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## ALISON ELIZABETH TAYLOR ATLANTA

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It is possible to get so lost in the astounding marquetry technique employed by Alison Elizabeth Taylor—in which an incredible array of wood-veneer inlays are fit together like puzzle pieces—that her gritty, incisive look at American economic blight can recede into the background. But beyond the show-stopping craft, *Un/Inhabited* is a declaration of an artist firing on all cylinders, with utter mastery of formal and thematic realms [ACA Gallery of SCAD; November 9—December 30, 2010].

Taylor's use of a material associated with both the aristocratic past and the blue-collar present of cheap home decor inventively evokes people living off the grid and outside society. Taylor's geographic sweet spot is the American Southwest—the artist hails from housing market collapse mecca, Las Vegas—and specifically marginal communities born of financial devastation. With whole neighborhoods abandoned, a shadow economy has arisen in the wake of a decimated housing market. This is what Taylor documents. In this world, squatters and lost souls cut holes or break down doors to camp in the leavings of someone else's reality. The people, seen and unseen in *Un/Inhabited*, squat in abandoned properties, live in geodesic domes or in tiny ad hoc spaces that double as business and home, rifles kept close at hand to ward off trouble, as if in some *Mad Max* dystopian future.

The marquetry technique can be utterly evocative, textured and rich, as in *Folie à Deux*, 2008, in which we assume an overhead view of a man and a woman's hands digging a hole. The varying shades and textures of the wood veneers that Taylor employs give extraordinary depth and resonance to the layers of dirt. That Taylor renders so much reality-effect in shades of brown intensifies a feeling of oppressive sun-baked sameness, a dust bowl, edge-of-the-world quality only enhanced by the scorched-earth sensations of the pyrography she also incorporates into her work.

Taylor's ideas are as shaded and complex as her

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# JAMES COHAN GALLERY



material. She is a fan of the complicated vantage point, the windows leading to windows that allow both a microscopic and macroscopic view of the subject at hand. In the exquisitely detailed *Nursery*, 2010, we peer through a hole punched in a wall, which affords us a sad, poignant view of a child's nursery cursorily decorated with *Winnie the Pooh* images of Tigger and Piglet taped to the wall. But Taylor takes us deeper still into the pictorial space, leading us through the metal frame window of the nursery to offer us a view of yet another—we can only assume similarly abandoned—home beyond this one. Taylor repeats this perspective in *Un/Inhabited* to illuminate a bitter truth. She gives us a manifold view: the West she documents is filled with scrapped subdivisions, half-finished homes, and the communities of squatters and scavengers that have sprung up in their wake. It's a landscape pocked with holes, and an almost animalistic digging or tearing away: the apocalyptic frenzy that remains when all hope is lost. Despite their span from 2006 to 2010, the works fit together with a haunting completeness, like a film's establishing shots giving way to close-ups, a complete picture of a time and a place emerging in the process.

Taylor's attention to detail makes her an extraordinary storyteller, almost journalistic in her observations. Her ability to penetrate and render a scene is evident in *Room*, 2007-2008, a stand-alone room placed in the center of the gallery and inspired by the Duke of Urbino's *Studiolo* at the Metropolitan Museum. Entering the space is a heady, transportive thing. The sensation is of being enveloped by someone else's reality, a kind of sci-fi teleporting to the space itself. Taylor hones in on the details of this man's life: the photographs taped to the wall, the souvenir dolls accumulated on world travels, the guns and army helmets that attest to a violence-laced life. The portrait intimates a man living in conditions both pitiable and renegade, suggesting the pioneer spirit of America lived out even today.

—Felicia Feaster