

The Architectural Exhibition Review

12 March 2024 (updated Jan 2025) — Review

The Leave Behind

“Madelon Vriesendorp: Cosmic Housework,” Jencks Foundation at the Cosmic House, London — 12 September 2023 - 14 September 2024

It is rare that you see an exhibition in which you can't easily find the works on display. At the Cosmic House, the Notting Hill residence-turned-museum, the built Postmodern manifesto designed by Charles and Maggie Jencks, any foreign object disappears into the richly textured architectural menagerie. A severed white foot props a door slightly ajar, plastic swans paddle on green linoleum, spiky-haired, milky gargoyles eye you from atop a bookshelf, a roughly hewn, hard-edged couple sternly browses the library. Disembodied limbs are flung across chaise lounges. In this house everything is a double entendre: A couch turns into an Aldo Rossi-esque municipal square. File cabinets tower in a city of miniature buildings. At the bottom of the jacuzzi is an inverted Baroque cupola. Only in Maggie's study, the space where “symbolism stops at the door,” does Madelon Vriesendorp's exhibition *Cosmic Housework* distinguish itself from her hosts' propensity for decoration and kitsch.

Vriesendorp and the Jenckses were close friends. She had been a guest at their house when it was still a private residence. They shared a love for seeing characters in buildings and architectural dad jokes, be they of a visual or textual nature: one of Vriesendorp's new groups of work is *Plastic Surgery*, a witticism about the empty plastic milk jugs she origamied into the anthropomorphic creatures that now populate the house.

Much like Charles Jencks' self-declared role model, John Soane's museum — a private home that, even during Soane's lifetime, displayed his vast collection of antiques — the Cosmic House has always been an exhibition space. Souvenirs and archetypical pyramids and obelisks abound in this universe of cosmological and architectural precedents. They sit on a dead-end staircase, on ledges and custom-built furniture. The house itself might be best described as a giant object label alluding to its own underlying symbolism. Vriesendorp's Easter eggs leave behind another commentary layer that brings in her own private mythology of found objects and critters. And everything in this house — living organism or inanimate object — teems with a rich life of its own.

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