

*Deli/Grocery
2000*

'Regarding
Deli/Grocery 2000'
installation
1998



'Grocery No. 1'
original products,
bleached beeswax,
chrome, glass,
wood, spraycolor
53" x 24" x 11.5"
1991-1993

**H.N.
SEMJON**

MODERN ARTIFACT

words Jamie Atherton

They are painted in subdued colors on the backdrop of the street, continually recurring in the manner of a cartoon's revolving background. Drifting through Manhattan streets, one can be sure of never being far from the convenience of a convenience store. Customers pass under their awnings and between their trays of monoxide-tainted fruit, knowing what to expect. There is a ubiquitousness to these tiny caves of plenty, set into canyon walls, that makes it all too easy to assume that

each is the same as the last. One enters not to study or relish. It would take the attention of art to grant these spaces their deserved moment of consideration, to shift from a mode of viewing that reads them as utilitarian to one that both questions their purpose and recognizes a hidden beauty in the pedestrian.

Come September 2000, a store will be erected that will provide this service to its siblings. "Take out all the awnings, the delis, bodegas and

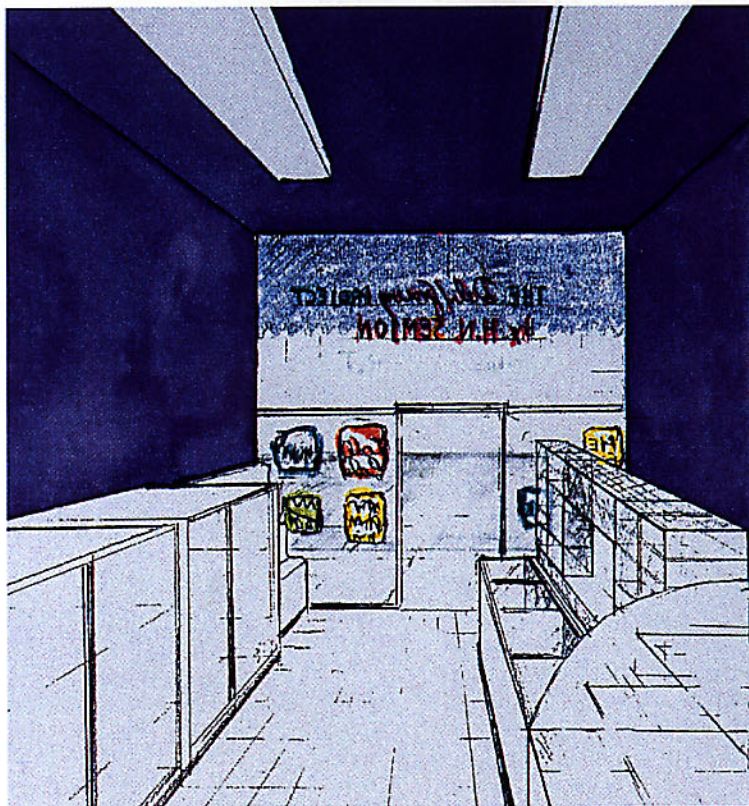


Illustration: 'Fictional Visualization of the Deli/Grocery 2000 project' 1998

grocery stores, and you suddenly have a naked and poor image of New York," artist HN Semjon suggests. The blue awnings and neon signage of his *Deli/Grocery* will no doubt attract otherwise engaged passersby with an urge

for a candy bar. Inside, perspectives will shift. The visitor will find himself in a space at once reminiscent of the expected, yet painted an unfamiliar blue, with unusually clean and shiny presentation, and a minimal, inaccessible stock. The store will be staffed by multi-lingual moderators dressed in 'communication suits' designed by Edward L. Buchanan of Bottega Veneta. The desired candy bar will be there, but it won't be available for consumption.

Semjon's space will be filled with 1000 of his 'Product Sculptures,' as previously installed in a kiosk (protected as a landmark) in Berlin. These are the things commonly found on shelves—cartons of milk, packets of oats and boxes of washing powder, coated in layers of bleached beeswax. The translucent applied surfaces are then carved in a painterly manner that gives them an ethereal, ghostlike quality. By blurring the packaging designs, Semjon elucidates their iconic status. It's a status already inherent; the process simply serves to accentuate. As Semjon says, "One thing's for sure, they become new icons because of their own representation."

