



Joseph Kosuth and his latest work, psychiatrist Jon Tatomer's Santa Barbara bedroom.

# ¿Mi Casa Es Su Casa?

BY ELIZABETH HESS

**S**ANTA BARBARA  
Dr. Jon Tatomer is a psychiatrist who lives in Santa Barbara: a paradise where the ocean meets the mountains, and most home owners have a view of one or the other. Tatomer is a willing victim—rather, participant—in an unconventional project called the "Home Show," organized by Betty Klausner, director of the Santa Barbara Contemporary Arts Forum. Joseph Kosuth is one of 11 artists invited to create a public installation in a private home. Kosuth has just finished transforming Tatomer's bedroom into a Freudian nightmare—or sweet dream, depending on the sleeper—that will open to the public this September.

Most people don't relish turning their homes over to relatives, much less to unpredictable artists, but Tatomer is not most people. Until now, he's never collected art, but he has collected just about everything else. His house is a flea-market heaven overflowing with the evidence of his idiosyncrasies: a rack in a corner holds countless 45s (in their original jackets); a ledge with rare wine bottles placed edge to edge encircles a room; hundreds of orange Penguin books (possibly the largest private collection) pop up everywhere there's a space.

Tatomer is clearly an interesting guy, judging from his "things"—and we do. He describes himself as an "existential therapist" open to "the bizarre, the obscure, the unusual," and therefore, he says, to "Kosuth's piece." Actually, much

to the amazement of a couple of his outraged friends, he likes Kosuth's installation so much he's considering preserving it after the show. This is his prerogative and the only material reward for those home owners unlocking their doors to the public. At the moment, Tatomer is still a little uncomfortable in his new bedroom, but his kids love it—perhaps they think the joke is on dad.

Kosuth kept Tatomer in the dark while the work was in progress, which is exactly where he left him in the end. A once pinkish bedroom is now painted pitch black with two large, white words floating on a wall: "Modus Operandi." Other than a prominent bed, there's not much else of note in the room, with the exception of two empty wine decanters used as bookends for a selection of Penguins and two photographs of the piece taken by Kosuth. Tatomer's mother gave her son a new bedspread for the occasion, a symbolic gesture in keeping with the psychology of the piece.

Conceptual art, either in its neo or "original" form, is not exactly standard fare in Santa Barbara. Inevitably, the Kosuth piece doesn't look like art, nor does it look like the bedroom of anybody in their right mind. Kosuth is sometimes obscure, but never subtle. The critical success of the installation, which questions the Freudian assumption that dreams and seduction, wherever the two shall meet, are key to analysis, is dependent upon Kosuth's wise choice of room.

(The bathroom would have also offered him a psychoanalytic challenge.) The bed is the place of choice for most people to make the transition from conscious to unconscious thought, but other, less abstract, activities also occur in it. (Some shrinks have had trouble keeping a particular "modus operandi" in their pants.) Tatomer isn't exactly laughing about this interpretation, and one of his patients is upset that he'd agreed to participate at all. "She doesn't want my bedroom open

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to the public," explains Tatomer. "It invades the privacy of her fantasies." Kosuth has hit a home run in at least one ballpark.

Other homes are presently being transformed by Kate Ericson and Mel Ziegler (collaborators), Ann Hamilton, Lisa Hein, David Ireland, Jim Isermann, Erika Rothenberg, Norie Sato, and Ursula Von Rydingsvard. Twenty-five sites that cut across neighborhoods and economic boundaries were eagerly offered to the artists, including a center for the homeless, which was not chosen. Thus far, everyone seems pleased with the matches—with the possible exception of Von Rydingsvard. After the artist completed a large installation in a guest house (originally a World War II bunker), the owners informed her some visitors were arriving and the piece had to be temporarily

moved. Von Rydingsvard doesn't make lightweight sculptures that can be shoved in the closet.

The unavoidable problems of "domesticating" these wild artists in Santa Barbara homes are exactly what makes this project unique (the show is based upon one organized in Belgium in 1986); Klausner is putting together the first public/private collection in the U.S., raising questions of ownership, censorship, and authorship. Artists commonly subvert the distinctions between private and public but rarely do they make public works for private sites. For those artists curious about their collectors, this is a chance for an intimate collaboration; for those who have been antagonized over the years, it's an opportunity for revenge. Lisa Hein's home owner, an architect named Cy Madrone, got so involved in the installation that the two are now working together, or at least side by side. The piece is about her unwelcome reception on his turf.

The "Home Show" is funded entirely by private money, thanks to the Lannan Foundation, which means there is no GSA, NEA, or other officary to set civilizing standards. Potentially, this situation could allow artists more latitude than usual over a "public" work—or, as the case may prove, less. That's the question. Klausner is supporting the artists through each step of the process, but she also identifies with some of the home owners' anxieties: David Ireland chose her house.