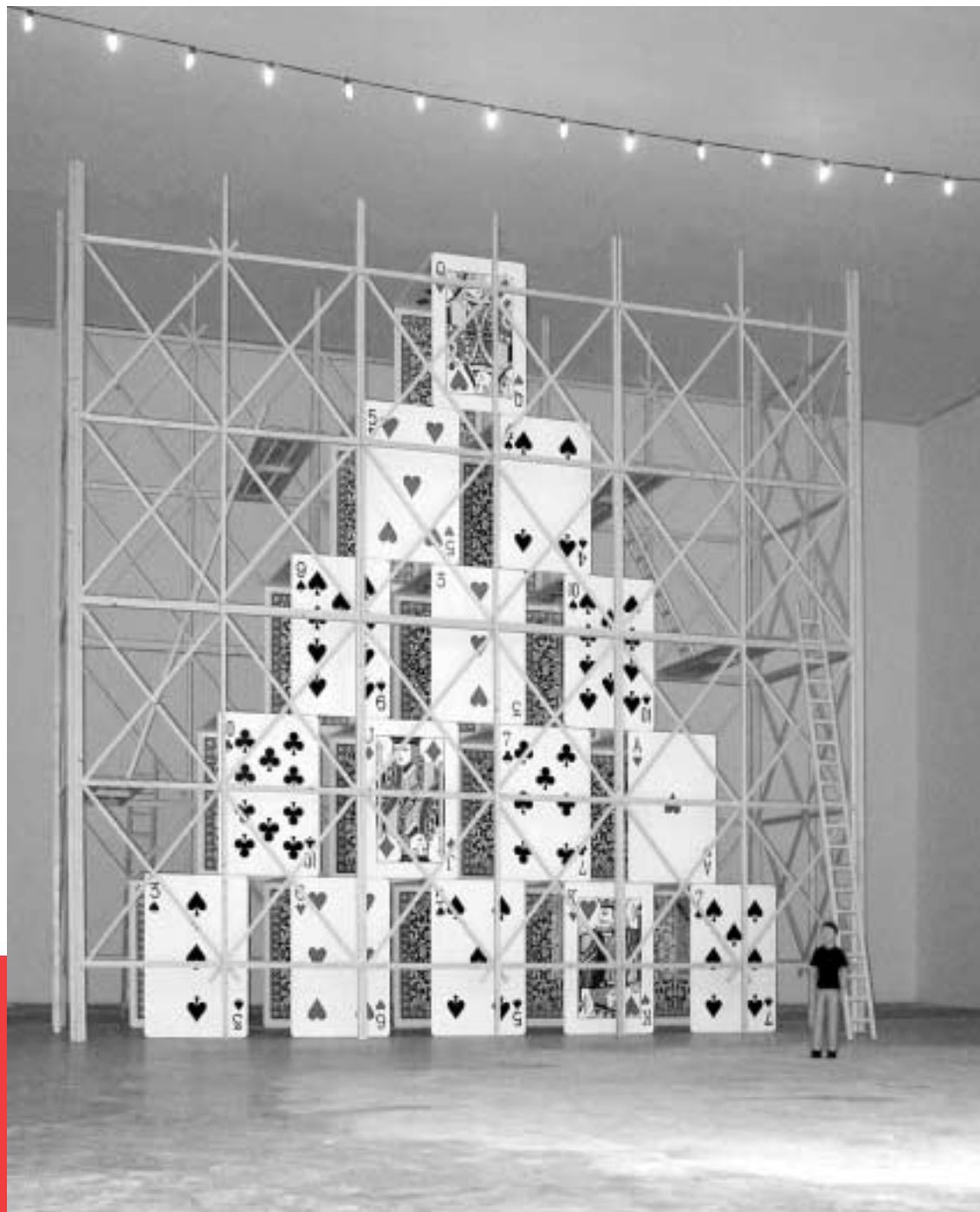


NEWORK

ROBERTO BEHAR AND
ROSARIO MARQUARDT



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Roberto Behar and Rosario Marquardt, who collaborate under the name R&R Studios, were trained as architects in Argentina and moved to Miami in the mid-1980s. They are an artistic team for whom the built environment and issues of public space are central concerns, yet they are also at home working in the more private arena of art: the studio, the home, and the gallery. They have described their work in painting, installations, and architecture as being “three expressions of the same idea: an idea that is both dream and obstinate reality. [The] works propose encounters of stories and spaces, which alternate between the private and the public, the intimate and the monumental, the quotidian and the fantastic.”¹

