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entertainment | **Weekend Pass**

Little World, Big Ideas

Hans Op De Beeck's film work looks at the power of playfulness at the Hirshhorn

Museum

Think back to rainy childhood days spent indoors, moving tiny pieces of furniture around doll house rooms and building elaborate sets for miniature toy adventures. Belgian visual artist Hans Op De Beeck explores this world anew in his film work, "Staging Silence," on view now at the Hirshhorn.

The 22-minute high-definition video has the crisp black-and-white look of a perfectly restored noir — but that's where the darkness ends. The film trains a lens on a small stage, which is continually transformed by hands just out of frame. A multitiered cake is whittled into a tiny, decayed antebellum mansion; an office space veers from dull to festive and back



Belgian artist Hans Op De Beeck's short film work "Staging Silence" explores the transformational power of whimsy in art.

again with party flags, balloons and changing shadows; a trailer park goes from night to day with the aid of a lightbulb and some carefully placed cotton balls.

Without any actors with whom to identify, viewers are instead free to project their own impressions, emotions and ideas onto the

tiny sets, assisted by an alternately cheery and discordant soundtrack.

If all of this sounds conceptual, the overall feel of "Staging Silence" is more whimsical than avant-garde. The film is almost defiantly fun, a reminder that art needn't be stuffy to be valuable —

and that improvisation is a necessary element of creation.

Hirshhorn curator Kelly Gordon says that, while the scale of the museum's Black Box venue makes "Staging Silence" "more immersive and less toyland-like," the strength of the work still lies in its playfulness.

"Some days, [I] let my eye lead my mind into that little trailer perched on top of the hill."

— KELLY GORDON, CURATOR, HIRSHHORN MUSEUM AND SCULPTURE GARDEN

"All good art experiences are subject to viewer mood and whatever one brings to it," Gordon says. "At the same time, art can take your mood somewhere unexpected."

For Gordon, Op De Beeck's quirky piece provides a refuge from the buzz of her downtown workday.

"I most enjoy how this work is a relief from the 'noise' of the media-ized world," she explains. "Some days, [I] let my eye lead my mind into that little trailer perched on top of the hill." JESSICA ROAKE

● **Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, 7th Street and Independence Avenue SW; daily (closed Dec. 25), through Feb. 27, 10 a.m.-5:30 p.m., free; 202-633-1000, Hirshhorn.si.edu. (L'Enfant Plaza)**