

The World of Madelon Vriesendorp

In 1972 Rem Koolhaas, Madelon Vriesendorp, and Elia and Zoe Zenghelis collaborated on Exodus, or the Voluntary Prisoners of Architecture; the project was a catalyst for what three years later would become the Office for Metropolitan Architecture, bringing together the architecture concern's original four-person line-up. Practically, Exodus transplanted the Berlin Wall to London and made it inhabitable; privately, it inaugurated the working relationship between Vriesendorp and (husband) Koolhaas, paradoxically united — at least professionally — by a massive partition. The World of Madelon Vriesendorp brought Vriesendorp back to Berlin: the exhibition, having originated at the Architectural Association in London, was featured at Berlin's Aedes am Pfefferberg this past spring, and like a reverse Exodus the retrospective deconstructed the wall that had enclosed 40 years of work, and proceeded to excavate and restore its gloriously messy ruins.

The exhibition's full title is actually The World of Madelon Vriesendorp: Paintings/Postcards/Objects/Games, although the world in question is such a confusion of objects and paintings and uniqueness and reproducibility that not one of these four categories is clearly distinguishable from the other three — a Minnie Mouse wearing traditional Indian dress, for instance, shares a display case with a Turner discovered in the bottom of a cast iron frying pan. The Architectural Association's Shumon Basar, who co-curated the show with architect/theorist Stephan Trüby, had been thinking about unearthing Vriesendorp's archive of pure STUFF (a “craggy community of miscreant figures lined up to face you — both silent and raucously unruly”) since he first set eyes on it during a visit to her North London apartment roughly 8 years ago, where her semi-secret object archive was deployed. The volume of work was certainly bursting at its seams, and the time to exhibit couldn't have been more ripe: this year marks the 30th anniversary of Koolhaas' Delirious New York; Vriesendorp had provided the book's cover illustration, Flagrant Delit, for which she would become known. The painting has also, more recently, constituted a kind of centerpiece to the archaeology of her work presented within the exhibition — and published in its accompanying catalogue, designed by Kasia Korczak — alongside a wall of over 60 of Vriesendorp's “playground surrealist” paintings, many of which had never before been seen by the public. And this was perhaps generally the case with the items on display — even Vriesendorp's family was unaware of the totality of the works buried in that studio, her daughter Charlie Koolhaas having apparently asked, “Mum, were all these in your studio the whole time?”

There is a scene towards the end of Jim Henson's 1986 movie Labyrinth in which Jennifer Connelly's character finds herself in a bedroom that looks like her own, surrounded by familiar toys and trinkets. The heroine soon realizes that the room has been completely fabricated by her adversary, the Goblin King (played by

David Bowie), and, having realized that “it's all junk,” begins to question her connections to objects and the fantastical realities she has created out of them. Human connections, we are taught, are more valuable ...

[The clipping ends mid-sentence here.] Photograph: Madelon Vriesendorp in her studio (photographer not credited in the clipping).