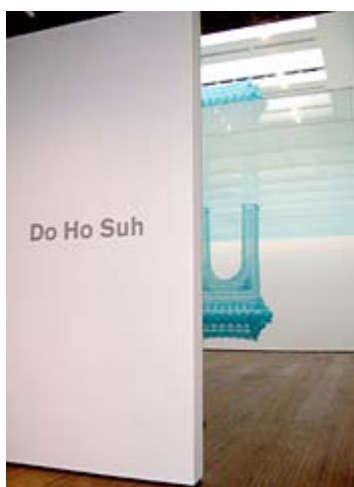


## Print Article



Outside the new Lehmann Maupin gallery at 201 Chrystie Street



Installation view of Do-Ho Suh's *Reflection* at Lehmann Maupin



Installation view of Do-Ho Suh's *Reflection* at Lehmann Maupin

## GATEWAY TO NOWHERE

### by Ben Davis

Do-Ho Suh, "Reflection," Nov. 29, 2007-Feb. 2, 2008, at Lehmann Maupin Gallery, 201 Chrystie Street, New York, N.Y. 10002

The 12-year-old Lehmann Maupin gallery, long resident on West 26th Street in Chelsea, has inaugurated its new second space on the Bowery with a work by a long-time star of their stable, Do-Ho Suh. In fact, the gallery has given over the entire impressive, high-ceilinged space to a single large sculpture by the New York-based Korean artist.

Suh (b. 1962) is known for large-scale, finely crafted sculptures that take various forms, including constructions using a multitude of small plastic figurines and floating architectural structures made of gauzy fabric. Trained first in Korean ink painting and then at the Rhode Island School of Design and Yale in the '90s, Suh is uncommonly good at marrying socially charged imagery with an elegant material sensibility; his works trade both in self-conscious conceptualism and sexy surfaces.

The new work, titled *Reflection*, is a meticulous, one-to-one architectural facsimile of a Korean ceremonial gate, crafted entirely from sheer blue fabric and suspended upside-down in the air in the middle of the gallery. A work of considerable ingenuity and craftsmanship, it comes complete with all the detailing and ornamentation. It seems to hang from a ceiling made of like-colored fabric, stretched horizontally across the space. But above this plane, a second gate stands right-side-up, suspended from the ceiling by wires, a perfectly identical mirror image. A stairway to the gallery's second level allows visitors to look down on the piece from above.

In one way, this is old hat. Suh is returning to the motif he has explored many times before: fabric reproductions of spaces that are charged with personal memories. *Seoul Home* (1999), now in the collection of the Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, is a one-to-one fabric recreation of his childhood house in Korea. *Perfect Home II*, which he showed in Lehmann Maupin's Chelsea space in 2003, cloned his New York apartment. More recently, he has been moving towards architectural pieces that are more deliberately fragmentary, like the orange mock-up of his NYC apartment's staircase he took to the 8th Istanbul Biennale.

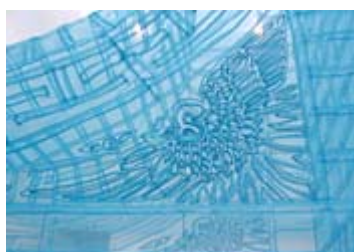
The current arch recreates the entry gate Suh grew up with at his Korean home. As a spectacular image, it certainly generates lots of attention. But is there anything new to say about the gesture?

As to the piece's personal significance, the gallery press releases and accompanying literature give a smattering of details, but it is difficult to dig up what connotations this structure has or had in its original context. This, it is important to note, is part of the game. Suh's sculpture is an image presented literally suspended in air, held up as a quotation, taken out of context.

The work is transparent in more than one sense. Perceptually and conceptually, you absorb Suh's sculpture all at once. You register it



**Do-Ho Suh**  
*Reflection*  
 2004  
 Lehmann Maupin



**Do-Ho Suh**  
*Reflection (detail)*  
 2004  
 Lehmann Maupin



**Do-Ho Suh**  
*Seoul Home/L.A. Home/New York Home/Baltimore Home/London Home/Seattle Home/L.A. Home*  
 1999  
 Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles)



Do-Ho Suh's *Perfect Home II* at  
 Lehmann Maupin in 2003

as a meticulous, almost inscrutable recreation -- and that is exactly what it is. Lehmann Maupin's Stephanie Smith speculates that it took almost a year for Suh and his team of assistants to craft *Reflection*, yet little about it makes you think of the labor that went into its production. From one tile-work detail or dragon ornament to the next, there is hardly evidence of the hand of the maker, only a flawlessly calculated, machined perfection. The image has a luxurious slickness appropriate to the context where it was originally displayed -- the Hermès headquarters in Tokyo.

Nevertheless, buried in the image, there is a kind of secret narrative. The balance between individual and collective identity has defined Suh's practice to date, almost programmatically. To take just one example, perhaps his most iconic piece is *Some/One* (2001), an impressive, life-sized suit of Korean armor assembled from hundreds of dog-tags, the centerpiece of the Seattle Art Museum's newly opened contemporary galleries. Some kind of statement about the individual identities buried beneath the construction of a common identity seems explicit.

Yet looking closer, beneath the obviousness of this idea, things get a bit more tangled. The dog-tags in *Some/One* present only the appearance of individual names. In fact, they are printed with nonsensical character sequences. Upon still closer inspection, it becomes clear that there are only a limited number of these nonsensical sequences, which have been mixed together in various combinations to give the impression of variety. The semblance of individual identities buried in the larger image is really a kind of surface effect, a knowing appearance.

This double bluff applies, mutatis mutandis, to Suh's architectural simulacra as well. The fact that his dummy structures recreate personal spaces is part of their presentation. But, in fact, they are mute reconstructions, as alluring as they are affectless. In being reprocessed, these memories have turned into stylish ghosts, removed from their origins, in suspended animation. Suh's works are testament to art's ability to forget the individual, not to its ability to remember it.

In this respect, the current piece at Lehmann Maupin is a coming to self-consciousness of something that was mainly implied in his other work: With its mirrored forms suspended in air, *Reflection* is no longer the reconstruction of an architectural form; it is the reconstruction of the image of an architectural form. It's a memory once removed.

And at last, in the context of the gallery's new space in the Bowery, and the attendant opening of the New Museum up the street, Suh's gateway to nowhere takes on added resonance -- original, lived-in architecture being replaced by a shadowy, boutique image of itself. This gives a very social referent to Suh's abstract memorial; it testifies to art's awkward balancing act as the self-cancelling middle term in the process of urban renewal and gentrification, thriving on the raggedness of life and also bringing with it the cool that potentially cancels it out. It is a testament to the evocative power of what Suh does that his work can stand as a kind of symbol of transition. It gives the faceless beauty of his sculpture an undercurrent of real ambivalence and longing.

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Do-Ho Suh's *Staircase* (2003) at the 8th Istanbul Biennial



**Do-Ho Suh**  
*Some/One*  
2001  
Seattle Art Museum



**Do-Ho Suh**  
*Some/One* (detail)  
2001  
Seattle Art Museum