

# IF THESE WALLS COULD TALK

Photographer Sarah Hobbs experiments with weird science

## REVIEW

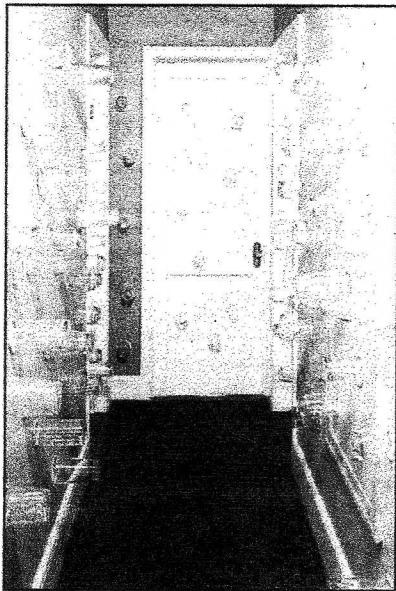
### *Does This Sound Like You?*

Through July 30. Solomon Projects, 1037 Monroe Drive. Tues.-Sat., 10 a.m.-6 p.m. 404-875-7100. www.solomonprojects.com.

BY FELICIA FEASTER

If only the tools of science could give us a formula for understanding the human heart and mind we are damned to grapple with all of our lives.

The entrance to photographer Sarah Hobbs' exhibition at Solomon Projects is dominated by the Atlanta-based artist's funny, psychological spin on just such an instance of scientific certainty head-butting with what we know of the wackier, far-from-material realities of life: the Periodic Table of the Elements.



THROUGH A HALLWAY, DARKLY: Sarah Hobbs' "Untitled (nosiness)" invites the viewer to lend an ear, using juice glasses to snoop on the next room.

That cut-and-dried schemata for all that is absolute and precise gets a humorous drop-kick in Hobbs' work, which is all about the inadequacy of science when human behavior is involved.

Hobbs' wry variation is her own "Periodic Table of the Traits," 118 human tendencies from Fg for forgetful to Ad for Adversarial, and not one of them something you'd want to be described as.

Hobbs' take on the human condition has elements of cynicism and joviality that can bring to mind comic sensibilities as diverse as Woody Allen, Neil LaBute, Helen Fielding and any random issue of the *New Yorker*. Romance-burned, a little sick of it all, Hobbs hasn't exactly given up on the human race. She's just learned that it's an engorged cow you can milk as often as you need to for your art. Where the human race is concerned, science may falter, but artists and analysts will never lack for material.

*Does This Sound Like You?* is mostly about the neuroses of modern life addressed in Hobbs' carefully set-designed arrangements of *stuff*. In works like the hysterically funny (though awkwardly titled) "Untitled (thin boundary)," Hobbs has filled a wet bar with drinking glasses imprinted with the kind of things that people at cocktail parties:

- A) think
  - B) sometimes say
  - C) generally regret saying later.
- "We Can't Afford This House."  
"I May Lose My Job."  
"Are Those Real?"

Hobbs' large photographs are essentially visual punch lines that elucidate some definitively contemporary neurosis. In "Untitled (nosiness)," juice glasses are affixed to a hallway's walls — the better for some unseen snoop to hear what's being said in the next room.

Hobbs' sensibility is as much about comedy as it is about photography, and so her work is like any stand-up comedy act: often laugh-out-loud funny, occasionally not so much.

Hobbs' work is also about class and the kind of nicely decorated rooms in older homes where well-educated city dwellers like the cast of *sex, lies, & videotape* ponder the absurdities of our social behavior, unspoken anxieties and psychological "tells."

Her photographs can lead you to mutter, "So true, so true," under your breath, even as Hobbs' particular, aforementioned style — urban, arch, knowing, well-decorated — can make you self-conscious about doing so. The furnishings and sense of humor in Hobbs' work may inspire that particular kind of middlebrow shame at reacting so predictably to familiar hallmarks of caste, taste and humor.

Hobbs' strength is in designing her settings so well. In the tastefully understated dining room of "Untitled (overcompensation)," an excessive pile of wrapped gifts means more because there are just two chairs at the table with enough space between them to suggest some romantic tempest or lingering issues necessitate grand gestures like all those presents. Hobbs could be a Hollywood set designer with her attention to what our environments say.

Decor, in Hobbs' hands, becomes the way we speak about who we are and who we think we are. The domestic space in Hobbs' work is the container for all of the leaking anxieties expressed within the walls of our dining rooms and offices. Things may seem cool, polished, controlled and dust-free, but Hobbs' work assures us that, like a potential girlfriend appraising a first date's apartment for signs of psychology manifest in record collections and wallpaper choice, the shelves filled with carefully pruned bonsai indicate very clearly the hell that living with you will be.

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