



Robin Hill with Sam Nichols at another year in LA

Always formally and conceptually restless, sculptor Robin Hill has only amplified her experimentation with materials, formats and even disciplines since moving from New York to northern California. In the past year she has collaborated with two of her colleagues in the Sacramento area, veteran conceptual artist Steve Kaltenbach and composer Sam Nichols, on a new-media project presented last fall in the New York area. Hill's latest exhibition finds her working once again with Nichols, a fellow faculty member at the University of California, Davis. "Kardex," as the show was titled, was Hill's idea, her fabrication and her set of metaphors, yet its most important component was activated—not simply embellished, but fulfilled—by an electronic sound structure devised by Nichols to respond to viewer interaction.

The dominant object in "Kardex"—replete with spotlight and office chair to accommodate audience members—was the title piece, a welded steel cabinet whose stack of 29 drawers houses Hill's photographs of friends' ears. In fact, in each drawer, a single photo has been blown up and spread out in segments across flat-lying, overlapping cards encased in plastic. The presentation invited handling, but it was the very act of opening up one drawer or another that triggered Nichols's MIDI-to-Mac-hookup mechanism. A brief delay between the pulling open of a drawer and the sound kicking in initially heightened the surprise. As other drawers were opened, the discrete

sounds overlaid one another with pleasant—indeed, musical—transparency. Among the sounds were footsteps on a hardwood floor, water running, numbers being dialed on a cell phone, a voicemail being left, as well as sanding, chiseling and tearing. Arguably, with a little practice, a keenly attuned audience member could have developed a certain virtuosity in combining these elements.

Hill augmented *Kardex* with two other assemblages associated with office work, specifically with the antiquated, mid-20th-century setting of a small business (appropriate enough to the gallery's own faded light-industrial neighborhood, brimming with used office-furniture stores). One piece consisted of a stiff, "sculpturized" work coat hanging on a Duchampian coatrack. The other set a lamp and a receipt pad on a desk, inviting visitors to complete the receipts, which had been printed with Hill's imaginary business, Robin Hill Manufacturing Co. Inc. The lamp faded off and on, in an endless cycle, its wan light mournfully illuminating a corner of the gallery. With this almost Hopperesque *mise-en-scène*, Hill seemed to be bidding goodbye to the hands-on quality of old-fashioned white-collar work. At the same time, the dynamism and user-friendliness of her collaboration with Nichols displayed her willingness to embrace the digital, albeit with tongue in cheek—er, ear.

—Peter Frank

View of Robin Hill's exhibition "Kardex," 2006; at another year in LA.

