



Henrik Kam / 500 Capp Street Foundation

"Josh" is a suspended body of a man, made with silicone, steel, hair, urethane and clothing, that fits into his surroundings.

# Magic moves into rooms at David Ireland House

By Charles Desmarais

The first review I ever wrote for The Chronicle helped win me a major journalism award. Still, given the opportunity, I would take a do-over.

The David Ireland House — also often called by its address, 500 Capp Street — is, as I described it, a mysterious and evocative work of environmental art. Yet it was always something more.

Ireland lavished as much attention and love on living people, particularly other artists, as he did on his grand house/sculpture and its component parts. The works he created out of the rooms of the house and

Exhibition  
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environment  
in 10-work  
installation

the detritus left behind by former occupants were not mere objects but fragments of prior lives. They were relics manifesting the worth of animal and human animal existence, which he assiduously organized, preserved and displayed.

His interactions and relationships with the living took many forms: gifts and exchanges of works of art; teaching, both formal and incidental; unforgettable dinners; colloquy that might be interrupted, but had no end. More publicly, according to the official keepers of his legacy, Ireland "actively curated the house and frequently opened it to visitors." They

*Matelli continues on E3*

## ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT

# Infusing Ireland House with magic

Matelli from page E1

point out that he made the house “and all that creatively and socially transpired within it ... a hub of the artistic community.”

In recognition of that social aspect of Ireland’s work, curators regularly invite visiting artists to show within/amid the masterwork by Ireland, who died in 2009. The latest such posthumous interchange is with New York artist Tony Matelli, whose artistic insertions are on view in an exhibition called “I hope all is well....” It runs through Oct. 13.

In just 10 works, over the interior and patio space of the smallish Victorian, Matelli does not so much respond to the Ireland House experience as reinterpret it as something close to magic. The coolly surreal oddness of the original has been heated up by several degrees. A psychological darkness clouds the famously sparkling gloss-coated walls and floors.

The mood is set from the first works. A glass of water set upon a slightly crumpled cardboard box is not only incongruous — as many Ireland elements are, too — but creepily filmic in both placement and aspect. As in a key scene in a movie, the objects are meant to be accepted as fact, but also as an energy somehow concentrated, distilled to its essence.

On close inspection, “Glass of Water” turns out to be more real than real, which is to say, completely fabricated. A printed checklist confirms that it was made in 2011, of blown glass, painted polyester and fiberglass.

On the second floor of the

### Tony Matelli: I Hope All Is Well

... Artist-guided tours 11 a.m., 2 and 4 p.m. Wednesday-Friday; self-guided tours noon-5 p.m. Saturday. Through Oct. 13. \$10-\$20. David Ireland House, 500 Capp St., S.F. 415-872-9240. [www.500cappstreet.org](http://www.500cappstreet.org)

house, one is confronted by the lifeless body of a man, floating (falling?) through the middle of a sitting room. It, too, though utterly convincing, can be nothing else but a handmade object (composed, we are told, of silicone, steel, hair, urethane and clothing, and titled “Josh,” 2018). Yet the scene is, as well, the condensed energy of a single moment, inviting our inspection.

Nearby, a (painted bronze) weed forces itself through a crevice between wall and floor. One object suggests death, the other life. Both are art, both are true only by virtue of their existence, of having been manufactured and put in place here.

One hallmark of Ireland’s method is his precisely calibrated placement of objects. If you can’t design the perfect container for every work of art, you can perfect an existing container (room, gallery, shelf or whatever) by careful situation of the art in relation to where a viewer might be expected to stand.

That’s an esoteric idea in the abstract, but Matelli’s execution of it is spot-on. The floating/falling Josh hovers a few inches off the floor, calling attention to suspended objects above and beyond, previously installed by Ireland.

