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Loft Imitates Art

A couple of gallery pros remake their home into a livable exhibit.

By Wendy Goodman
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Chiappa's designs—including four resin-and-Styrofoam stools, a Mondrian-referencing bookshelf, and a painted wood sculpture of a chef's knife—are joined by those of Marcel Wanders (the knotted chair) and Maarten Baas (the white clay coffee table). The wire hanging sculpture over the sofa is by Beth Campbell.

Photographs by Jessica Antola

He can't really stop himself," Kate Werble says of her boyfriend, Christopher Chiappa, who spent nine months impulsively fabricating furniture, plaster-coating columns, and remaking air vents into portals to another dimension as part of a soup-to-nuts renovation of their one-bedroom loft in Long Island City. Chiappa, an artist and exhibition designer, moved into the former Eagle Electric factory in 2007, attracted by the postindustrial setting and the loft's wall-to-wall windows (Werble, who owns West Soho's Kate Werble Gallery, joined him there a year later). But the standard vents and lack of architectural detail were enough to drive the installation maven, who's "roadied" shows for design stars like the Campana brothers, Hella Jongerius, and Ingo Maurer, a little bit nuts. So he took it upon himself to create a sculptural, idiosyncratic backdrop for a mix of art pieces (his own and others'), designer furniture, and family heirlooms. "Everything Chris does is rooted in self-portraiture," Werble says. "Those dipped lights in the bedroom are based on the candles he used to make as a kid." And while Chiappa brought a childlike zeal to designing pieces, like the bed—which he painted over and over until it looked like it'd been dipped in foam—not everything in the home was forged from scratch. The living room and bedroom are graced by a chaise, armchair, and teapot that Werble inherited from her grandmother, adding just a smidgen of antiquity to the couple's mostly handmade world.