

SEAN KELLY

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MoMA PS1

Leandro Erlich Immersed in Reverse

This fall, P.S.1 presents *Leandro Erlich: Swimming Pool*, an extraordinary and visually confounding installation by the Argentine artist Leandro Erlich. Erlich is known for installations that seem to defy the basic laws of physics, and befuddle the viewer with jarring environments that momentarily threaten a sense of balance or space. P.S.1 Director Alanna Heiss spoke with the artist about his childhood among architects and the ten-year journey that brought *Swimming Pool* to P.S.1.

Alanna Heiss: We met in 1999 while you were still a student at Texas, when you made your first swimming pool. Since then we've dreamed about doing this project but haven't been able to until now. We're finally fulfilling our dream together. How does it feel and what were the challenges along the way?

Leandro Erlich: *Swimming Pool* was first created during my residency at the Core Program in Houston in January 1999. A monumental piece, *Swimming Pool* is both physically and financially challenging. When we met again in April, it was clear to both of us that now is the right time for *Swimming Pool* to be shown in New York. So, almost 10 years since its creation, *Swimming Pool* is finally in the exhibition space for which I have always felt it is so perfectly suited.

AH: Why would you say the Duplex is so fitting? How does the space enhance the piece?

LE: In September 1999, I moved to New York and when I first visited P.S.1, I remember thinking how perfect the Duplex space would be for *Swimming Pool*. It offers an opportunity to view the piece in the correct order: first from above and then from below and inside.

AH: Your works bend the boundaries of space with architectural installations that are, in one way or another, incomplete, unexpected, impossible, or disorienting. Tell me more about your interest in these surreal spaces. How did you come to this in your practice?

LE: I was born into a family of architects, and early on I found myself wondering about spaces, construction sites, apartments, and houses. I found that these spaces were able to hold information not just related to functionality, aesthetics, or social status, but also to a hidden layer of emotions and perceptions.

I am interested in architecture as the background of our daily experiences: an emotional architecture. I think of ordinary spaces as the stage for a play. The play is, of course, our lives: we are continually interacting and in dialogue with our habitat. It defines us; it is the envelope of our existence and has a major role in the way things happen for us.



Leandro Erlich, *Swimming Pool*, 2004. Permanent installation at the 21st Century Museum of Art, Kanazawa, Japan. © Leandro Erlich. Courtesy Sean Kelly Gallery, New York.

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In my installations, the functional aspect of architecture either no longer exists or has been altered completely. Daily spaces—the architecture we take for granted—are very often where my work starts. The spaces I create become a poetic fiction for the viewer. Symbols and metaphors are hidden in doors, cabinets, living rooms, mirrored rooms, or inside a swimming pool.

So, it is not really the surreal but the "real" that interests me. The "very real": the ordinary and the way that our notion of reality is conceived. There is no better place to question reality than in the ordinary.

AH: How important is it to you that the illusions created by your work remain intact? Or do you prefer that they be shattered and revealed as ordinary?

LE: Illusions transform the ordinary into the extraordinary. They act as a trigger for the viewer's interaction. They are placed in the work not to deceive but to engage, to be discovered, and to be revealed. It is important to restore our capacity for surprise and to keep always in life a certain level of awareness. Reality itself is not made of one truth.

AH: Many of your installations construct spatial divisions, where a viewer can visually access a space or experience it, but not inhabit it. What is the role of alienation in your work?

LE: My work proposes an experience; often this experience consists of traversing a space guided by the knowledge and recognition of what seems familiar. Alienation can become evident only in the context of familiar places in which we think we know what to do

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