

Pepón Osorio

Institute of Contemporary Art

An invitation to a three-year artist's residency at Philadelphia's Department of Human Services (DHS) was right up Pepón Osorio's alley. Osorio is a former social worker, and his unblinking recreations of human environments are a direct outgrowth of this experience. For this exhibition, a culmination of his recently completed residency, the artist made excellent use of the ICA's first-floor galleries, transforming them into remarkable facsimiles of a hearing room in family court, a tract house in mid-construction, and DHS's offices. He has a striking ability to analyze and replicate the way people interact with their personal space.

The three unpeopled environments contained a central humanizing element that brought the space to life. In the mock office, a cage in the center of the room was packed with a real family's entire belongings. In the courtroom, there was a video of a girl confronting a judge who had placed her in foster care. In the tract home, a video projection showed a boy who had gotten lost in a new housing development that had literally been transposed over a Philadelphia neighborhood he used to know.

So much detail went into these installations that it distracted from the real-life dramas that were addressed. But Osorio was able to articulate the knotty disconnect between government agencies and



Pepón Osorio, *Face to Face*, 2004, mixed media, dimensions variable, installation view. Institute of Contemporary Art.

the human predicaments they're supposed to be solving, and, as he usually does, he proved that artists can be agents for social change without compromising their esthetics.

—Edith Newhall