The space in which an icon is placed becomes hushed and hallowed—spaces in which we tread slowly and carefully. Both churches and museums invoke such behavior in their patrons. By comparison, the urban grocery store is about speed, unabashed familiarity and unconsidered consump-



'Budweiser 12 Pack,' original products, mixed media 25" x 29" x 9" 1998

tion. When the commonplace and the sacred become one, it makes for an emotive dichotomy. As in a museum, the art pieces are contained in glass cabinets—"the aspect of 'do not touch.'" As in a deli, these are in fact

refrigeration units and display cases. Finally, the plan for the New York space—studio in the rear, project office in the middle, and installation in the front sales floor—serves as a model of contemporary art practice.

The project is a variation on a recurring 20th century idea of incorporating the selling of art and its retail space into the actual work. While often these aspects remain taboo, an unconnected element that is hidden behind locked gallery doors, Keith Haring's *Pop Shop* or Tracey Emin's *Tracey Emin Museum*, for example, have succeeded in making the sale, in Haring's words, an art statement. *Deli/Grocery* develops on these themes by integrating art made with everyday consumer goods into a reappropriation of their apposite retail space. In contrast to the *Pop Shop*, the product becomes more expensive, the environment more mundane.

Unlike the activity of shopping, where attention-grabbing designs ensure that we just grab, visitors will instead be forced to peer closer, as if to wipe the dust off of an ancient relic or to clear the ice from the outside of a cryogenic container. It is possible to imagine the experience as that of our great-grandchildren visiting a theme park recreation of late 20th century life. Semjon urges us "to appreciate what surrounds us, to not take things for granted," with a final celebration of a convenience (Continued on page 156)



J. DREYFUSS > (continued from page 76) creative team of 60 people, and has experienced something of a couture culture shock.

"I didn't know everything that happened with [why] Hervé Léger left, and I didn't want to know. I've tried to be professional, I didn't want to be involved in the story of the past," Dreyfuss says with the diplomacy skills of an old pro. "I do not try to do what Monsieur Léger did, just show him that I respect him. It was his house before, and I've tried to analyze the image of the house and what the house needed. The lines were really sexy, so I've tried to stay in those kind of lines. But now it's haute couture, it's not prêt-à-porter anymore, so I could push the clothes really far. And *voilà*."

The premiere collection was shown in July, but because Hervé Léger had never before shown couture, Fashion Week's organizing board, La Chambre Syndicale, did not list the company on its official show calendar. "[At first,] I was angry [with La Chambre Syndicale], because they've been really tough with us. But I need to respect people and their decisions. The only thing was, for a really, really long time, no French designers had arrived at a couture house in Paris. And for once when it happens, they are not helping us. At first, I did not understand. Now I understand better. Perhaps it was too early to be on the calendar. Perhaps you need to take your time."

Time is a rare commodity in an industry based on speed. "It's going too fast for the young people," Dreyfuss contends, but adds, "That's also the way you see who's going to carry everything on the shoulder—and it's really heavy." Dreyfuss has learned his lessons quickly in a business built on buzz, witnessing the quick rise and fall of colleagues like Jeremy Scott. "I really do appreciate the media," he says. "Without them, I would not be here. I think that the media needs the designers, but I think it's really important that we not forget that we also need the media." But maybe the media needs to develop a new vocabulary. "I had so many people say I'm a genius. And I always say, 'If I were a genius, my mother would have seen it before everyone.' People don't realize the work, 20 hours of work a day. It is such a personal investment, when you're showing with your name. But, you know, there are two kinds of people in the fashion world. There are people speaking and the people working. The people working are important. You've got so many people speaking—let them say that you are a genius or you are shit, because it means the same thing."*