Behar and Marquardt are perhaps best known to audiences for their public projects scattered around Miami, works that are as much about expression as utility. The giant red *M* – “the biggest ‘M’ in the world” – at the Metromover’s Riverwalk Station in downtown Miami may serve as a clock and a gateway, but its primary function is as a symbol: an out-of-scale child’s alphabet toy that serves as a container for multiple meanings, from Miami, Metromover, motion, monument, and milestone, to memory, mystery, magic, migrant, and motherhood.

The canvas murals of *The Bedroom* on the side of the Buick building in Miami’s Design District transform the building into a giant dollhouse by presenting cutaway views of two rooms. Within one room a man sleeps, while in the other a devil and an angel engage in a boxing match for his soul. The outside of a public structure becomes the setting for an interior battle. *The Living Room*, also in the Design District, transforms one corner of an urban intersection into a domestic interior. The motif of a cutaway room is here presented in three dimensions, this time a living room equipped with an oversized couch flanked by towering lamps, flowered wallpaper rising 40 feet into the air, and a 12 x 6 foot window that presents an ever changing view of sky and clouds. The artists have described the work as a place “where art and life meet, public and private space collide, the real and the fantastic coexist, and the domestic and the monumental intersect.”² In each of these works, the artists subvert notions about public and private in an effort to inject a note of intimacy and introspection into the stark impersonality of Miami, a city where expediency has historically been a higher priority than quality of life.

This interplay between public and private, art and architecture continues in Behar and Marquardt’s indoor collaborations, which are often characterized by a dream-like quality, including sharp changes of scale and confusion between reality and imagination. For their *New Work* installation, titled *A Place in the World*, Behar and Marquardt have created a space that is both indoors and out. We enter through a narrow corridor, passing through a multi-colored plastic curtain into a nondescript interior space lit by a single bulb. Within it is a table, onto which a roulette-like wheel has been mounted. The wheel is marked with multiple directional indicators – North, South, East, and West – arranged in random order. The presumed orientation of the room changes with each spin of the wheel, and our sense of dislocation begins.

From this room we pass through another part of the same curtain into a larger, darker space. It is illuminated by strings of colored lights, like an outdoor piazza in holiday season. At the far end is a tall structure, a five-tiered house of cards surrounded by a

scaffold, around which several small figures congregate. It is unclear whether this card structure is being built or being preserved, whether it is enlarged or reduced, whether we are inside or out. From the bare antechamber, we have moved into a dream.

Our uncertainty is largely the product of an ambiguity of scale. The cards, which are each about 2-1/2 feet tall, are, of course, far larger than the playing cards we normally use; yet the figures who surround it, each about 20 inches tall, are roughly one quarter our size. The five-story card structure seems the right scale for them, but too small for us. The cards are thus both big and small, the structure both an edifice and a model, and we are unsure whether we're our size or the size of the figures. We are like Alice in Wonderland, caught in a world of changing scales.

The house of cards is a motif that appears several times in Behar and Marquardt's work, most notably in *Los Pasos Perdidos* ("The Lost Steps"), a tabletop sculpture that resembles a public plaza. It is populated by a series of structures and features derived from the artists' other projects, both realized and unrealized, rendered in a variety of different scales. There is, for example, a maquette of their giant red *M*, along with a black ziggurat-like structure surmounted by a mirrored ball that was an early idea for the Metromover commission. There is a paper boat made from a colored map, an image the artists once used in an installation called *The Dimension of Our Hope*. A pair of benches and a basin in the form of an eight-pointed star were originally features of a proposal for a public area in Florida City, Florida.³ There are also an airplane, a hobbyhorse, a cemetery, several buildings, a devil, and a few trees. Scattered about the sand-paved plaza are a number of figures, including a blindfolded girl – "the dreamer" – who appears in a number of Behar and Marquardt's oil paintings. *Los Pasos Perdidos* is a plaza where Borges meets Alice. It "appears both as architectural model and construction toy," write the artists, "It recalls the space of childhood and memories of play and suggests.... possibilities for the invention of contemporary public space. The work proposes a journey from the imaginary to the real. Thus memories and desires are co-present in *Los Pasos Perdidos*."

