

Martha Wilson, Nick Cave and Pepon Osorio in New York City

By [andrea kirsh](#) | September 27, 2011



Pepon Osorio 'Drowned in A Glass of Water' (2010) mixed media, Ronald Feldman Gallery

Pepon Osorio's exhibition at Ronald Feldman Gallery (through Oct. 22, 2011) consists of one large installation in each of two rooms. *Drowned in a Glass of Water* revolves on a huge platform, each side revealing a tableaux of contrasting domestic scenes. Osorio has an ability similar to Edward Kienholz's, of evoking human vulnerability through forms that suggest the human despite being only partially figural (or having figural attributes). The living-room of a modest home is cramped and chaotic. A large woman looms over the scene; she wears a red and white, crocheted ballgown and her arms are covered with bandages. In front of her is a wheelchair occupied by a figure, represented by a video screen which shows the hands of a woman crocheting the red and white yarn of the dress. Is the large figure a mannekin, or a dream of the incapacitated, knitting woman? Or are there two women in the room? A boy in a football helmet sits at the back, watching television; his back is to the room and to us, the viewers. Balloons with get-well wishes sit on a shelf, implying that someone is recuperating. The shelves are otherwise filled with a multitude of gimcrack figurines, the floor is littered with toys and a toppled, miniature Christmas tree.

The reverse of the platform is occupied by a sleeker and more monied scene: on a hospital litter lies a figure in the guise of a video screen again, whose imagery implies the interior of the body at a molecular level. Beside it a golden heart sits on the ground, covered in a glass bell jar of sorts, upon which rests a gold pocket watch. On the back wall in an elaborate, gold frame is a moving image of a waterfall. It's impossible not to associate it with the flickering waterfall of Duchamp's *Étant donnés*, but I can't figure out what to make of that association. A mirror reflects an image of a woman's mouth, eating from a silver spoon.

The work in the second room, *Todo o nada (All or Nothing)*, is clearer in its references. To approach it we pass through security gates to find the bruised face of a boy looking out the window of a modest house, as we hear the voice of his mother who describes finding him beaten. Both works evoke the harshness of everyday life which, even for the wealthy, includes our common mortality. Osorio's work is full of references to pain, yet the very efforts he puts into the representations implies some optimism, or at least hope of redemption. But the imagery of figures mired in difficulties pervades this exhibition.