible programs. Individuals, non-profits, community groups, school children, educators and artists borough-wide all benefit from our exhibitions, performances, television programs, and education programs as well as the subsidized platforms we offer for artists and community members to develop and present works.

BRIC's Contemporary Art program acts as the visual arts anchor of Brooklyn's downtown cultural district. We present contemporary art exhibitions, ongoing opportunities for artists, and free interpretive programs that engage and challenge visitors. Our Contemporary Art Education initiative introduces thousands of students in Brooklyn and beyond annually to visual art through school-based residencies, class visits to BRIC House, and our annual student art exhibition and *Family Days* festivities.

BRIC acknowledges public funds for its contemporary art programs from New York State Council on the Arts; New York City Department of Cultural Affairs; New York State Assembly members Charles Barron, Felix Ortiz, and Joan L. Millman; New York City Council members Mathieu Eugene, Vincent J. Gentile, Letitia James, Brad Lander, Stephen Levin, Diane Mealy, Domenic M. Recchia, Jr., Albert Vann, and Jumaane Williams.

Additional support is provided by Astoria Federal Savings; Lily Auchincloss Foundation; Milton and Sally Avery Arts Foundation; Barclays/Nets Community Alliance; Bay and Paul Foundations; Bloomberg; Bloomingdale's Fund of the Macy's Foundation; Con Edison; Robert Lehman Foundation; Laurence W. Levine Foundation; and numerous individual supporters.



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\$5.00

ISBN 978-0-9899805-0-0

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