

JASON MIDDLEBROOK
Time Out New York
July 31 - August 7, 2003



Reviews



Jason Middlebrook, *Beneath the Gnomes*, 2003.

“Yard”

Socrates Sculpture Park, through Aug 3 (see Elsewhere).

The 16 artists in “Yard,” Socrates Sculpture Park’s summer group show, reveal unsettling tensions within the manicured lawns and picturesque communities of American suburbs. A former rubble-strewn lot built on landfill that juts into the East River from Long Island City, Socrates is a surprisingly apt place to contemplate suburbia’s peculiar fusion of nature and culture.

Offering a metaphor for the show, Jason Middlebrook’s mixed-media installation *Beneath the Gnomes* (2003) excavates the underside of the suburban landscape. Sixteen fiberglass lawn ornaments, including a garish pink seahorse and a mustachioed Mexican in a sombrero, tower from pillars made of concrete and debris-filled earth that appear to have erupted from the ground below.

Other contributions call attention to the boundaries that define suburban space. In *The Yard* (2003), artist duo Venske & Spänle distinguish a 14-by-34-foot plot from the surrounding grass by covering it with plastic sod, tilting it and having a copy of *The New York Times* delivered to it every day. Lisa Hein and Bob Seng’s *Two Pools* (2003) features contrasting 17-by-13-foot versions of the kidney-shaped swimming pools that dot the backyards of the affluent. One rests accessibly within the park, but offers an unsatisfying imitation of chlorinated water: a convex surface of matte blue ceramic tiles set in ten inches of concrete. The second pool—a plastic float strewn with glimmering multicolored glass bottles—drifts in the river just offshore. Like the nearby suburbs that beckon successful city dwellers, the sparkling pool seems a world away from the industrial congestion of the Queens shoreline.

—Laura Auricchio