



SEXXXITECTURE
CULT, San Francisco

When attending a show titled ‘Sexxxitecture’, you know both what to look for and the danger of projecting too much onto what you see. Purporting to ‘explore the complex relationship between architecture and people’, this group exhibition featuring seven artists focused on how sexuality fits into and is affected by man-made structures.

While exploring how ‘the built environment informs human sexual dynamics,’ the exhibition had the effect of highlighting the often comically antagonistic relationship between buildings and human

(1) sexuality. What can be the most sublime physical and spiritual experience available to human beings is, in fact, subject to sabotage by the discomfort and loin-frosting ugliness of the structures we have designed, built and furnished, presumably to soothe our souls and enhance our comfort. Daniel Gerwin’s sculptures – for instance, *Leaving Home* (2012) and *Dress Up* (2014), jagged-edged and forbidding to the touch, suggests violently broken bedframes and spiked peepholes. Two paintings by Roman Liska resemble magnified carpet burns, mounted like trophies on the wall (‘Dazzle Paintings’, 2015). The press release for ‘Sexxxitecture’ rightly pointed out the aphrodisiac effect that balance, sleekness, harmony and luxury have on many. Alejandro Almanza Pereda trolled such sensitivities with his witty installation of chintzy shelves, barely supported by nonsensical totems of upside-down statuettes, assorted books, even thin glass bowls. In a smart use of CULT’s dim and low-ceilinged middle room, gallery director Aimee Friberg placed a small, bare, antique single bed, with small roses painted on the headboard and a Jacquard pattern on the mattress. Peering in from behind the frayed black curtain felt more invasive than voyeuristic, like one was about to uncover a tragic secret. The tableau was a grim mix of the sinister and the innocent: its dimensions claustrophobic rather than cosy, the bed, which it’s hard to imagine accommodating one adult body, let alone two of them, could nevertheless be construed as the scene of some dark sex act.

The only overtly erotic works were several paintings by Max Maslansky, who painted scenes from 1970s porn films onto bedsheets. Figures with obscured faces and labial skin tones cavort amongst furniture that imprints variations of its own lines and patterns onto their bodies, marking the curves of their pink flesh with the hard, angular, flatly-coloured motifs of mid-century interior design. This was the most literal translation of the exhibition’s theme.

Were it not for the title of the show, many of the pieces in ‘Sexxxitecture’ wouldn’t necessarily appear to be expressions of anything to do with sexuality at all, let alone of its connection to architecture. Works more suggestive than even Jake Ziemann’s phallic blob sculptures might, in another context, pass as thematically distant. But in her witty and challenging installation, Friberg forced us to think about a subject that could easily devolve, especially with more explicit material, into a sort of ‘feng shui for lovers’ silliness. Given a chance, this complex and playful show left us with a heightened awareness of the awkward, ugly and even absurd aspects of our sexual dynamics often overlooked in our focus on the prettified, glossy eroticism that flatters us but is ultimately incomplete.



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(2)

1 Alejandro Almanza Pereda, *The only known complete protection from this event would be to prevent its occurrence, part III*, 2015, shelves, water and found objects, dimensions variable

2 Jake Ziemann, *ooh ooh ooh ooh pull me like*, 2014, spray paint and gouache on ceramic, gypsum, acrylic, cardboard and bricks, dimensions variable