

banal objects in an auto school classroom — into the context of a gallery. Bijl's work came to mind one sunny afternoon when I walked into the Oliver Kamm/5BE Gallery and immediately walked out again, convinced that I had entered the wrong space. I had a second look at the frosted glass and brushed steel door and — silly me — wondered at the strangeness of this apparent juxtaposition: a nice, cutting-edge gallery raised one floor above the kind of small, gritty bodega one finds again and again in Chelsea. Opening the door for a second time, I peered around looking for a staircase and suddenly realized that I had been royally had. As Frankenstein stated, the pleasure of trompe-l'oeil lies in the realization that one has been tricked. I had entered Justin Lowe's striking re-creation of a bodega, a place chock-full of anachronisms, where cultures rub hard against one another.

Everything was just right, from the gaudy yellow neon lighting to the pale lime-green walls, from the tiled linoleum floor with missing panels to the glass-paneled refrigerator warm enough for a colony of fruit flies to breed on top of rotting plantains, from the packs of fried pork-skin to the bags stuffed with Wonderbread, from the inexpensive toys to the rolls of toilet paper, bottles of soft drinks, and condoms. For the barely initiated, such an environment constitutes an assault on the senses. The juxtapositions found in a bodega are perpetually surprising. One seems to have entered a time-warp — these places can feel very 1970s — and even a different region: witness the posters in Spanish announcing various musical groups and the Latino radio station pumping out streams of music. Like the bodega, art takes us to a different realm.

The reception desk was hidden behind a Plexiglas wall containing compartments filled with cigarettes



Top: Justin Lowe, *Ice Cream Truck*, 2006. Mixed media, detail of installation.

Above: Justin Lowe, *Bodega*, 2006. Mixed media, detail of installation.

and candy. Another wall, bearing bags of potato chips, could be rotated, thereby allowing access to a small space clad with moving blankets. Next, two steps led up to a narrow scaffolded space, which one gradually recognized as the interior of a van, with a Persian carpet on the floor, posters on the walls, and loud music playing. Two stuffed coyotes wearing sweaters cuddled in the front of the vehicle. Once one exited the van from one of two side doors, it revealed itself as a "Kool Man" ice-cream truck with swirling lights. The floor was covered with disks made of rolled-up clothing, and the spaces between the disks and underneath the truck were filled with rolls of fabric. The polychrome floor, covered with a vari-

ety of textures, was soft and uneven. Sounds of shattered glass were heard — part of a collaborative soundtrack.

The title of Lowe's exhibition was "Helter Swelter," a sweaty take on Paul McCartney's song, which aimed to be the loudest and wildest ever recorded, aggressive and hallucinogenic all at once. Manson reportedly interpreted it as prophesying a future race war. Lowe's work touches on issues of class and race, hinting at a drug high as we pass from the everyday into increasingly psychedelic territory. Things are not what they seem: bodegas and ice cream trucks are also known to serve as drug fronts. Lowe's New York solo debut hit the bull's eye.

— Michaël Amy

NEW YORK

Justin Lowe

Oliver Kamm/5BE Gallery

In art, by definition, things are not what they seem. Duchamp proved as much when he placed a signed and dated urinal in a gallery, thereby transforming its meaning. However, there is also art relying on strategies of appropriation and displacement that succeeds in momentarily making the public believe what it sees. The Belgian neo-conceptual artist Guillaume Bijl, for example, specializes in the creation of highly illusionistic installations that move entire environments from everyday life — for instance, the dreadfully