

Review

Exhibitions

Perry Hoberman

Sorry, We're Open

Postmasters Gallery through May 24

By STEPHEN PUSEY

ON ENTERING POSTMASTERS Gallery, one might easily assume that the proprietors have upped and fled to Chelsea, and that the administrative offices of a small corporation had taken their place. Of course, this is not the case, though the title of their latest exhibition certainly sounds like an apology for remaining in SoHo.

Someone has, indeed, set up office in the space, but as we wander through its maze of grey modular cubicles, we discover a disquieting underside to its guise of normality. The Minotaur of this labyrinth, Perry Hoberman, has created an intricate, and wryly humorous folly of deceptions that obliquely leads us on the trail left by the absentee employees who are named, in Esperanto, on each cubicle.

This exhibition rewards those who pay attention to detail, and who venture to interact with the works. We are greeted by a receptionist in the form of a desk from which protrudes a large waste pipe. Peer through this — it is best if someone is also sitting in the chair — and you have a close-up of the secretary's genital area: "How nice to meet you."

So you pick up the telephone on another desk, and the recorded operator cycles through endless voice mail options. You notice that the handcuffed briefcase next to you is ticking ominously and that left on a shelf, are two cups containing what appears to be gunpowder and, — one has detonated. A file cabinet labeled "Data", "Title", "Core", looks like it may offer some clues, but try to open it — you can't — push against it, and the draw slides

inwards to reveal an empty interior.

Round another corner a camera peers intently into a corner and the desk monitor reveals the subject of its surveillance — the furry world beneath the carpet. Saunter past the simulated computer terminals, the polystyrene cocoon stealing a nap, the jumbled labels that read — "Closed, Come In", "Apartment Of Dog", "Beware For Rent" — and you will find yourself in poor little Jimmy Peebles' corner. His neighbors are Frederic Guess and Pam Prush. His desk is not much higher than three feet and his chair looks like it has been pushed into the floor. Sit there for a while and you will be overcome with the oppressiveness of his drab, daily, sound-proofed, containment, until a static breeze causes your hair to rise and you glance upwards just as the foam-core tiled ceiling descends.

On a monitor, in a far corner, a screen saver keeps a dozen pencil sharpeners busy, a curious metaphor for management, perhaps. Nearby there is a table littered with books that have titles like, "Winning Through Intimidation", "Industrial Psychology", and "The Nations Health", but open any of these and you are presented with strange imagery pasted to the underside of the table — psychosis hidden by the pat formulas of corporate America.

In this pseudo office environment, Perry Hoberman has created a thought-provoking network of inferences that parody and subvert its veneer of normalcy. It is difficult, if not impossible, to aestheticize this work, as to do so would be to objectify it; whereas our understanding of the piece is derived as much from our containment and interaction within this "office", as it is from an awareness of the related discourse of writers such as, Jean Baudrillard, William Bogard, Timothy Druckrey, Michel Foucault, Gilles Deleuze, and Felix Guatarri.

Obviously, the decoy is never what

it "seems" to be, though it may trigger conditioned responses, just as if it were the "real" thing. Once we have seen through the initial illusion, we may consider ourselves free of its lure. Or does the simulacrum have its own agenda of signifiers, which indeed we fall for — hook, line and sinker — with all its ramifications?

In recognizing the artifice, we become engaged with the referential area behind its surface, which embellishes and enriches our appreciation of its construction. The object is never what it appears to be, but is an operand for all the cultural baggage that you bring to it.

This is the real twist — that the simulation of this office stays with you after you leave the gallery, that the exhibition space is just an encoded manifestation and extension of the labyrinth of simulacra and surrogates, that constitutes our 'reality' as dwellers of a technological society.

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