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View of Christian Tomaszewski's installation *On Chapels, Caves and Erotic Misery*, 2007, cardboard and mixed mediums; at the Sculpture Center.

Christian Tomaszewski at the Sculpture Center

Christian Tomaszewski's elaborate new installation *On Chapels, Caves and Erotic Misery* shifted between darkness and light, the immediate and the fantastic. It was the last in his series of five large-scale works relating to the David Lynch film *Blue Velvet* (earlier versions also made explicit reference to Kurt Schwitters's *Merzbau*, sometimes called *The Cathedral of Erotic Misery*). Tomaszewski, born in Poland and now living in New York, shares the director's interest in overlapping narratives and the dark side of everyday life, and he seeks to find emotional truth in the face of extreme artifice.

The expansive installation sprawled through the entire basement of the Sculpture Center. Its tone was set in a darkened anteroom where the words "This film has been modified from its original version. It has been formatted to fit your limits" were backlit on a black screen. This was a good indication of what followed: film sets made real, distorting our conception of narrative and actual space.

A door led to a long, pitch-black hallway illuminated only by more backlit glass. It was

hard to see as one moved slowly past phrases describing stage directions from *Blue Velvet* and other poetic references, such as "I am trying to break your heart" (from the Wilco song). Viewers emerged at the far end of the passage into a neutral area, carpeted in gray. Surrounded with closed doors, some of which didn't open, it was like a strange hallway in a dream. One door led down an immaculate white passage lit by overhead fluorescent lights that hummed faintly—an eerie, sanitized space, coldly brilliant.

From there, one passed back through the gray carpeted hallway before finding the way into a final room. It held shelves of various table lamps, but the dominant elements here were elaborate small-scale movie sets in boxes, some stacked on one another. They portrayed scenes from *Blue Velvet*: a booth in a diner, a pair of couches, a spare interior with a blood-red stain on the carpet that made it look like a crime scene. There was even a clear box holding what looked like the severed ear Kyle MacLachlan finds on the ground. The tone of the sets combined the nondescript with the menacing.

Tomaszewski understands the mechanisms of enduring cinematic power: editing and scene-setting. Here those processes became physical—it was as if one were inside and outside of a film at the same time. At the conclusion of the installation was a red neon gun, like a sign you would see outside a bar, which shot the blinking words "bang bang." This was the end of the piece, but it may also have been a new beginning. Tomaszewski reworks existing narratives, creating a fully realized world where control collides with possibility.

—David Coggins