

Derosia

Greg Cook, Wonderland, November 27, 2023

# WONDERLAND

## Carlos Reyes's Minimalist Monuments To Lost Gay Clubs



In Carlos Reyes's one-room exhibition, "18," at MIT's List Visual Arts Center in Cambridge from Oct. 27, 2023, to March 10, 2024, are four 2-foot-wide monoliths made from cedar planks, scratched with graffiti. Called "West Side Club," the 2018 sculptures were assembled from wood salvaged from New York's now defunct West Side Club, which announced on Instagram that it had "permanently closed" at the end of May 2021.

The club had billed itself as "New York's private social relaxation club for gay and bisexual men." The graffiti here includes hearts and initials of couples, names, places (Istanbul, London, India, Palermo, Trinidad, VNZLA [Venezuela], Portugal, Colombia, Cuba, and Sri Lanka), and sexual come-ons ("Any age, Any Race"). "Live free," one carving reads. It's not just the words though—the way they're carved into the wood is evocative of touch.

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Carlos Reyes, “West Side Club,” 2018.

The monoliths read as minimalist monuments, a sort of tombstones, to disappearing gay cultural spaces. Reyes, who was born in 1977 in Chicago, and lives in New York and Caguas, Puerto Rico, works in a tradition of Felix Gonzalez-Torres of the late 1980s and early ‘90s, before his death from AIDS in 1996, and Macon Reed’s 2015 walk-in, participatory installation “Eulogy for the Dyke Bar,” which asked: What happened to all the dyke bars?

On a shelf across one wall of the gallery is Reyes’s “Night Club” series from 2016, blown-glass sculptures in which he endeavors to “trace air and breath with an amorphous solid.” The clear glass—sometimes with metal elements—can bring to mind “jugs, paddles, and spoon,” according to a gallery sign. Perhaps also bongos? The idea, perhaps, is about the intimacy of shared breath.

Among the group of sculptures is Reyes’s 2017 “7269 (I),” a drum-like glass cylinder with a metal shower drain on top. The drain, the gallery explains, was salvaged from Melrose Spa, “a long-running men’s bathhouse in Los Angeles that was a notorious cruising site.” It closed in 2017, after 52 years of operation, when it lost its lease.

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Carlos Reyes, "7269 (I)," 2017.

"18," which was organized by List Assistant Curator Selby Nimrod, also includes Reyes's 2021 sculpture, "PROMESA," seven Ikea floor lamps gathered under one ring-shaped shade. Amid the pandemic, the gallery says, Reyes relocated to Puerto Rico, where there were frequent power outages. The title refers to the Puerto Rico Oversight, Management, and Economic Stability Act, federal legislation from 2016 that responded to the territory's debt crisis by giving "oversight of the island's critical infrastructure and expenditures to a financial control board that enacted a wide-ranging austerity plan and privatized formerly public utilities," according to a sign in the gallery, "including electricity."