

Art in America

MAY 2005



Ted Victoria: *Is Anyone Home?*, 1999, modified greenhouse, projections of brine shrimp, approx. 8 feet high; at the Butler Institute of American Art.

Ted Victoria at the Butler Institute of American Art

What began as an image in a dark box in the times of Leonardo and Vermeer has come full circle in the work of New York artist Ted Victoria. Using determinedly low-tech methods such as camera obscuras, lightboxes, lenses, rear-screen projectors and trial-and-error positioning, Victoria creates works that have all the appearance of a 21st-century high-tech exhibition.

The main attraction in his recent show at the Butler Institute, in one of the museum's new-media galleries, carried the title *Is Anyone Home?* (1999). The piece is a translucent, roughly 8-foot-high greenhouse like structure lit from within and apparently teeming with baby sharks swimming in a vast amber bath. In fact, they are brine shrimp (popularly known as "sea monkeys") housed in several small aquariums filled with a nutrient solution and sitting on the floor of the "greenhouse." Rear-screen projectors shoot images of the tiny, fishlike crustaceans onto the inner surfaces of the structure's opaque plastic walls, creating the effect of a cast of millions that seem as though they could at any moment spill into the gallery.

The show also included an array of camera-obscure projection boxes mounted on the walls. These look like lightboxes, but instead of using

photographic transparencies the artist creates images with actual objects and an adroitly designed system of mirrors, lightbulbs and clockwork mechanisms. Images of the various components of each scene are reflected and projected from separate areas inside the box to coincide on a frosted acrylic screen set into the box's front. The objects range from candlesticks to small collages, miniature televisions to tools. In the window of one untitled box from 1999 there is a still life that is Vermeer-like in the intensity of its observation. In another, *Watching IV. on L.S.D.* (1998), we see in the background a floating, distorted and hallucinatory TV screen (in this case hooked into the Youngstown cable system), a clock that keeps random time, and, in the foreground, a sofa and a revolving vase of flowers. In each box, Victoria suggests a different but equally intriguing narrative. That he creates these images without resorting to gigabyte technology makes his work even more unique, effective and delightful.

—Dorothy Shinn