

Critical review of an exhibition



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Review of Katrin Sigurdardottir's Boiseries It appears that today, aesthetics is more of a holistic experience involving more of the senses instead of exclusively the visual. Technology is crucial in this regard. In the movies, one, for instance, is treated to the wonders of 3D and this particular development is not entirely undesirable. This is perhaps what I have in mind when I opted to see the Icelandic artist Katrin Sigurdardottir's exhibition at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, which has run since October 2010. I wanted something different than merely appreciating a painting for a two-dimensional point of view. The exhibition, called Boiseries, are actually installations that are real-life interpretations of French rooms that were en vogue in 18th century France. Particularly, the artist tried to recreate two rooms: the first, a room from the Hotel de Crillon; and the other, from the Hotel de Cabris. As in any installation exhibit, the visitor here would have to enter into the experience, than merely assuming an spectator's perspective. The Hotel de Crillon room interpretation is found in the Lila Acheson Wallace Wing's south mezzanine gallery. This is an enclosed affair wherein one has to make use of several mirrors in order to see what is inside. The experience is quite surreal and evokes a kind of voyeuristic taint as the effect of the presentation places the visitor in a real and fantastic setting at the same time. It is like there is a high degree of intimacy involved brought about by the proximity to the installation, but the mirrors provided enough distance for detachment. It is difficult to describe the room in its entirety but it is like a piece of precious porcelain, which can be pretty to look at but one needs to be really careful because it breaks easy. The stark white interior of the room adorned with the liquid hue of glasses offered several scenes of artistic composition that are effectively framed by the mirrors. Yes, pretty and

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encased in their respective “shelves” to be appreciated from afar. And so, it was not anyone’s room. The room in the north gallery of the mezzanine is interestingly different. The guest is allowed to “enter” the room and from the door, one is arrested by a warm feeling that is quite surprising because the interpretation does not have any furniture at all. I found that I achieve my objective in this particular interpretation. The color scheme, the light, which are earthy to me, seems like a room in all sense of the word - functional, inhabited and place of refuge. Moreover, the detailed engravings on the wood panels and the patina of the floor suggested a sense of history that could perhaps aggravate sadness or trigger joy, depending on the mood of the room’s occupant. At one point I stood in front of the two panel-paned door and expected to burst out in a balcony with the Seine River view or a French provincial tableaux. With the two installations, Sigurdardottir, must have several motivations. I am sure, one of them is to present a contrasting representation of a period that can be both complementing and conflicting at the same time. If this is the case, the attempt is quite effective. A visitor would certainly feel it - from the manner the presentations were staged to the details found in every nook and cranny each of the rooms.