J. THIMISTER > (continued from page 90) Motherwell, Taipès. I am very fond of graphic and simple things that show skillful manipulation of material. It's because of that I love Rembrandt; his brushstroke vibrates. **So painting is important?** I think painting is very important. It's the abstraction of the life of a society, a way of feeling things, to reject, to beautify, and to create in material and proportion and color, which for fashion is very useful. For me it's very important, and literature as well. **And music.** I love words; I love the way they follow each other. I love to read. ...I'm from the North—it's more than anything black and white. I love the sky blue of the North; the paintings, Vermeer. I like the colors of the earth. The desert is very important in my life; being alone, facing myself, or God. **You like the solitude?** I've got the devil in me. **[both laugh]** **There is something diabolical about you.** For me, God is both good and evil; humans have two sides as well. **In fact, I don't think you're diabolical. You're very gentle.** I hope. I try to be, but I'm not always—**You're like the devil by Vermeer.** I don't know the devil by Vermeer, you have to explain that. **[laughs]** **I'll explain off the tape.***

H.N. SEMJON > (continued from page 144) all too easily overlooked. He anticipates a future where e-commerce demands standardized packaging, uniformly designed to fit vast automated warehouses and dispatch facilities. Even now, the curvaceous coke bottle preserved in wax becomes an archeological find, as visitors to *Deli/Grocery* are faced with "the future lost."

Deli/Grocery is scheduled to open in September 2000, with simultaneous events being held in Berlin, Mexico City, London, Sydney and Copenhagen, connected via multi-media links. www.deligrocery.net*

K. LOCO > (continued from page 148) four-month hiatus due to a broken left arm. Despite rumors that the injury resulted from a backstage skirmish while opening for Saint Etienne in San Francisco, the Kid insists it was a freak accident at a movie theatre. "I smoked, like I always do—and then I just fell down the stairs," he laughs.

"When I started working on the album again, I thought that maybe it would be a good idea to do *Love Story, Part II*," Prieur muses. "When you go to see Part I or II of a Hollywood movie like *Star Wars*—that is a big joke with us here in France. We can do this with *Love Story* to Rachida and my music—because the girl, she's not dead, you know?"*

R. TRÜBY > (continued from page 150) ties between Germany and Brazil that made cross-pollination possible in the first place. The Beetle, it turns out, was a principal German export to Brazil. And the Volkswagen bus—you probably remember it more because it's worth two points in Punch Buggy—was actually called the "Samba."

And, like the rounded forms of these classic designs, it all comes full circle. The third installment features the new VW Beetle on its cover. It's less flower, more power: While the uninitiated may never have heard of artists like Heinz von Moisy, Mr. Circle, or Ximo and Judy, that's precisely why Trüby is here. *Glücklich III*, just released, is the first record in the series to feature contemporary productions alongside old-school tracks, with submissions from Berlin, London and Paris, all infused with a deep Brazilian house vibe. The Trüby Trio even drops one of their own tracks, a conga-propelled, smooth-rolling vibe that pretty much sums up the meaning of the word *glücklich*—happy.*

F. KUTI > (continued from page 152) all corners of Africa and Europe, until Sola lost her life to cancer. Femi's wife Funke took Sola's place in the group.

MASS—the Movement Against Second Slavery—is the political wing of Femi's musical ground war against the problems in his country and across the African continent, which he launched on his father's birthday. Targeting the universities, Femi is using his spotlight to build a groundswell of positive change: "Talking about the way forward, getting Nigerians to believe in themselves, be proud of their heritage, and giving the African man his pride again—mobilizing the youth of Africa through my music. Uplifting Nigeria and spreading it around Africa."

Which is saying quite a bit when the more obvious choice would be to discard this Sisyphus reality in favor of a sunny beach between gigs. "There's no turning back now," says Femi. "I couldn't see myself running away from the problems in Nigeria because I want a happy life. My life is there. I find joy in exposing what is wrong. It's a hard and sad decision, but it's a decision I can't run away from."

What does he think about when the music stops? "Music," he laughs. "I like to lie on the bed, look to the sky, let my body float on rhythms, and rewind. Thinking about new songs, what I'm going to do in the future. Floating and tripping on life."*