

ARTFORUM

Los Angeles

Andra Ursuta

FRANCOIS GHEBALY GALLERY
2600 South La Cienega Boulevard
November 17–January 12

For Friedrich Schiller, our aesthetic accomplishments owe themselves to the *Spieltrieb*, or “play drive”: the expenditure of energy in an unimpeded outpouring of imagination. Romanian-born Andra Ursuta, an artist who plumbs bleak and benighted notions about her birthplace, might seem like the last person to evoke Schilleresque playtime in her acerbic mode of cultural anthropology—*cum*—sculpture. Yet a certain kind of diversion nonetheless has its day in her exhibition “Mothers, Let Your Daughters Out into the Street.” A diminutive model of a WWII bunker squats in the foyer. Cast in concrete from a mold made from little slats of wood that buckled under the sculpture’s material—and perhaps historical—weight, Ursuta’s bunker is droopy and deflated, a distant cousin of Claes Oldenburg’s soft sculpture. The bunker’s tiny escape routes and detailed embrasure perversely seem to offer the same pleasures as a playhouse.

In the sunken cube of the main gallery space, a large swing set has been improbably lodged between the high walls. One end of its coral-colored crossbar is battened down to the floor, while the other is propped by precarious, monumental stacks of concrete blocks, cast in rough-and-ready geometries. A pair of double-sided swings with gaping, toilet bowl-shaped holes is hung between these tumbledown fragments of eastern European abstraction. Described in the press release as a “giant weapon of defilement”—a social one, at that—the swing set is intended to encourage the unimpeded outpouring of something besides imagination: an “irruption of excremental forces,” in the words of Georges Bataille, which *that* theorist would sooner call the origin of art.



Andra Ursuta, *Natural Born Artist*, 2012, concrete, steel, 13 x 7 x 10'.

— Joanna Fiduccia