



Virgil Marti at Elizabeth Dee, 2010, installation view



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GOTHAM ART & THEATER by Elisabeth Kley

Miss Havisham's ghost has plenty of room to dance in Virgil Marti's ghoulishly opulent show at Elizabeth Dee on West 20th Street in Manhattan. Marti (b. 1962) is famous for beautifully kitschy allegorical installations using things like mirrored Mylar and chandeliers made of resin antlers; here, he's presenting an over-the-top environment that's up-to-the minute and spare, while at the same time enfoldng multiple layers of recollection: a 21st-century look back to an ersatz 1970s version of Baroque grotesque decoration, by way of the Victorian obsession with mourning and death.

The exhibition opens with *Memorial Gardens* (2008), a floor-to-ceiling panel of horror vacui wallpaper with a pattern that includes a photo of a flower bedecked cemetery plot, a snapshot of Elvis tucked into a wreath, and a grave-shaped dirt brown rectangle framed by blue and white artificial roses -- a lugubrious nod to our current obsession with tributes to worm-eaten celebrities.

Inside is a pair of large circular poufs, the couches with raised middle sections often seen in Victorian ballrooms. Each is divided into sections like an orange, upholstered with different fabrics. Pouf, of course, is a derogatory word for gay men, but these are actually metaphorical portraits of Marti's parents as pieces of furniture.

His version of his mom, titled *A Pot of Paint* (2010), is done in fleshy hues of makeup- and lipstick- colored velvet, plus flowered chintz, fake leather and fake fur. Dad, on the other hand, titled (after Whistler) *Arrangement in Black and Blue* (2010), is dressed in darker tones, as if he is wearing a spotted business tie and a brown seal coat.

Another wallpaper called *Austrian Swag* (2009), pasted on the surrounding walls, is based on a photograph of off-white fabric draped like a high-end coffin's lining, or the hangings in Mae West's boudoir -- an enticing illusion of a cloth cocoon that ultimately repels by its flatness and falsity. Several similarly resistant decorative silhouettes made of chrome-plated weathered plywood hang like pictures with their faces to the wall, or worn-out mirrors that glitter but refuse to reflect. They come in an assortment of succulent metallic colors, such as lavender, blue and gold, and each has a different ornamental shape.



Virgil Marti's *Memorial Garden* (detail), 2008, at Elizabeth Dee

Object Relations (2010), a grouping of three round fake fur tuffets sized large, medium and small, can be found in the back room, huddled together like father, mother and child. A silver-plated branch protruding like a misplaced antler from the father cushion ends in three holders, each containing a burning candle. Wax falls down on the floor and on the littlest pouf, as if a Victorian ghost with a taper is carelessly defacing Marti's luxurious interior by piling up evidence of disappearing time. The show is on view Jan. 9-Feb. 20, 2010.

ELISABETH KLEY is a New York artist and writer.



Virgil Marti's *Night Watch*, 2010, at Elizabeth Dee