



Front Man

Newspapers, nail clippers, combs, and Corona beer

by Jerry Saltz

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By now the empty- or full-as-exhibition strategy is more than a half-century old. In 1938 Marcel Duchamp hung 1,200 bags of coal from a gallery ceiling; four years later he filled a space with a mile of string. In 1959 Yves Klein exhibited an empty gallery as art; the following year Arman filled one to the point of no entry. In 1964 Lucas Samaras arranged the contents of his entire bedroom in the Pace Gallery; Christo wrapped a whole museum five years later. Artists have put horses, donkeys, and dogs in galleries; filled spaces with dirt, bricks, cardboard, and steam; and transformed rooms into stores, shrines, and restaurants. The gesture is a standard form of institutional critique.

It's also a form of super-realism. Instead of Duane Hanson's or Ron Mueck's perfect renditions of human bodies we're treated to

re-creations of real-world environments. The recent high-water marks in this genre are Michael Smith's over-the-top installations of a light-show shop and an artist's loft sale.

Into the fray comes Justin Lowe, 30, with his super-realistic version of a bodega installed in the Oliver Kamm Gallery entrance. This store is exact down to displays of newspapers, nail clippers, combs, and Corona beer. Behind the "store" is a Mister Softee truck. Beyond that is a floor covered in rolled-up clothes. The store is the best part by far and is all that's necessary. The only sour note is the press release claim that bodegas are often "fronts" for illicit activities. Sometimes they are. Mostly, they're ways for people to make a living. If Lowe's installation needs a bit more inner tension, its outer skin is impeccable.