

## David Schafer

at WORKS ON PAPER, 4 March–19 April

David Schafer's drawings present an examination of shopping-mall food-court seating, considering everything from color, size, shape, consumer psychology, and what direction the subject faces. Unlike Miss Manners, who considers her guests' backgrounds when working out a seating arrangement, Schafer plans seating for the generic shopper, relying on subtly manipulative design techniques to enliven any consumer's shopping slump. His surplus of studies results in an unresolved solution for an already outdated system of restaurant seating.

Using colored pencils, heavy markers, design programs, and magazine cutouts, Schafer provides a garden variety of sketches of the kind contemporary art museums like to display to highlight the creative process. The drawings range from dinner-party-napkin quick to Koolhaas-meets-Kruger elaborate, in which different images and typefaces merge in an eye-grabbing "Conceptual" fashion. The focus of the thirty small sketches is two types of seating: Cluster and Bar-Ring. Some of these visual musings are quite handsome, while others should have been relegated to the cutting-room floor.

Of note are two of the Bar-Ring studies, *Behavioral Study (tables)* (1999) and *Behavioral Study (seating)* (1999). The former shows a hand-drawn ring supporting ten ink-jet printed tabletops, each in a primary color. The latter follows the same format, except that fast-food-style seats take the place of the tabletops. The rings symbolize an endless, unchanging cycle that provides superficial decorative variations. Imagine using this type of seating: Just when the consumer has reached maximum shopping fatigue and needs to refuel, he is faced with yet another choice. All the comfortable seats are occupied and only the small round ones in red are available. Do you wait for a chair in your favorite color? Bully someone out of one? Or compromise?

Schafer pastes magazine cutouts of 1973 Ford Pintos in several of his drawings, using Detroit's response to Volkswagen (which exploded when rear-ended) like the bomb symbol that appears when computers crash. Computers are organizational tools built to make work more efficient. Every time one crashes, I think of Robert Smithson, the father of anti-systemic thinking. Despite Smithson's efforts to bury bureaucratic systems in the nineteen seventies, today, formulaic thinking is everywhere. Schafer's sketches of Cluster and Bar-Ring seating options provide several low-cost alternatives to established chain-restaurant seating, although there isn't a single, clear solution that makes

any more sense than any of the others.

*Stepped Text Study* (1999) is a large text panel with two small images pasted on it. Appearing as a single paragraph, the block of text is actually two separate narratives, printed in alternating lines. To read the text, one must skip every other line and then go back to the beginning and do so again. Both paragraphs outline corporate design parameters for seating and shopping-mall layouts. Pasted in the middle is a small drawing of Schafer's Cluster seating option, which differs from the seating prescribed in the text by providing seats at varying heights. An advertising image of the 1973 Pinto punctuates the text's end. Since the formula described in the text has already proven its value at shopping malls across America, the assumption is that change will cause chaos.

Like the local nightly news, Schafer's exhibition presents the appearance of thorough investigative reporting without providing much in terms of substantial information, critical analysis, or lasting insights. The number of drawings displayed suggests that the artist has spent a fair amount of time thinking about the ways corporations manipulate consumers. However, displaying so many varying options dilutes a clear message. Seeing the artist's thought-process in the form of sketches without a final resolved piece weakens his works' impact and calls into question its conceptual underpinnings. Whether Schafer disagrees with corporate formulas or has resigned himself to them is never made manifest. Despite some anti-establishment content in his sketches, their tasteful framing and stylish arrangement on the gallery walls fall right in line with the order of things.

Jennifer Dunlop works at Hodgetts+Fung, where she is currently assisting in the development and design of a permanent exhibition for the Harley-Davidson Museum in Milwaukee, Wisconsin.



David Schafer  
*Bar-Ring with Text*, 2000  
Ink on ink-jet collage  
13 3/4" x 11"