

Karlos Martínez Bordoy

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By Max Andrews



Karlos Martínez Bordoy, *Bed Base #1*, 2024, painted iron, steel cable, springs, fittings, cold wool, canvas, twisted thread, cotton tape, birch veneer, polyester thread, 94 1/2 × 31 1/8 × 72 7/8".

Comprising just four works, Karlos Martínez Bordoy's exhibition "Folded Forms" was in part a droll reaction to the dimensions of FormatoComodo, among the smallest of Madrid's commercial galleries. The exhibition's hardworking conceit hinged on the so-called Murphy bed. This space-saving invention, patented more than a century ago in the US and lately revived as a tiny-home hack, lets a mattress and bed frame fold vertically against a wall or into a cupboard, freeing up floor space.

Bed Base #2 (all works 2024) is a tall standing structure of metal bars affixed to the wall, flanked on each side by columns of wooden bed slats that spill onto the floor. Two octagonal coffin-like forms made from narrower bars were bolted between the uprights, held open by steel tensing cables like a pair of scissors. Delicately stitched textile panels, secured in place as if on a loom by straps and metal springs, span these intersecting frames. *Bed Base #1* incorporates a central spine of similar sanded wooden slats and three body-proportioned iron frames, staggered like a sequential diagram demonstrating a whole range of such fold-out berth contraptions. (Indeed, the series includes more works than were included in this presentation.)

Martínez's exacting choice of hardware and soft materials offered a correspondingly precise set of allusions. For example, the coarse fabric bands that braced the textile panels were of such a specific blue-gray tone and texture that they immediately brought to mind the straps of some vintage navy-issue duffel bag, while the gently curved birchwood bed slats suggested sober IKEA furniture. The coded sculptural imaginary was somehow part midcentury flophouse, part contemporary tourist-rental micro apartment—both symptoms of an economic squeeze and versions of vaguely seedy urban malaise. The motif of the Murphy bed already brought its own ready-made cultural freight through how it has been played for a laugh in silent film and early Popeye cartoons. Yet in Martínez's hands, the disappearing-bed concept offered itself as a playfully fickle take on classical sculpture's long-standing predilection for verticality and figuration over salacious postwar horizontality and materiality.

Poised like mechanical switches between the upstanding pragmatism of making do in close quarters and the sensuality one might enjoy lying down in the same, the eroticism in these hybrid sculptures was latent but not overt. *Torn Curtain #1* made it more explicit. A muted combination of wool cloth, lightweight suiting canvas, and hanging straps (the same blue-gray textiles as in the companion works) was stitched to two stiff flanges and suspended by clamps and springs

from a wall-mounted telescopic arm. Resembling a cantilevered hanger for a couture fetish apron or a prototype for a customized sex sling, it also suggested a deviant form of painting where a stretcher might be more like a frame for supporting a body. *Blind* alluded to painting in a different way: through the sensuous possibilities of its tailored juxtaposition of refined fabrics and rigid metal strips. It hung flat against the wall like a ribbed rolling shutter partially blocking an imagined window. The stitched textiles' closely spaced parallel lines evoked the subtle grids of Agnes Martin, but *Blind* represented something even more discreet: an indistinct threshold of disclosure, concealment, and gendered materiality. Belying its sleazy reputation, the Murphy bed was originally designed to circumvent courting customs that would not allow a lady to enter a gentleman's bedroom. Martínez's "Folded Forms" opened out its metaphor into a meticulous consideration of how we negotiate personal space and concealed desire.