



**New York**  
**Virgil Marti**  
 Participant Gallery  
 There are eight puns in the title of Virgil Marti's mostly Mylar *Grow Room*, at least. Expanding both the proportions and possibilities of the just-opened Participant Gallery space, Marti covered three walls in rectangles of hydroponic Mylar. Spider webs, re-interpreted and printed in childhood's macramé configurations, looped across the Mylar. The knots and hanging frayed edges of the macramé cords acted as illusions, *trompe l'oeil* of actual craft creations. Inter-

woven in the patterns were attractive hydrangeas, sunflowers, and poppies. Complete with translucent-pink, antlered Venetian chandeliers, the piece evoked a European mirrored salon.  
 All seemed pretty and festive until one realized that the spiders were on drugs, their webs contorted by the mind-altering effects of speed and sedatives. Furthermore, meshed with arcs of knotted cord reverberating in the mirrors were multifarious darting illuminated strips, resembling a Brice Marden painting run amuck. Every shape in the room

was multiplied in the shiny carnivalesque extravaganza. Borders between Mylar panels and fluorescent bulbs became jerky snakes of light, while chandeliers produced a gazillion warm, Christmas-y glimmers. There were also lots of melting sci-fi moments, such as a surreal semblance of the earth opening up. Metal stair grate and clay-red paint from the gallery's unfinished interior added additional trippy textures, with all the searing light entities careening like bumper cars at an amusement park.  
 In Alain Resnais's film, *Last Year at Marienbad*, we are led

**Virgil Marti, *Grow Room*, 2002. Mylar and mixed media, installation view.**  
 through a European chateau's sumptuous, ornately mirrored halls. We watch a play, and gliding through gaming salons and shooting ranges, pause on a verandah next to a classical statue. Throughout the film, Character X (Giorgio Albertazzi) attempts to arouse A's (Delphine Seyrig) authentic emotions and instill a desire to give up her icy façade, her castle of convention. Yet Seyrig clings to the known, safe social rules, like ornament stuck



to its classical orders. As X's arguments grow more intense and convincing, A is drawn into horrific hallucinatory, delusional bouts of violence. In the end, she likely remains incapable of escape from cultivated, aristocratic decorum.

Marti's scenario, appropriating the metaphorical European period décor, delivered a similar denouement but switched high to low. *Grow Room* contended that in America we are likewise entangled in a societal web. Revered here, however, is not game etiquette but the cheap or perverse amusements of a still-new decadent society. Marti insinuates a culture where everything is diverting and skin deep, cosmetic like the veneer of Mylar prettifying the raw space. His spider webs are deviant attractions. His deer don't grow up but serve as decoration. Here, nature has relevance only for its sentimental symbolism or entertainment value. In fact, authenticity is irrelevant: the incongruent sources for the installation were bargain-basement, flat reproductions of stuff that only used to be real. The computer-generated macramé, hybrid blue

artificial roses, and resin chandeliers were but a reconfiguring of the familiar into novel diversions.

In fun house mirrors at the circus, we love gawking at ourselves in magic distortion. This culture may never grow up, instead expanding indefinitely into more and more TV-screen oblivion. All the same, from a phenomenological standpoint, as in Resnais's film, Marti's room was austere, empty until visitors collaborated, mixing their colored shapes and responses into the wavy mosaic.

—Gae Savannah