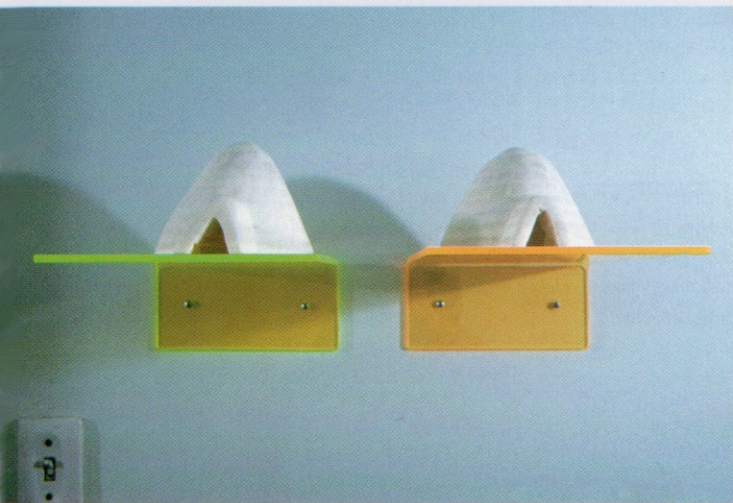


Nate Cassie

Sala Diaz, **San Antonio**

Drug culture, globalism, fine art, traditional craft, and basketball are some of the topics raised in Nate Cassie's spare exhibition of new paintings and sculpture. With a few simple, well-placed pieces, this Texan artist sets a raft of associations adrift, playfully juxtaposing unlike elements in order to reveal their surprising similarities. Jacking up blood-sugar levels to accommodate these eccentric relationships, a candy-colored sweetness runs through the entire show, which is unified by a cool palette and minimalist aesthetic. *Anandamide* and *2-AG* are tight grids of glossy enamel lines on snow-white backgrounds. The works' titles refer to neurotransmitters that naturally produce opiate-like effects. These large "drip'n'turn" paintings suggest the complex circuits linking brain, pharmaceuticals, and computer science. Slightly askew, the barbiturate-hued, lattice abstractions also echo the Deco pastels of Miami's South Beach, where the artist has participated since 1997 in a NFAA (Nat'l Foundation for Advancement in the Arts) residency. *Crush Groove* and *Dope sells itself* are additional, candy-slick works with obvious allusions to narcotics. Encased in clear resin, these enamel-on-panel paintings are organized with loose lines, rows of hash marks, thick dollops of paint, and pink, pucker-shaped circles. Sugar spins the show in another, related direction. The diptych *Alaska* is a pair of sugar-cube igloos on Day-Glo acrylic shelves displayed in the gallery's restroom. Elsewhere, two halves of a large igloo *piñata* are displayed against different walls in separate rooms. It's a Duchampian joke, a mind-altering passage between exterior and interior spaces. Igloos might be a tongue-in-cheek reference to the artist himself, who relocated from Michigan to the tropical heat of South Texas in the early '90s. Handmade by local craftsmen, the *piñatas* not only evoke the sweet treats of Mexican fiestas, but also place a disciplined craft in telling counterpoint to Cassie's equally exclusive fine art practices. The exhibition's "icing on the cake" is a pair of sugar-cast Air Jordan basketball shoes—the recipe for which, incidentally, comes from first "First Lady" Martha Washington—placed outside the entrance to the *piñata* igloo. Buff-colored and chunky, they resemble Eskimo boots; global entertainment, culture, and commerce are fused in one universal symbol.

John Ewing



Courtney Smith

Galeria Camargo Vilaça, **São Paulo**

Courtney Smith is enraptured by the past. She constructs her works from objects, both real and fake, which stand testimony to past events. But with strong technical intervention, she also constructs the future, in a way that suggests nostalgia hides layers of violence. Previously, Smith worked extensively on cloth, but now the artist has ventured to produce larger three-dimensional works. At Galeria Camargo Vilaça, she is currently showing nine pieces of furniture from the first quarter of the twentieth century. The function and structure of each has been modified by dismembering the wood with very precise cuts, then reassembling the parts with hinges, and including elements of glass and mirror. The result is an articulated piece that can be returned to its original format, or folded to create an almost completely flat plane. Violence appears in two technical aspects: the analytical and the synthetical. Most obviously it can be identified in the surgical severing of the originals: precious solid Brazilian wood boards are reduced to narrow elements; full-length mirrors are rendered useless. On the other hand, the composition evinces crudeness—the craftsmanship employed in making the original furniture contrasts sharply with the new structure. The various parts are held together by abundant metal hinges and staples, right alongside the fine old carpentry. Nonetheless, these Frankensteinian objects stick to the spatial constraints of the original models. With the exception of the china closet, Smith didn't elaborate the rears of the pieces, so they should necessarily have been displayed in front of a wall. But they were exhibited as sculptures, thus indicating unsolved issues within a new area of inquiry. One of the most successful accomplishments of Smith's work, however, is the discovery of playful interaction. Since original form is always displayed as a compositional possibility, the objects establish a standard of order, proportion, and utility that leaves the viewer with the responsibility of entropy.

Felipe Chaimovich



Courtney Smith,
Espelho-Leque, 2001,
mirror, 65 x 42 cm.

Nate Cassie, *alaska*, 1999, sugar cubes, royal icing, acrylic.