

GAGOSIAN GALLERY

REVIEWS

NEW YORK

Robert Therrien GAGOSIAN GALLERY

The difference between the colossal and the merely big is more than just a matter of size. Take Robert Therrien's recent show at Gagosian: Like much of the Los Angeles-based artist's sculptural work over the past decade and a half, the bulk of the objects installed in the cavernous space (here reconfigured to roughly half its regular dimensions) painstakingly reimagine a selection of quotidian objects at outlandishly exaggerated scales. Yet the fact that most everything shown here is large does not necessarily mean that everything is larger than life, and the reasons for this disparity suggest both the strengths and the limitations of Therrien's expansionist policy.



View of "Robert Therrien," 2008. From left: *No Title (Stacked Plates, Mint)*, 2007; *No Title (Stacked Plates, Butter)*, 2007.

Evoking the contents of a kitchen cupboard that had been run through a malfunctioning replicator, the first room was dominated by several sets of pastel plastic or metal dinner plates (dated variously between 2004 and 2006), swollen to many times their actual size and stacked into eight- or nine-foot-high columns that, with the aid of sensors, mimic the viewer's motion, silently turning at the same speed and in the same direction. These were paired with *No Title (Disc Cart II)*, 2006–2008, which features flat metal circles (coasters?) decorated with small painted figures and shapes, as well as arrays of metal cookware rendered in different magnifications—a tiny cairn of delicate dollhouse pots and pans teetered on a plinth along one wall, as a hulking nine-foot tower of their kin lurked around the corner in its own grotto like a scullery maid's nightmare. (Meanwhile, a cart full of the actual-size models for these scalar oddities idled somewhat forlornly in a corner of the main space, its only bid for similar distinction the complexity of its precarious house-of-cards mounding.)

As it turns out, these resized domestic objects were only setups for the real showstopper, a Brobdingnagian set of card tables and folding chairs that turned the gallery's back room into an uncanny forest of metal legs and seat backs. The oversize-table-and-chair arrangement is perhaps Therrien's best-known trope—*No Title (Yellow Table Leg)* of 1993 and *Under the Table* of the next year were his first forays into the enlargement of everyday objects, and he has frequently returned to them as subjects since. The scrupulously faithful facture of the objects—their worn and rusted surfaces (painted in institutional shades of cocoa, beige, and green) redolent of church-basement community meetings and VFW-hall wedding receptions—gives them a vivid sense of physical life, but here it also conjured a narrative aspect largely absent in the other objects on view.

The phenomenological experience produced by the tables and chairs turns out to be radically different from the other escalations Therrien performs. No matter how small our younger selves were—and all of these size shifts are at heart about toying with the viewer's sense of his or her own bodily presence and the emotional states associated with such alterations—frying pans and plates never loomed as large as bathtubs. Yet everyone, at some point in his or her childhood, sought refuge (for real or for fun) beneath the canopy of a table, and the disorienting mix of security and infantilization that this work

produces (think of Jim Carrey's regression in Michel Gondry's trippy *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind*) makes for a surprisingly powerful bit of sculptural memory theater that inspires more than just simple admiration for Therrien's extraordinary technical skill.

In this respect, the tables and chairs can be aligned, perhaps counterintuitively, less with the other Big Objects in the show than with a work whose effects were not predicated on physical size. *Red Room*, 2000–2007, was composed, viewers were told, of 888 red objects, all packed into a small closet with Dutch doors cut into one of the main room's walls. Therrien's agglomeration—a messy riot of crayons and cinnamon candies, plastic kitchenware and cardboard bricks—was a welcome interruption in the seamless fabric of the white cube and its meticulously wrought contents, a kind of strategically self-inflicted wound that exposes the obsessive innards that lie behind the impeccable surfaces of the artist's outside vision.

—Jeffrey Kastner

