

CL's guide to dance, theater,
comedy, spoken word, classical
music and visual arts
* indicates critics' picks.

VISUAL ARTS

DYSFUNCTION JUNCTION

SARAH HOBBS TRANSLATES

psychological states to photographs whose trappings are as carefully arranged as a movie set. Give me a disorder, Hobbs suggests, and I will show you its manifestation, whether it's the downy, cottony confusion of "Memory Loss" or the gooey, chocolate-painted walls of "Obsessiveness."

These mini-worlds of psychic distress can have profound resonance, but at other times they can seem like the facile punch lines of *New Yorker* cartoons. "Vanity" is one of several weaker works in the show. Done in pink and rose, the photograph of rows of beauty queen rhinestone crowns placed on pretty pedestals offers little fresh insight into narcissism.

But for the most part, the show *Small Problems in Living* demonstrates Hobbs' shrewd ability to represent a world where acquisitiveness and accumulation can result in extreme social distress.

It's an idea that has timely ripples for the current state of mind that confronts fear of nuclear or biological devastation with cocoons made of duct tape and plastic sheeting and "safe rooms" stashed with Evian and canned chili. Hobbs is right to concentrate her project on the ceilings and encroaching walls of the domestic front as the place where our real psychological battles are fought.

One of the most arresting images in this small body of work is "Indecisiveness." A single chair is placed with its back to the viewer, squeezed into a small, cell-like room. Tacked to the walls of the claustrophobic space are hundreds of paint samples like the kind anxious home-improvers bring home en masse from Lowe's in the midst of fix-'er-up whirlwinds.

In "Hoarding," psychological distress is represented as a matter of accumulation. In this series of 12 small photographs, Hobbs places evidence of hoarding on the same wooden table: giant aluminum foil balls, packets of Sweet 'n' Low, hotel soap and other mysterious packages wrapped in blue fabric.

With her clean, simple set design, Hobbs' images can often play into the same orderly aesthetic of domestic anxiety's dominatrix, Martha Stewart. But unlike the Stewarts of the world, who suggest consumption and order are a salve to our contemporary malaise, Hobbs shows the problems beneath the modern phenomenon of *too much* choice. "Indecisiveness" beautifully attests to the entrapping psychic meltdown that confronts Americans, whose plenitude can often feel constricting and confusing.

— FELICIA FEASTER



"Perfectionist" (2002) by Sarah Hobbs

SARAH HOBBS

Small Problems in Living by Sarah Hobbs runs through March 15 at Solomon Projects, 1037 Monroe Drive. Tues.-Sat. 10 a.m.-6 p.m. 404-875-7100.