

# House bound

*David Hoffos' evocative video funhouse at the Art Gallery of Nova Scotia was born out of a recurring dream.*

By Sean Flinn  
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Throughout David Hoffos' *Scenes from the House Dream*, solitary individuals appear in life-size and small scale.

The visitor encounters the former type sitting at different points along the walkway, throughout this built environment, an evocative funhouse. They appear via video projection on plywood cutouts painted black.

"The strange cutout figures in the space," nods Sarah Fillmore, chief curator at the Art Gallery of Nova Scotia. "I didn't know how to approach those people."

They have that effect, especially the solo, brooding drinker in "Absinthe Bar" (2004), whose bent posture and downward gaze give the impression of inner turmoil. Maybe it's a will to forget whatever's happening back at home, the dream house-turned-nightmare.

"When the life-size figures materialize in the viewer's space of the gallery, it's an indication that one world infects the other world," explains Hoffos. "The material world doesn't exist without the immaterial world."

The Lethbridge-based Hoffos began work on *Scenes from the House Dream* in 2003 in response to a "recurring dream about a house, a domestic space you return to in your unconscious." He completed the project in 2008, when it started touring the country.

The second type of figure in *Scenes from the House Dream* inhabits Hoffos's model-sets in proportionate scale to the milieu, its miniature objects. The artist uses mirrors and panes of glass to reflect the video-generated people into the scene. Video monitors are taped up to tightly frame the person's actions and gestures. Carefully considered angles and lighting complete the "illusion" that these tiny figures properly occupy these spaces--that they belong in them. The model worlds are unpacked from and reassembled on top of their shipping containers.

"I think for illusion to operate properly it needs to reveal itself at some point," says Hoffos. "I really don't think any glimpse behind the curtain, or interruption of the effect, ruins the delight in it."

Despair and anxiety creep in too. "As I continued to produce these works I saw these lonely figures at night in anxious spaces, pacing around in these sort of un-policed corridors of the world," says Hoffos. "I think night is a time of wonder and anxiety, possibly depression, addiction even."

Viewers watch these people, detecting the big worries, fears and preoccupations in their posture and movements, and begin to understand and identify with why they've sought these temporary, solitary places.

The project resonates with Hoffos in new, more personal ways. "I've struggled with mental health issues all my life," he says. "I have Tourette Syndrome. I've had serious bouts of anxiety and depression. And so when I see these figures alone at night, wondering about the world or trying to figure out their problems, to me it becomes more than a dream about a house, it becomes a statement on the modern condition."

We're conditioned to focus on the material over the immaterial, to want the nice big house we can't afford. "I've definitely had response from people in the same boat to me going through the exhibition and feeling that thing: that feeling that you are alone but you're also living *with it* too."

That understanding goes directly to recognizing and learning to live with challenges.

"To me it's an elegy, almost a tribute to the idea of living with mental illness and getting through it."



David Hoffos, *Scenes From the House Dream: Phase 4: Bachelor's Bluff(Widowlake)*, 2005