

Hirsch Perlman's previous work addressed the relationship between language and image within the history of architecture, specifically with regard to the way in which our perceptions of the International Style have been determined by documentary images. As our knowledge and understanding of this architecture is almost exclusively based on reproductions, questions concerning variations in meaning through slight differences in presentation assume enormous significance.

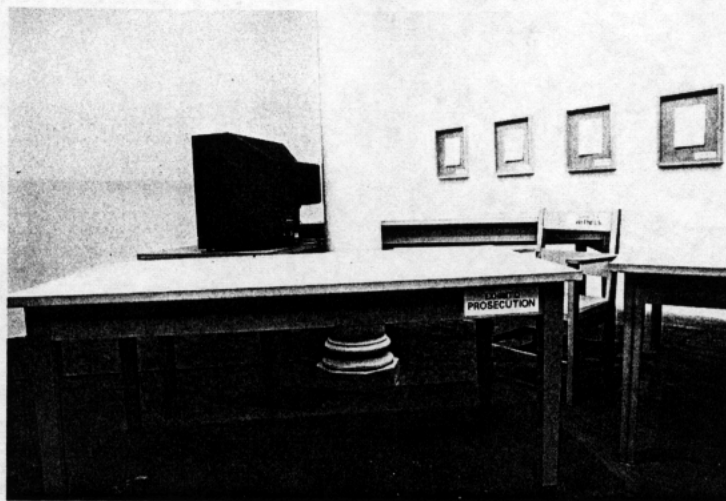
In his recent installation, Perlman asks "another question . . . within the same frame of reference" about the "similar nature for proof of knowledge, intent, motive, scheme, design." Both of these quotations appear in the exhibition itself, in the form of framed and fragmented court transcriptions. The only words in the piece that allude to the subject of a trial were "Question: Did you at any time in your life ever shoot Mr. F__, Mr. G__ or anybody?" By precluding questions concerning the subject and the guilt, which usually provide the focus of interest, the possibility of a comparison with other systems becomes possible. A chair with the inscription "EXHIBIT A WITNESS" is surrounded by four tables with nameplates: "EXHIBIT B EXHIBITS," "EXHIBIT C DEFENSE," "EXHIBIT D PROSECUTION," and "EXHIBIT E JUDICIAL." The chair's design is

based on the classic Mission style, with "mission" here also presumably meant to suggest a plea for truth, in a visual pun that conflates both linguistic and extralinguistic elements. The arrangement incorporates excerpts from Gertrude Stein's *How to Write*, 1931, cited by anonymous-looking speakers on videotape; here the emphasis on language operating within the systems of law, literature, and art becomes the common point of reference.

When one speaks of these different systems, it is with the awareness that each appears in a different guise. While literature and the law can be perceived directly through language, the third system, art, is experienced fundamentally through its placement in a gallery. Not only is the concept of a gallery context not accepted as simply given, but it is made an essential subject of the installation. Questions, then, of ambiguity, of difference, and of sameness—of perceptual conventions contingent upon various systems—become the focus here. Do Perlman's comparisons of linguistic systems constitute a kind of tracing back to a sameness, or is it a ploy, by which he foregrounds difference? As the central though neutral "third" party in the search for truth, it seems that language stands as a witness to its own indictment.

—Sabine B. Vogel

Translated from the German by Douglas Wada.



Hirsch Perlman, 1990. Installation view.