

THE ARCHITECTS NEWSPAPER

A Wrinkle in Space

06.06.2007

Kaleidoscopic mix of art and commerce opens in financial district



SEONG KWON / COURTESY PUBLIC ART FUND

Many people walking by 125 Maiden Lane in Manhattan's financial district are too absorbed in cell-phone conversations or their own thoughts to take a close look at the storefront, but those who do often do a double-take, grow puzzled, then slowly smile. The project is not a storefront at all, but in fact an installation by the Brooklyn-based artist Beth Campbell. It looks like something made with fun-house mirrors, because Campbell and her collaborators meticulously replicated the outer storefront four times, one after the other, extending back from the sidewalk. Presented by the Public Art Fund, the piece, *Potential Store Fronts*, will be on display through June 24.

What kind of store is it? One that offers a tantalizing array of possibilities, but nothing more. "It's a tease," Campbell said, both for the senses and consumer desire. The glass front doors remain locked, despite a note promising "Back in 5"—which seems to refer to five minutes, but could also be the five layers of parallel realities. Modeled after a variety store, the display window shows eclectic items copied over and over: a naked bar of soap, a lonely succulent plant, and enigmatic signs advertising "Personalized Lie Detector Tests," "Explore Your Inner Self," "Become a Life Coach," and, lit in neon, "Change." It's like a cross between a Dale Carnegie selfhelp book and a surreal Magritte painting.

Instead Campbell names sci-fi author William Gibson and digital pundit Nicholas Negroponte as her influences; she shares their fascination with transcending the constraints of physical reality. Her past work in installations and video has often played with viewers' sensory perceptions, but in gallery contexts, the artifice was more obvious. This piece's location on a commercial street magnifies its illusory magic. As she constructed it, people walking by on the sidewalk would often stop and strike up conversations. Some immediately grasped it as an artwork, she recalled; others declared, "I can't wait to go in," not realizing that by gazing into its layers, they'd already entered Campbell's uncanny world.

LISA DELGADO