

WELCOME TO THE DOLLHOUSE: MIKE GOODLETT AT INSTITUTE 193

By Maddie Klett

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View of Mike Goodlett, *Untitled*, 2001–07, wood, glass, paper, and ballpoint pen, 40 by 32 by 9 inches; at Institute 193.

JOSH PORTER

“Desire Itself,” an exhibition of works by [Mike Goodlett](https://www.artnews.com/t/mike-goodlett/) (<https://www.artnews.com/t/mike-goodlett/>), who died this past June at age sixty-three, was a memorial of sorts. Staged at [Institute 193](https://www.artnews.com/t/institute-193/) (<https://www.artnews.com/t/institute-193/>) in the artist’s hometown of Lexington, Kentucky, the show comprised seven of his “shadowbox” dioramas made between 2001 and 2007. To create them, Goodlett extracted thousands of pages from his journals and

intricately folded them into the shapes of decor items such as flower vases, fireplaces, and chandeliers, which he arranged within handmade wooden frames. Precarious accumulations of paper—folded into tight scrolls, fake cigarettes, and crumpled balls—act as scaffolding for the shadowboxes’ dizzying tableaux.

In *An Aspect of the Divine Life (Society Indoors)*, 2001–07, and *The Visiting Hour (Some Are Ghosts)*, 2007, well-dressed ladies and dapper dandies stand between stage curtains created from accordion-folded paper. Their oversize heads and toothpick bodies—which Goodlett drafted in ballpoint pen with a caricaturist’s shading and features—recall marionettes. Two other works, both untitled, feature the large, isolated hands of a puppeteer. In both, the hands pull back curtains to reveal a central room containing an empty red chair. Operating as the central character of the scene, the chair is framed by paper floral sconces above and by the faces of spectators drawn onto crumpled paper balls in the pit below.



<https://www.artnews.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/dollhouseasylum.jpeg>

Mike Goodlett, *Dollhouse Asylum*, 2006, wood, glass, paper, and ballpoint pen, 48 by 38 by 6 1/2 inches.

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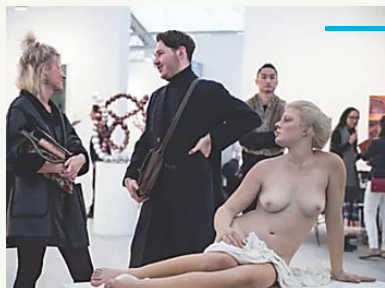
While most of the shadowboxes suggest theatrical stages, one, *Dollhouse Asylum* (2006), depicts a house in cross section, with chambers connected by a maze of passageways and staircases. Lumpy, brown phallic forms made from pantyhose stuffed with cotton wool rise from the ground floor, and a pink, shell-shaped satin ornament with vaginal folds hangs in

the center. These ersatz rococo flourishes call to mind the stylistic interventions Goodlett made at his own home in Lexington, a farmhouse he inherited from his grandparents some thirty years ago. Published images of the house depict trails of white paper flower petals lining the ceiling, while a makeshift skirt of irregular cardstock flaps hangs from the dining room lampshade. For the house's many doorframes, Goodlett constructed decorative wooden and plaster molding that echoes in the curved flourishes of the frames he made for his shadowboxes.

The sole photographic elements in the works on view are a trio of images from gay magazines on the walls of *Dollhouse Asylum*: two photographs of shirtless men, and another depicting a leather daddy in chains. Placed in an upstairs chamber, the photographs allude to the artist's sexuality and evoke the closed-door intimacy of a bedroom. They also hint at the direction of his subsequent work: in the 2010s, Goodlett made erotic graphite-and-ink drawings depicting bulging phallic forms. His last sculptures, the subject of a 2020 virtual solo exhibition staged at Goodlett's farmhouse and hosted by MARCH gallery, likewise echo the stuffed pantyhose components of the shadowboxes, with spandex fabric stitched together to mold Hydro-Stone cement into freestanding biomorphic forms.

Remembered by Lexington locals as a friendly but private person, Goodlett treasured his time at his home and studio. He donated the house and land to Institute 193 just prior to his death to start an artist residency, so others could find creative solace there. His scrappy shadowboxes, constructed from the thought-filled pages of his diaries, are a reminder that our homes are places for expansive introspection, creation, desire, and dreaming.

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