Kim Beck Ownership Society

September 7 — October 4, 2009
Artist Talk / Reception: Thursday, September 24, 4pm - 6pm
In the first four years of his administration, George W. Bush now infamously coined the term “Ownership Society” as a philosophical goal whereby Americans, regardless of whether or not they had the economic ability to pay for it, could own property. Fast forward to today, when misguided governance, risky lending, irresponsible borrowing, and Wall Street greed collapsed our economy into a culture of joblessness, homelessness, foreclosures, and unfinished housing complexes. This loaded phrase, “Ownership Society,” serves as the title and foundation for Kim Beck’s most recent foray into the intersection of architecture, sculpture, installation, drawing, and text. Traditionally, Beck’s practice has focused on the overlooked, desolate spaces in the landscape, including the flatly bland terrain of Denver where she grew up, the weeds and cracks in
the sidewalk, or the garish billboards and lonely telephone poles along the highway. Blending an interest in architecture and the landscape with a deep ambivalence towards nondescript, man-made constructions, her work reflects a disdain for the inevitable progress of commercialization as well as an appreciation for the awkward beauty of these same spaces and objects.

In “Ownership Society,” Beck extrapolates this idea to include the ubiquitous: buildings abandoned mid-construction, houses in foreclosure waiting to be reclaimed, and signage indicating businesses closed and store-wide sales of inventory. Perhaps best epitomized in her petite gouache sketches of houses in foreclosure taken from the Web, these smudgy, romanticized images, simply by nature of their material, convey a romanticized melancholy that hints at the darkness of their source.

While the nuances of the social and cultural landscape have always played a role in her work, this turn in Beck’s practice reflects a more overtly political stance. At the same time, the fluctuation between abstraction and representation combined with Beck’s gentle and delicately meticulous use of materials imbues her work with an elegantly beautiful artistic aesthetic that belies their disenchanted beginnings.

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Heather Pesanti

Heather Pesanti is Curator of the Albright-Knox Art Gallery in Buffalo, New York
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