



"Gary Baseman: THE DOOR IS ALWAYS OPEN" AT THE SKIRBALL CULTURAL CENTER, VIEW OF BEDROOM, 2013
PHOTO: TIMOTHY NORRIS/COURTESY THE SKIRBALL CULTURAL CENTER

LOS ANGELES

Gary Baseman: "The Door is Always Open" at Skirball Cultural Center

Crossing the threshold into Gary Baseman's installation "The Door is Always Open" unveils a world unto itself. Adapting the layout and rooms of his Los Angeles childhood home, Baseman invites viewers to journey with him through aspects of his cultural heritage, Jewish upbringing, and artistic development connecting the rooms of the house to different facets of his creative output. The exhibition melds reality and fantasy as well as the personal and commercial in a homey atmosphere, revealing the importance of family and childhood in Baseman's work. The narrative that weaves through his oeuvre is one of facades, wherein human vulnerabilities are masked by cartoon stand-ins. Whimsical characters are depicted in cartoons, drawings, paintings, sculptures, toys and wallpaper that decorate each room in the faux house. *The Explosion of Dream Reality* (2009) depicts one of Baseman's imaginary worlds. Against a light blue background we see an entanglement of animal and human forms. Within this menagerie, figures sprout tree-like appendages while animals exhibit human emotions. The painting is an image of innocence, wonder, guilt, life and death.

Baseman's works draw from pop culture yet are extremely personal. His cartoon-like characters serve as his alter-ego. One character, Toby, described by Baseman as a 3-D pleather friend, has traveled with him all over the world, taking his place in touristy photographs that document their local as well as international excursions. In the Skirball exhibition

these color photographs and numerous Toby dolls line the hallway that connects the various rooms of the house. Each room has a special significance for Baseman. He juxtaposes furnishings from his childhood home—a dining room table set for a holiday meal, an array of living room couches, a child's bed—with a plethora of decorations ranging from personal mementos and family snapshots to his own framed and unframed artworks.

Although it is pleasurable to see Baseman's iconic characters appearing on lamps and bedspreads, and as small-scale toys or life-sized figurines, the pop qualities of his production and the focus on installation diminishes the reading of the individual works as fine art. However, by creating a physical place where dreams and whimsy collide with reality, Baseman can safely articulate his fears and fantasies. While much of his work has a childlike simplicity, it resonates on multiple levels, communicating the complexity of life in a way that is understandable to all ages and all audiences.

—JODY ZELLEN