

# Madeleine Bailey at Artists and Residents | Chicago Art Magazine

by Jeriah Hildewine



A Hiding Place For Two, Madeleine Bailey

Tang Zehui's project "Artists and Residents" is a recurring endeavor in which she pairs an artist with a local resident who hosts the artist's work in their home for a one-night event. The most recent iteration featured Madeleine Bailey, a fellow writer for Chicago Art Magazine. I was particularly eager to see her work, since although I know Madeleine socially I'd never had the opportunity to see what she does in her own practice. So, Steph and I headed down to Hyde Park to check it out.

The venue was truly amazing; it is difficult for me to conceive of the reality that people actually live like this. Walls textured with embossed impressions of leaves (they looked like alder leaves to me), rich wood, white carpets that were actually clean, and kids' bedrooms you could land an airliner in...even their cat looked expensive.

While not quite as intimidating as the cold luxury of the Lewis', the setting of this iteration of Artists and Residents was still enough to make me a little nervous, paranoid I'd spill a drop of wine or break something. I imagine that installing work in this place would make me feel like a cat in a room full of rocking chairs, yet Madeleine Bailey's work interfaced surprisingly well with this environment.

On first entering the space, the viewer encounters a floor strewn with a bunch of octagonal cushions, made of some kind of perforated vinyl-like material and edged with a zipper. The zippers' lengths exceeded the perimeter of the octagonal cushion, and hung loose like a tail. Above each cushion, a hanging white string led my eye upwards, towards the ceiling to which it was affixed. Each string was hanging from the center of an octagonal recess in the ceiling, obviously an existing part of the building's architecture. The strings, visually connecting Madeleine's work with the building itself, functioned as an introductory remark, a statement of purpose, a declaration of intent. They firmly asserted that Madeleine would not be shoehorning an existing body of work into an unrelated space without concession; rather, a dialog was clearly being established here.





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Up a flight of stairs, I encountered another of Madeleine's pieces, this one less aggressively a part of its environment. The piece, which Madeleine described as a "painting," was a wall piece somewhere between a Rauschenberg combine and a Lee Bontecou canvas-and-wire wall sculpture. Dimensional, convoluted, and undulating, the piece looked perfectly at home against the clean white wall of the home; indeed, I at first wondered if it wasn't part of the homeowners' collection. The piece quickly affirmed its relationship to Madeleine's work, however, by the numerous zippers which coursed and distorted the work's surface. It thus tied itself to the work on the ground floor even as it as it integrated itself beguilingly into the decor. (A second piece on this floor, Madeleine described to me as a zipper encircling a "spot" on the wall, but I have to confess, I missed it.)

The work on the top floor bears the most direct relationship to the title "A Hiding Place for Two." A pair of masks hung tethered to weighted blocks on the floor; viewers were encouraged to become participants by donning the masks and blindly navigating the space, and each other. Between uses, the masks dangled from bent stalks like giant cat toys. In use, they evoked for a spectator imagery of sexual bondage and particularly pony play; I was also reminded of Elise Goldstein's piece *Open Seclusion* from *New Blood III*, only because of the similar structure of the mask-like prop. These visual reads address only the more superficial aspects of Madeleine's piece, which seems to be more about personal interaction, awkwardness, and obliviousness.



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Madeleine's strategy of placing the more site-interactive work on the ground floor, with a related but less reactive piece on the floor above, and finally an entirely self-contained work on the top floor, draws an unexpected (and probably unintended) parallel to the stone facade of the Palazzo Medici (or Palazzo Medici Riccardi), by Michelozzo. In this Florentine palace, Michelozzo had the exterior of the ground floor finished in rough-hewn stone, the second floor in large stone blocks, and the top floor smoothly finished with small, close-fitted blocks. In this way he depicted visually the history of architecture, with greater refinement being literally built atop the cruder works of its antecedents. This is what I thought of when considering Madeleine's decision to place a playful response to the site on the ground floor, a straightforward painting unobtrusively on the second floor, and the titular installation on the top floor. One could also argue that it functioned like an appetizer-soup-entree course set of a meal, with each piece transitioning the viewer to the next, whetting his or her visual appetite.

Each of the three pieces I saw functioned in a different way, from the playful whimsy of the work on the ground floor, to the deadpan formalism of the wall piece, to the uncomfortable interaction of the top-floor installation. As this was my first exposure to Madeleine Bailey's work, I was pleased by the breadth of her work, and by the recurrent themes (black, white, and red, zippers, and dry humor) that connected the various pieces. It was also really interesting to see the inside of a rich family's house, an interesting counterpoint to *Join The Lewis Family*, and a strong incentive to check out the next iteration of Tang Zehui's *Artists and Residents* project.

*Artists and Residents – 4801 S Woodlawn Ave. Hiding Place for Two, work by Madeleine Bailey, curated by Tang Zehui. Reception 4-7pm. One night event.*