The house of cards in Behar and Marquardt's *New Work* installation is like a detail from *Los Pasos Perdidos* enlarged to a new scale. Surrounded by a scaffold, it is unclear whether it is being built or is on the verge of collapse.⁴ This uncertainty may reflect the tenuousness of what one writer has described as "the exile's attempt to find and define a place in the world."⁵ In a new world the exile seeks to build a home, yet his efforts are threatened and undermined by the confusing, alien environment in which he finds himself. In conjuring up images of childhood and play, the artists evoke the essential connection in the exile's mind between childhood, home, and rootedness, all of which have been lost and left behind. But the reference to childhood also serves to establish a common ground for people from diverse backgrounds, for what can be more universal than child's play?

For all its universality, however, Behar and Marquardt's house of cards seems a particularly apt image for the city in which the artists now live. Miami is a young city, a city of immigrants, a city of great aspiration ("the capital of Latin America"), but also of great instability. With little historical foundation on which to build, the permanence and viability of its lofty dreams seem continually in doubt. As such, Miami provides an

BIOGRAPHY

Roberto Behar and Rosario Marquardt were born and raised in Argentina. They both have Diplomas in Architecture from the Universidad Nacional de Rosario in Mar del Plata, Argentina. Behar completed post-graduate studies at the Institute for Architecture and Urban Studies in New York City. Marquardt holds an additional degree in puppet theater direction. They currently live and work in Miami Beach.

They have exhibited their work at the Museum of Contemporary Art in North Miami, The Bass Art Museum in Miami Beach, the Museum of Art in Fort Lauderdale, the Fondation pour l'Architecture in Brussels and the Museo Nacional d'Arte in La Paz. Their public commissions include the 45 foot-tall *M* at the Riverwalk Metromover Station in downtown Miami, as well as *The Salon*, *The Bedroom*, *The Living Room*, and *Kids!*, all located within a 2-block radius in Miami's Design District.

Their work has been featured in numerous publications devoted to art and architecture, including *The New York Times*, *Aula*, *architektur.aktuelle*, *Art in America*, *Metropolis*, *Casabella*, *Area*, *Faces*, *Archivos de Arquitectura Antillana*, *Abitare*, *Summa*, and *Loft*. Behar and Marquardt have lectured in the United States, Switzerland, Italy, Brazil, and Argentina.

ideal laboratory for Behar and Marquardt's "imaginary solutions" for the problems of the contemporary metropolis. "Miami straddles the first, second, and third worlds," Behar and Marquardt have written, "and is the capital before its time of the fourth. A present and future world in which most city inhabitants come from somewhere else and offer each other a culture of cultures to be discovered, plus the opportunity to build shared memories that simultaneously function as the place's meaningful landmarks and spaces." It is a place, in short, for architects and artists, where buildings have much in common with dreams.

Peter Boswell

Assistant Director for Programs/Senior Curator

- 1 All quotations are from the artists' unpublished writings, unless otherwise cited.
- 2 Quoted in Jean-François Lejeune. "SMALL + SMART: The Living Room in Miami-Florida, USA." *architektur.aktuell*, n. 254, March 2002, p. 148.
- 3 The eight-pointed star is also featured in *The Star of Miami*, a proposal by Behar and Marquardt to transform unused Flagler Island in Biscayne Bay into a star-shaped public park.
- 4 In this sense it carries through on the ambiguity of *The Living Room*, which could be interpreted either as an incomplete structure or as a ruin.
- 5 Janet L. Rumble. "The Art of Being Neither Here nor There." *Aula* 3, 2002, p. 69.

CHECKLIST

House of Cards, 2003
House: wood, paint and ink,
144 x 144 x 48 inches
Figures: polymer and fabric,
each 21 inches high

Wheel of Fortune, 2003
Wood, nails and acrylic paint,
36 x 41 x 41 inches

All works in the exhibition are courtesy of the artists and realized with assistance from Miami Art Museum.

New Work: Roberto Behar and Rosario Marquardt is organized by Miami Art Museum as part of New Work, a series that presents projects by leading contemporary artists.

Miami Art Museum



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COVER: *New Work: Roberto Behar and Rosario Marquardt*, installation in progress, 2003