

Art in America

OCTOBER 2002

David Opdyke at Roebling Hall

In his recent exhibition, David Opdyke created a wry tribute to the visual semiotics of American democracy. In a large table sculpture and engaging graphic works, he recombined his source materials—U.S. maps, corporate logos, newspaper headlines, toy airplanes, aluminum fence posts, AstroTurf and the layouts of planned suburban neighborhoods—into vaguely comical, symbolic representations that reflect the political interests, statistical polemics, corporate marketing and social idealism at the core of popular American consciousness.

“Vote Your Subconscious” is a series of 12 vivid inkjet prints in which Opdyke merges images of U.S. maps with understated but distinct renderings of corporate logos on a sickly green background that replicates the face on the dollar bill. The maps are skillfully manipulated so that the variously colored states subtly depict the logos for CBS, 7-Up, Coke, CNN and other such sponsors of our media-driven nation.

In *Political Shuffle*, he lampoons the rhetoric of lobbying groups. A three-screen projection displays a random succession of politicized words, phrases and attributes. The changing sequences create ambiguous comic transpositions of slogans, such as “Probe Vladimir Dole,” which in turn are sponsored by

such strange organizations as “Home Owners for Farming Freedom” or “Parents Against Urban Oversight.”

Taste Test 2000, a large tabletop sculpture in the shape of the U.S., is constructed of scores of tiny red and white houses arranged in the easily recognizable pattern of a tract-housing development. The layout and color scheme of the houses re-create the familiar Coca-Cola logo. This apparently cheerful work is related to two large wall banners with U.S. maps (also bearing a camou-

David Opdyke: *Taste Test 2000*, 2001, gatorfoam, painted plastic and paper, 48 by 78 by 2 inches; at Roebling Hall.



were hung nearby, repeating the visual patterns of *Taste Test*. But these bewildering banners include hundreds of tiny, ominously discordant items—bubbling beakers, fuse-lit bombs and gas masks—scattered around the country. Opdyke's works are a smart aleck's pledge of allegiance to a republic that ostensibly provides liberty and justice, but actually seems best at offering advertising, consumption and middle-class complacency for all.

—Calvin Reid