

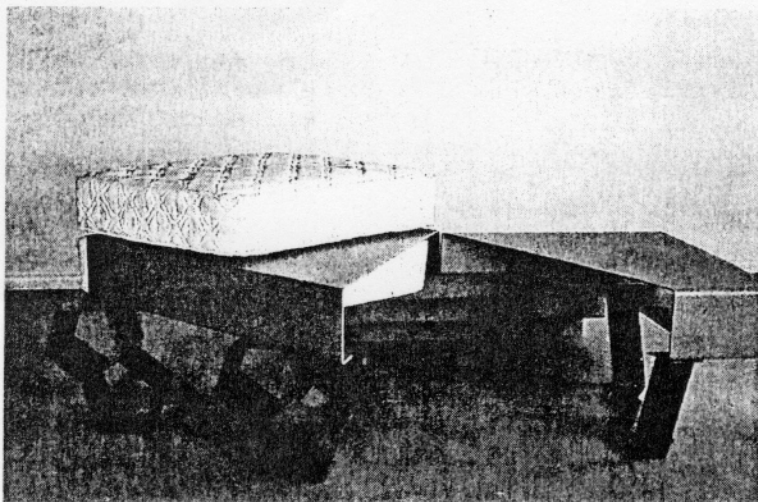
## MOWRY BADEN

POST WILSHIRE AND  
DOWNTOWN

Mowry Baden's latest offering reiterated the artist's preoccupation with how we position ourselves relative to sculpture, furniture, and other objects, and how such things position us. The three works on view played with the form, material, and meaning of one of the artist's favorite subjects (and one of the most loaded pieces of furniture most of us know): the bed. Unlike many of Baden's pieces, which lure the viewer with improvised gizmos and less-than-high-tech interactive scenarios into games of gratification and frustration, these works engage the viewer in a more contemplative manner (though still tempting one to enter, touch, or climb on board), as Baden translates the bed into formal sculpture, semiotic text, and psychological minefield.

*Ever Pronating*, 1996, turns a pair of twin-size mattresses on end, generating a slouching V-shaped structure held up by a hot-pink steel armature and converting the bed as horizontal surface and instrument of leisure to sculptural object and architectural space. Baden has created a corner into which one might be forced or might voluntarily retreat, a dead end or a point of departure. Rather than the relaxation or the excitements and finalities usually associated with a bed, waiting seems to be the name of the game, as well as a sort of arrested entropy—holding up things that want to sag.

Baden literally and figuratively puts the bed on a pedestal in *Broken Dreams*, 1996. Graced with stairs one must ascend to reach the mattress, the pedestal is a faux granite-finished steel platform supported by bright red legs made of sheet metal bent into spindly-looking geometric forms. This platform is split in half, with one side empty and the other supporting a small squarish mattress that is either a twin-size cut in two and seamlessly sewn up or a queen-size shrunk for Lilliputians—in either case, hardly comfortable. The



Mowry Baden, *Broken Dreams*, 1996,  
aluminum and fiberglass, 95 x 83 x 33".

mattress, though carrying all the delicate stitching, texture, and detail that it should, doesn't look quite right. One wants to touch it, just as one would want to in a department-store showroom. When you do, however, instead of a gentle give beneath your fingertips, the surface clicks against your nails. It's as hard as stone—or at least as hard as the fiberglass from which it is molded—an unyielding surface atop a broken and unstable foundation.

The third work, perhaps the most telling in terms of the artist's interest in the potency of the bed as physical and symbolic material, is *Suture Mastic*, 1994, which presents a small wedge of space between a regular mattress (complete with mirrored headboard, box spring, and bedframe) and four mattresses cantilevered off the mirrored headboard. The constructed scenario is completely claustrophobic, whether one actually sneaks a moment to lie down or just stands back and considers the possibility. A simple but clever numbers game—the burden of four beds looming over one—it is also a curious twist on the tale of the Princess and the Pea, wherein viewers, who might otherwise prefer to align themselves with the light and delicate princess, get a chance to identify with the legume. Just to strain things a bit, Baden doesn't permit the two nightstands to carry their own load; they are cantilevered off the bedframe as well. Whether considering the structural difficulties and formal challenges of Baden's ensemble or drifting off into thoughts about birth, death, sex, sickness, rest, or restlessness, one quickly realizes there's a lot of weight riding on this.

—Christopher Miles