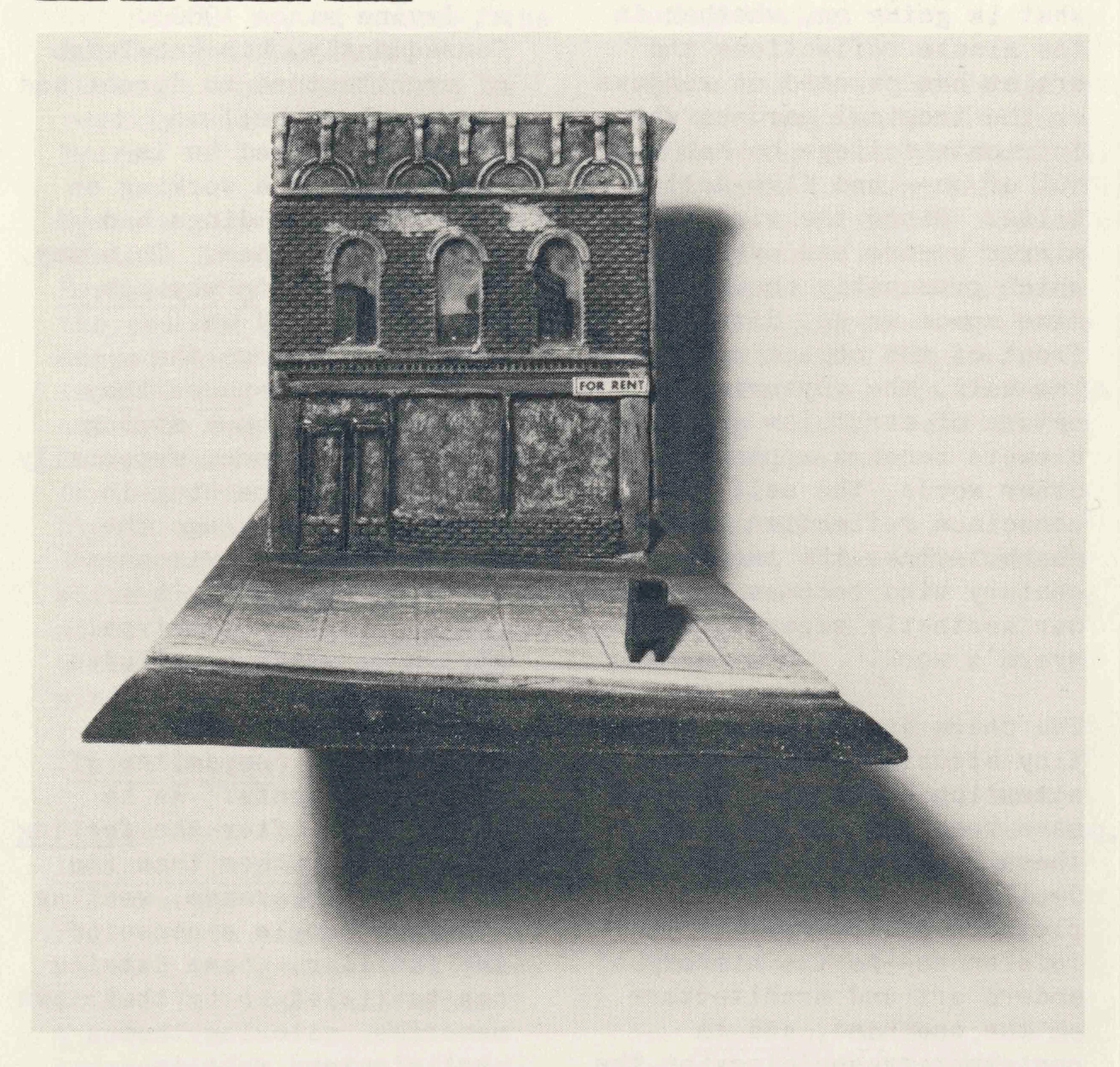
University Art Museum late September - mid-November 1985

2000 sq. ft./Key Money, 1981



Gifford Myers's miniature sculptures are small, clever and impeccably crafted -uncommon characteristics in the angst-ridden aesthetic aura of the 1980s. In a period which seems to believe that bigger is better, Myers's real estate sagas seduce through scale; most are no more than three and one-half inches across. Quite literally we must look very closely in order to see what is going on, whether in the minute reflections the artist has painted on windows or the tropical gardens whose intricate foliage he has cut out of one- and five-dollar bills. Since the windows mirror scenes and events which presumably occupy the same space we do, directly in front of the object hung on the wall, the voyeuristic nature of our roles as viewers becomes apparent. In other words, the selfconscious reflection that characterizes the twentiethcentury mind becomes part of our aesthetic experience of Myers's work.

The charm and scale of these tiny structures are effective attention grabbers. Once we have been enticed to examine these remarkable, fictive dwellings, we discover a plethora of layered references -- to the history of modern art and architecture on the one hand, and to contemporary sociology on the other. In terms of architectural style, Myers's houses run the gamut from International Style Modernism, which was introduced to Southern California by Europeans such as Richard Neutra and Rudolf Schindler (Modern Romance/A Matter of Style vs Content), to Postmodernist kitsch (Neo-Neo/So Real).

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 ironically evokes
various 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; and Rene Magritte, whose indoor/outdoor and day/night fusions from his Empire of Lights 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 daylit image (Shift Change).

Pieces such as
Imminent/Eminent 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 uses 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 Wortz 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, 1985, $2-1/4 \times 4-1/4 \times 2-1/4$ ".
- 2. Modern Romance/A Matter of Style vs Content, 1985, 2-1/2 x 6 x 2-1/2".
- 3. Something's Cooking, 1985, 2-1/4 x 5-1/4 x 2-1/4". Lent by Stephane Janssen, Beverly Hills, CA.
- 4. Semi-Precious Property,
 1982, edition 2/4, bronze and
 ceramic, 2-1/4 x 4 x 2".

- 5. Imminent/Eminent Domain, 1982, $3 \times 5 \times 2-1/4$ ". Lent by the artist.
- 6. Casa Tajunga, 1985, 3-1/4 \times 4 \times 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".
- 9. Shift Change, 1983, 2-1/2 $x 5-1/4 \times 2-1/2$ ". Private collection.
- 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); McIntosh/Drysdale Gallery, Washington, DC, '82; Janus Gallery, L.A., '81 (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); Whitney Museum, Downtown Branch, N.Y., Words, '77; Quay Gallery, S.F., Gifford Myers, Ed Blackburn, Bob Brady, '75.

Selected bibliography (see also catalogues under exhibitions):

Geer, Susan.

"Architectural Narratives,"

Artweek, Feb. 2, '85.

Albright, Thomas.

"Gifford Myers," San

Francisco Chronicle, Feb. 1,

'84.

Wortz, Melinda.
"Gifford Myers," Art News,
May '83.

Brown, Betty. "Gifford Myers," Arts Magazine, Nov. '82.

Westfall, Stephen.
"Microcosms," Arts Magazine,
Sept. '82.

Muchnic, Suzanne.

"Abstraction and Realism: A Coexistence," Los Angeles
Times, Sept. 19, '82.

Forde, Ed. "Gifford Myers," Images and Issues, Summer '82.

McBee, Gay. "Surreal Estart," New West, March '81.

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