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ART AND STUFF

A BLOG ABOUT ART MUSEUMS, ART EDUCATION, TECHNOLOGY, AND ABOUT LIVING IN THE STATES AGAIN FOR THE FIRST TIME SINCE 1991.

space travel in chelsea

In the midst of the proliferation of 80's art in Chelsea galleries these days, it is possible to duck into the back of [CUE Art Foundation](#) on 25th Street and be transported to a dimly lit, soothing, pleasant place that smells good and where serious work is being done - important work if you are considering time travel and some of the practical implications that involves. This is the laboratory of artist Thomas Ashcraft, who shares his ongoing scientific work in cataloguing and displaying all manner of artifacts he has developed for possible encounters of the third kind.



Curated by Bruce Nauman, this show allows visitors a luxurious exploration of minute, exquisite, inventions developed by the artist in response to specific requests to the "lab." Cast in bronze, fashioned in wire, and collected in vials, the typewritten labels bearing recent dates explain the various specimens' unique functions: Thinker's Gum, for example, was developed for staving off hunger, prolonging thinking sessions, sustained illumination, and giving traction. Although we don't know who The Thinkers are, all of the displayed objects seem to have been developed to accommodate specific needs when making intergalactic trips.

The laboratory is the opposite of a modern, hi-tech, antiseptic setting, however, and the total immersion in a world where the artist is consumed with making and archiving seemingly irrelevant objects that nonetheless acquire a sense of importance reminds me of Ilya Kabakov's Garbage Man installation. The use of wood, vellum, and natural materials and the dramaturgy of the installation narrative also sharply contrasts with the slick metal and plastic forms of objects in Matthew Barney's Cremaster universe, even though there is something otherworldly going on in both. Ashcraft, aka "Tom from HelioTown," has in any case conquered this little part of the Chelsea universe.



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