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STUDIO VISIT: THE MANY SHOWROOMS OF JUSTIN LIEBERMAN

By Colleen Asper



Justin Lieberman's work mimics the conventional forms for presenting objects and images: private collections, public archives, commercial display, advertising, and exhibitions formats.

His most recent solo exhibition in New York spread across two galleries this past January, with "The Corrector's Custom Pre-Fab House" at Marc Jancou Contemporary and "The Corrector in the High Castle" at Zach Feuer Gallery serving as two showrooms for one fictional collector's holdings. In a bit of homophonic mischief, this collector was named the Corrector. He was based on Nobusuke Tagomi, a character from *The Man in The High Castle*, **Philip K. Dick**'s novel set in a future fifty years after Germany and Japan defeated the Allied forces in World War II. Lieberman represented the Corrector

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as a stout wooden figure with buckteeth, squinty eyes, and a cape with a swastika on it. This politically incorrect Corrector presided over his assortment of pop cultural flotsam and jetsam, which at Marc Jancou was affixed to the outside of a giant steel dome; inside, a computer program archived each object. At Zach Feuer similar ephemera was displayed in a living room Lieberman created by covering the walls of the gallery in bubbling plastic laminate and the floor with a dirty rose-colored carpeted festooned with bits of duct tape. Having turned both galleries into mock domestic spaces, a parody was clearly underway, but of what?

The answer depends on where one's allegiances lie in the hierarchies assigned to ways of arranging objects. Decoration, collection, archive: these categories suggest radically different systems by which to accrue objects and radically different values for each system. Fan, collector, historian: appreciation, too, has its own language of distinction. In Lieberman's work these categories are muddled, such that a character from a fictional history turns into a collector of mass-produced objects sloppily fashioned by the artist, or a collection of objects that decorate a bit of pomo architecture are archived with the thoroughness of a tight-lipped librarian and the associative capacities of a befuddled poet. In the midst of all this playful confusion the question is perhaps better stated: what is not parodied?

Lately, some things appear relatively sacred. I visited Lieberman's studio in upstate Chatham, New York, before he left for Paris for a solo show at [Sutton Lane](#) and a group show at New Galerie de France. Works in progress were scattered in various states of assembly across his studio, a one-story building shared with a quilt supply store. Many of these new works, which include a wonky bookshelf crammed with every conceivable book about suicide and a small toy car pulling a float made of cumbersome toy dinosaurs, leave matters to chance in a practice previously premised on exacting narratives. The work that struck me as most different was in fact a reworking of a piece from 2004. The original comprised three coffee tables, each of which sported a base made from the logo of a hardcore band. The implications were obvious: punk is a commodity; corporate culture foolish; and radical ideology dated and ineffectual. The new work, to be exhibited in 2010 for a solo show at Bernier/Eliades Gallery in Athens, Greece, is a bronze cast that stacks all three tables on top of one another, with the shape of both the coffee tables and the logos lost in the spindly form created by the bronze.

The piece immediately called to mind something artist and writer [Michelle Grabner](#) said on a panel at the CAA conference in Los Angeles this past February. A conversation about relational aesthetics turned to aggregate sculpture and Grabner spoke of both when she said, "I'd rather see grand failure in risking a vertical stacking of idea and/or form than the kind of cast-a-net-gathering-it-in. I'd rather have something clichéd and hierarchical." What struck me about Lieberman's reworking of his earlier piece is that the arrangement of the tables went from literally horizontal to literally vertical simultaneous with ideas in the work moving from metaphorically horizontal-the punk rocker and the CEO leveled, to metaphorically vertical-the punk rocker and the CEO fodder for a third object allowed to have a structure not premised on invective. Finally, parody is beside the point.