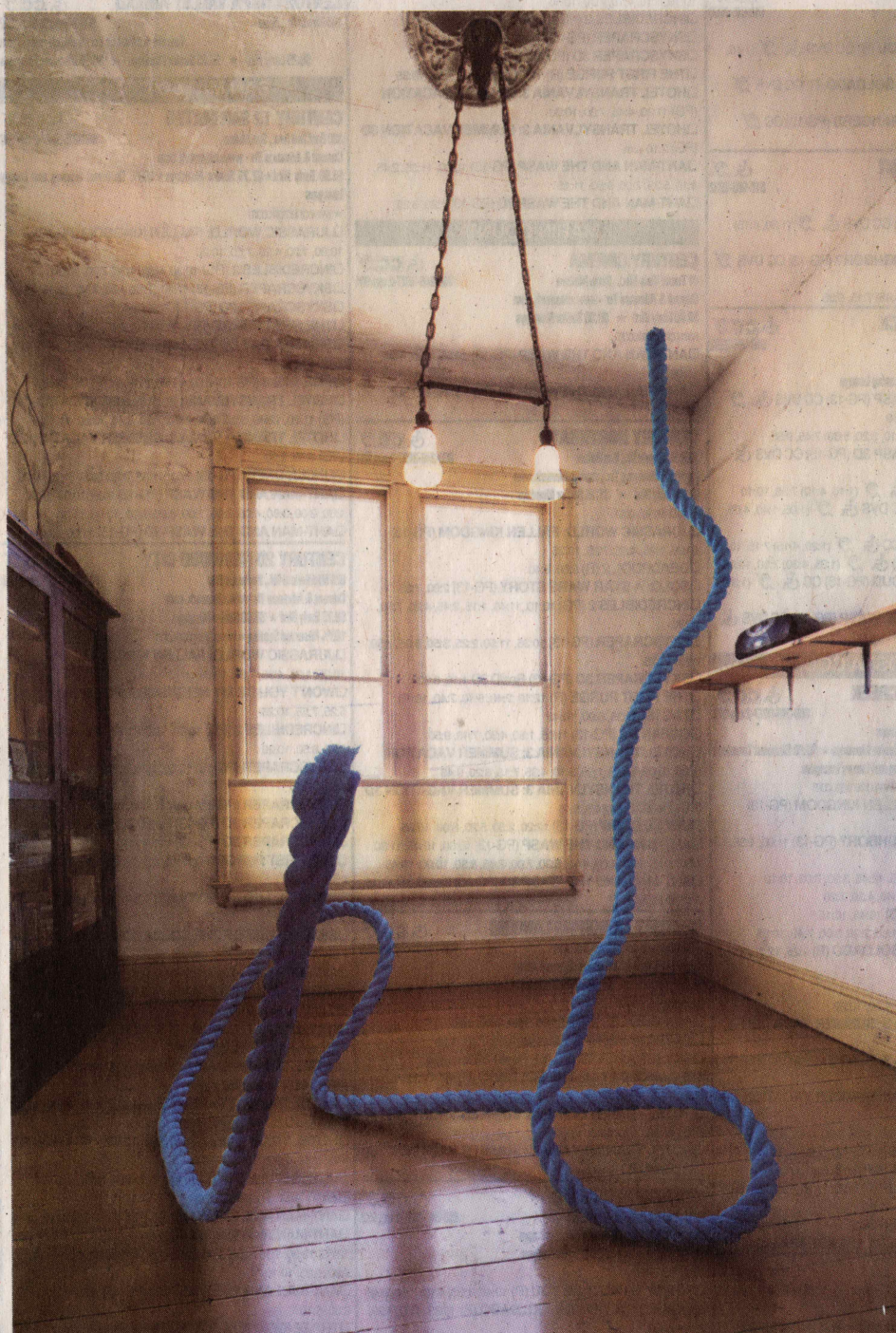
A writhing coil of rope — that is, an untitled sculpture of same — consumes the energy in its own room but also, by virtue of its jarring blue color and strategic placement, becomes an element of the spaces nearby. Like the entire exhibition, it is an experience that is not Ireland and not Matelli, neither confrontation nor alliance. One might best call it alchemy.

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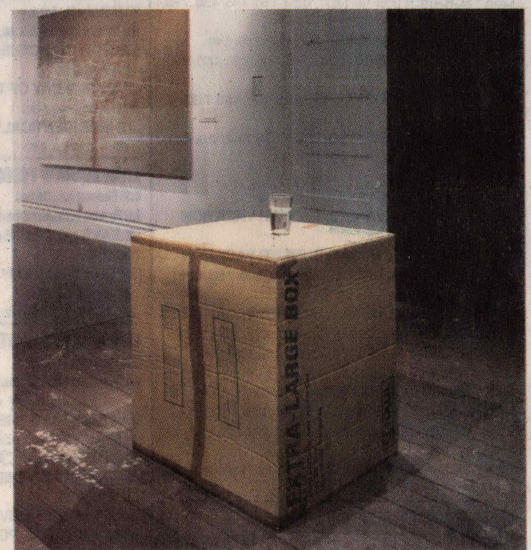


Henrik Kam / 500 Capp Street Foundation photos

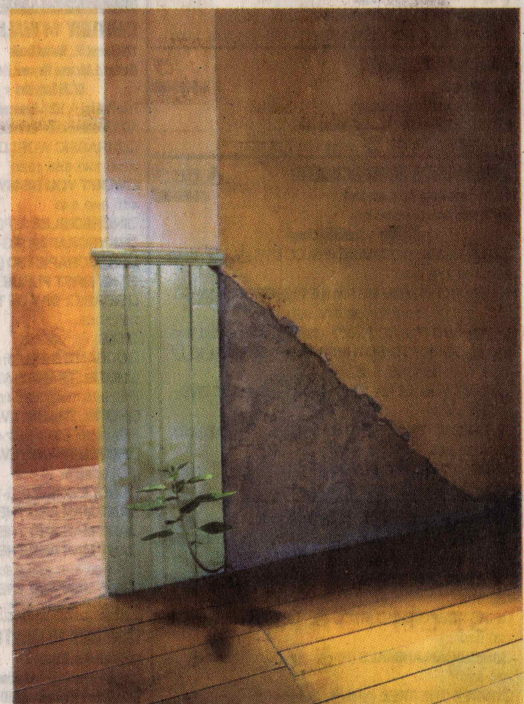
“Window,” a 2013 work, is a painted bronze installation by Tony Matelli in Ireland House, where objects are carefully placed.



“Untitled” is a blue, writhing coil of rope made of silicone and stainless steel.



“Glass of Water” is a life-size sculpture made of blown glass, painted polyester and fiberglass done in 2011.



“Weed” is a painted bronze sculpture.