

PERRY HOBERMAN

POSTMASTERS GALLERY

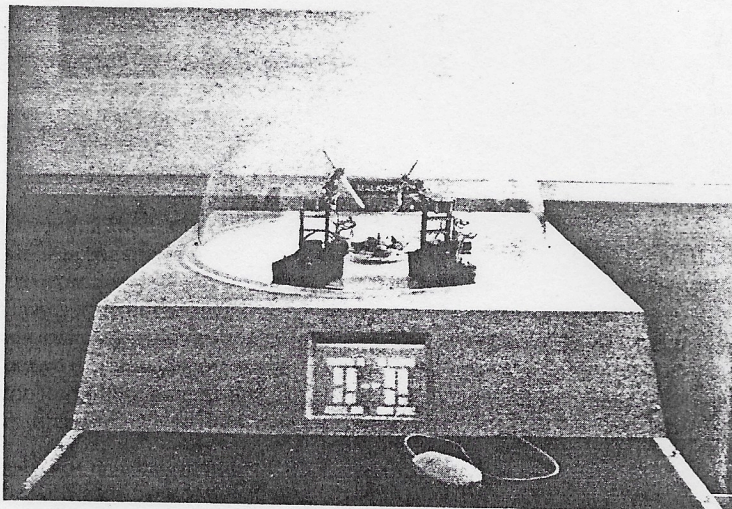
As noted in another publication, the title of Perry Hoberman's recent show, "Sorry We're Open," wryly commented on the flight of many galleries from SoHo and on the neighborhood's ongoing mall-ification. But if the SoHo crowd is shifting from cutting-edge cognoscenti to middle-of-the-road suburbanites, then so much the better

for Hoberman. His latest installation not only addressed the workaday lives of the latter—remarkable enough in itself—but was actually accessible and populist, as opposed to snide and ironic.

A mutant version of the most average office imaginable, "Sorry We're Open" was not visually impressive, and wasn't meant to be. In keeping with its subject, it had the kind of deflated loser aesthetic so popular right now (in both visual art and the culture at large). Hoberman favored cheap and/or cheesy materials: a labyrinth of purple cubicle walls, steel and formica shelving, Styrofoam cups and Sweet 'n' Low packets in the coffee corner.

Everywhere were ultrafake plants with uniformly geometric leaves and a mysterious, bubbly yellow goo for soil, as well as framed signs that defined "Vision" as "not seeing things as they are but as they will be" (the words, enlarged from a real-life motivational poster, were so blurred as to be nearly unreadable). Those signs contrasted with the sad little snapshot displays in many of the cubicles, which indeed showed things as they are. One was a drab record of what a worker might see during his daily routine: apartment, hallway, subway platform, elevator buttons, surveillance camera, people on the street, and finally (the day's treat) a movie theater. Instead of Fischli/Weiss' charming ordinariness, we were treated to the dreadfully mundane.

As with past works, such as *Bar Code Hotel*, 1994, various incarnations of *Fara-day's Garden*, 1987-94, and *Cathartic User Interface*, 1995, Hoberman incorporated a host of interactive elements into this installation, gizmos that laid bare the psychoses



Perry Hoberman, *Lunch After Upload*, 1997, robotic arms, computer, food, wood, and Plexiglas, dimensions variable.

simmering just below the veneer of "efficiency" and "normality" in the workplace. *Lunch After Upload*, 1997, involved pushing food around with eating utensils under a plastic dome via a computer mouse, an experience eerily familiar to anyone who's eaten while working at a terminal. Nearby, a shrunken desk and chair sat under the gradually descending ceiling in a cubicle belonging to one "Jimmy Peebles," whose name, along with those of some of his coworkers, was borrowed from Hoberman's nursery-school classmates (others were made up from Esperanto, the language that was supposed to unite the world).

The whole installation had an air of corporate condescension about it, pointing to the office worker not just as a cog in the machine but as the emotionally stunted child of the parent company. There was a weird poignance to *The Many Faces of June*, 1997, a series of calendars open to that month, as if to illustrate the attempt to express one's personality through pictures of castles, airplanes, barns, etc. In *Business Class Traveler*, 1997, a form explained that American Airlines "would appreciate knowing your feelings about our beverage service," and a blob of pink goo—the traveler—wore an eyeshade with labels reading "Wake For Meals." Using variously odd, clever, and sometimes obvious means (a briefcase with handcuffs attached) to de-familiarize the office, "Sorry We're Open" was a relentless demonstration of the flip side of workplace efficiency: stultifying banality.

In the east gallery were four pieces, each entitled "Calendarama": circular Plexiglas forms hanging from the ceiling that

framed pages from calendars. Climbing a ladder into the circle, you found yourself in a kind of fantasy world, surrounded by glossy photos of aircraft, golf courses, or birds (depending on the piece) that were intensified by magnifying lenses and spotlights. These pieces were art with a capital "A": prettier, and certainly more saleable than the agglomeration of nerve-wracking, depressing junk next door, they conveyed the idea of metaphoric escape from that world in a high-aesthetic, high-concept way. Nevertheless, *Sorry, We're Open*, 1997, was the better piece, if only because it brought a visceral negativity to the place where most Americans spend far too much of their lives.

—Julie Caniglia

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