

## REVIEW OF EXHIBITIONS

### NEW YORK

#### Allan Wexler at Ronald Feldman

Modern architecture generally represents the triumph of culture over nature—despite its lip service to their interdependence. Allan Wexler, a self-proclaimed "architect in an artist's body," suggests the shortsightedness of that practice with an exhibition of scale models and full-size prototypes of domestic environments. These witty transformations of ordinary living and dining rooms, furniture and home appliances, seem to support a kind of field theory of human existence in which the individual is captured in a network of social, technological and natural relationships.

As the traditional center of family life, the dining room serves Wexler as a nucleus from which social, biological and spiritual energies flow. A number of small models of tables and chairs within rudimentary rooms offer metaphors for connectedness. In some works the link is biological. One table's legs sprout roots that dig themselves into the earth out-

side, while another table is equipped with drainage ditches leading from the table legs to pools outside, in which trees are planted. Other models stress spiritual values: a table is covered with a white cloth that has begun to unravel into thin strips which wrap themselves around wire stakes in their heavenward ascent. Another invokes the machine, enmeshing diners within a complex system of pulleys and strings that connects them to the outside world.

A full-scale sukkah table has been designed to meet the requirement that this Jewish feast of the harvest be celebrated out-of-doors. Chair and table legs are outfitted with grow lights and end in planters filled with dirt and long grass. Another dining set physically connects seated users through a complicated sequence of hollow table legs, rubber tubes and wooden joints.

But if these works posit some kind of metaphysical bond between all orders of existence, they also celebrate the unexpected pleasures of making do. These deliberately low-tech, jury-rigged apparatuses remind us that a certain modesty is not only



Allan Wexler: Installation view of *Crate House*, 1991; at Ronald Feldman.

esthetically but also ecologically correct. This point is particularly clear in the show's centerpiece—a *Crate House* consisting of four large plywood crates-on-wheels that open to reveal all the necessities for a comfortable 20th-century life. One contains the kitchen, complete with a hot plate, small refrigerator, strapped-in dishes, pots and cooking utensils, an electrical hookup and a faucet attached to a garden hose outside. The bedroom comes with bed frame, mattress, pillow and sheets all designed to fold up neatly into its 79-by-65-by-29-inch shell. In what is perhaps a sorry comment on the state of our social lives, the living room is completely taken up with a home entertainment center. Meanwhile, the crate containing the bathroom remained modestly closed.

A home for the downsized '90s, the *Crate House* offers a cautionary message about humankind's place in the world. It is no longer feasible to re-create the world to suit our fancies. Rather, Wexler suggests, we must consider how to fit ourselves into its already existing systems. Beneath the whimsy, this serious message comes through with engaging clarity.

—Eleanor Heartney