

# ARTnews

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**NEW YORK REVIEWS**

## Karin Giusti

NIKOLAI FINE ART

Brooklyn-based artist Karin Giusti's summerlong installation, *The White House Project*, filled Nikolai's garden with a clear-plastic scale model of the U.S. president's abode. Giusti's project developed over two administrations, and was shown in a larger version in 1995 at RealArt Ways in Hartford and in '96 at New York's Battery Park City. The most recent incarnation was as a small greenhouse with 2 potted rosebushes and 24 small, sad, unblossoming planters, accompanied by pruning shears and gardening gloves. A drawing of a dollar bill graced the back of this house, while the front mimicked the facade that faces the White House lawn. The bill, lightly etched, takes a truism—that money backs politics—and makes it manifest.

If the White House were a greenhouse, the installation asks, what kind of growth would it foster? Inside Giusti's structure, which visitors could enter, plants were sparse. While the symbolism of the piece—big money grafted onto politics leads to environmental degradation—feels heavy-handed, its participatory nature suggests a less predictable insight: by engaging in it the public may not be blameless.

Within the gallery were seven lightboxes with letters and documents detailing Giusti's efforts to gain permission to study the White House by taking photographs and measurements: permission was denied. Off in a corner, an empty White House model, which was a functional terrarium, sat, a dollar bill adorning one side of it. But more interesting than the overt message was the visual effect of the lightboxes, which cleanly and cleverly conveyed a sense of the layers of bureaucracy, of time, and the mysteries of politics.

—Carly Berwick

