2000 sq. ft./Key Money, 1981
As an undergraduate at UC Berkeley, Myers studied architecture and also ceramics with Peter Voulkos, James Melchert and Ron Nagle. After receiving a Bachelor of Environmental Design degree in 1970, he spent three years designing and remodelling buildings before he entered the M.F.A. program in Studio Art at UC Irvine (he received his degree in 1975 and has taught at Irvine since 1980). Consequently, his knowledge of architecture is direct and practical as well as theoretical, and he is equally at home working on full-scale buildings and miniature facades. This may, in part, explain why his minutely scaled wall sculptures charge the architectural spaces they occupy with such a strong sense of presence, especially those made to be hung in a corner, which engage the space of their environment directly (Something’s Cooking). The archetypal styles to which he alludes are not those of actual buildings, but rather are created from composites of memory fragments. As he says, he is after the feeling of a house rather than its specific appearance, wanting “to give people a sense of the familiar, whose details can be filled in by their own memories, allowing them a participatory role in developing the image’s scenario.”

In addition to the architectural allusions, Myers ironizes a wide variety of references and puns related to the contemporary art scene. In Semi-Precious Property, for example, the “house” has been reduced to a Minimalist cube cast in bronze, which is paired with the shiny ceramic surface of the ubiquitous Southern California swimming pool. Myers’s juxtaposition of the traditionally “high art” medium, bronze, with ceramic and its connotations of “craft,” comments wryly on the traditional hierarchy of media in assessing the value of art. The artist most responsible for elevating the swimming pool to the status of an icon of Southern California is, of course, the British painter David Hockney, whose influence is readily acknowledged by Myers.

Myers’s other aesthetic idols include Edward Hopper, whose Early Sunday Morning inspired the red and green coloration, soaped windows and mailbox in 2000 sq. ft. Key Money; Rene Magritte, whose indoor/outdoor and day/night fusions from his Empire of Light are quoted in several double house compositions in which one side contains a night scene glimpsed through a lighted window, while the window of the second house reflects a daylight image (Shift Change).

Pieces such as Imininent/Eminant Domain address the escalation of the real estate market, which has reached its greatest extremes in New York and California. A house is no longer necessarily a home. It has become an investment, a tax shelter or a status symbol. The situation is such that ownership of a house can no longer be a viable American dream for a large segment of the population.

If we think too much about the issues raised in Myers’s deceptively charming architectural structures, we might easily despair at the deterioration of aesthetic sensibilities and life quality in the late industrial/capitalist era. What rescues us from this potential morass is the artist’s humor combined with an unusually refined technical mastery of his materials. Myers used them together to perform visual and verbal sleights of hand/mind that are equally entertaining and enlightening.

Myers has been the recipient of many awards, including a fellowship from the National Endowment for the Arts (1979) and the L.A. County Museum’s Young Talent Award (1984). This exhibition, which was previously presented at the University Art Museum, UC Santa Barbara, was funded in part by the UC Committee on Intercampus Arts.

Melinda Wertz
Director, Fine Arts Gallery
UC Irvine

Works in MATRIX (all works glaze and acrylic on ceramic, and lent by the artist and the John Berggruen Gallery, San Francisco, unless otherwise noted):

1. Neo/Neo, So Real, 1995, 2-1/4 x 4-1/4 x 2-1/4”.

2. Modern Romance/A Matter of Style vs Content, 1995, 2-1/2 x 5 x 2-1/4”.


4. Semi-Precious Property, 1982, edition 2/4, bronze and ceramic, 2-1/4 x 4 x 2”.
5. **Imminent/Eminent Domain**, 1982, 3 x 5 x 2-1/4". Lent by the artist.

6. **Casa Tajunga**, 1985, 3-1/4 x 4 x 2-1/4".

7. **Key Location/Close In/Hold Out**, 1985, 12" x 6-1/2 x 2-3/4".

8. **2000 sq. ft./Key Money**, 1981, 3 x 3-1/4 x 2".


10. **Night and Day**, 1985, 3 x 5-1/2 x 2-3/4".

Selected one-person exhibitions:

University Art Museum, Santa Barbara, CA, '85 (catalogue);
John Berggruen Gallery, S.F., '84; Los Angeles Municipal Art Gallery, '82 (catalogue);

Selected group exhibitions:

Los Angeles Institute of Contemporary Art, Pacific Connections, '85 (catalogue);
Arco Center for the Visual Arts, L.A., Los Angeles and the Palm Tree, '84 (catalogue); California State University, Fullerton, CA, The House That Art Built, '83 (catalogue); Kansas City Museum of Art, MO, Ceramic Echoes, '83 (catalogue); The Sculpture Center, N.Y., Houses, '82; Siegel Contemporary Art, Inc., N.Y., Microcosms, '82 (traveled to Contemporary Arts Forum, Santa Barbara, CA); Newport Harbor Art Museum, CA, California, the State of Landscape, '81 (catalogue);

Selected bibliography (see also catalogues under exhibitions):

Geer, Susan.
Albright, Thomas.
Wortz, Melinda.
Westfall, Stephen.
"Microcosms," Arts Magazine, Sept. '82.
Muchnic, Suzanne.
Forde, Ed. "Gifford Myers," Images and Issues, Summer '82.

MATRIX is supported in part by a grant from the National Endowment for the arts, a Federal agency, Mrs. Paul L. Wattis, and the T. B. Walker Foundation.