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What's On Sale There? Confusion, but It's Cheap

By RANDY KENNEDY

A humble sign on the window of a new storefront in Lower Manhattan yesterday encouraged passers-by to take a trip, one that could be long or quite brief depending on the traveler: "Explore Your Inner Self."

Lisa Reynolds, a city social worker who paused in front of the window with her co-worker, Judy Speller, on their way back from lunch, quickly

drive, a little crimp in the space-time continuum secreted away on Maiden Lane between a florist's shop and a Dress Barn. For Ms. Reynolds, the inner exploration yesterday morning involved trying to figure out whether she was having a brain malfunction.

"The more you look at it, the more confused you get," Ms. Reynolds finally said, laughing and cupping her hands around her eyes to stare deep inside. "Is that the intention?"

Not exactly, said Beth Campbell, a Brooklyn artist who created this storefront-of-storefronts over the last several weeks with the help of the Public Art Fund and several friends and fellow artists. Ms. Campbell's work often deals in repetition, not so much in the Warhol art-meets-advertising tradition of multiple Marilyns or soup cans but more in the spirit of science fiction that unsettles the senses: wormholes in perception, vortexes in viewing.

At the Roebing Hall gallery in Brooklyn in 2000 she created two hyper-realistic women's bedrooms, identical down to the creases in the sheets, and then connected the bedrooms by a hallway. You left one, walked into the next and wondered if you were trapped in a very specialized circle of hell, one strewn with underwear, self-help books, cigarette butts and posters of the Artist For-

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merly Known as Prince. One critic called it "an obsessive-compulsive's own private nightmare."

Ms. Campbell, 35, said she was partly inspired to create the storefront — which appears to be a vague combination of travel agency and life-coaching service — by the nameless stores she sees in Greenpoint, where she lives.

"They're kind of like Fed Ex and UPS places that sell milk and Avon, and maybe you can get your taxes done there," she said. But the idea arose more from a desire to create a public artwork that did not immediately announce itself as art, one that caught people in mid-stride and played with their expectations and their perceptions of real and recreated, copy and original.

Yesterday morning when a reporter arrived, Ms. Campbell was attending to a few last details inside the store, or artwork, officially titled "Potential Store Fronts," which will remain on view at 125 Maiden Lane through June 24.

"Sorry about that," she said, coming out of the store, which formerly sold men's suits. "I'm really not supposed to be inside the piece."

As she stood noticing people who began to notice the store, she described the characteristic reaction: slow, skip-step, double-take and head-turn. "Which is always exciting for me," she said.

Brynn Jarosh, who works at a corporate child-care center, walked by with two toddlers in tow and did the full stop, staring deep into one of the

bay windows, with a sign offering personalized lie-detector tests and another announcing, apropos of nothing in particular, "Growth, in moderately controlled conditions."

"It's funny," Ms. Jarosh said, "but I never ever would have thought that this was an art installation." She paused. "I couldn't figure out what it was, to tell the truth." Then she added, beaming at Ms. Campbell: "I like it. Good job!"

Ms. Campbell thanked her. She admits that, as she and her helpers, including her husband, neared the end of 12- and 14-hour days making the storefronts, she did sometimes become obsessive about the details of this particular job.

She insisted that a thin metal strip be added to replicate one on the street that separates the sidewalk from the entryway. She figured out a way, using glue stick, to mimic perfectly the graffiti that some anonymous artist long before her had etched on the front glass. And last weekend she went back in just to replicate the blackish chewing-gum splats, those spontaneous urban art forms, in front of the store.

"But maybe you shouldn't tell anyone that," she said, smiling. "It sounds a little crazy."

"Potential Store Fronts" will remain on view through June 24 at 125 Maiden Lane, Lower Manhattan.

For window shoppers,
a perfect art
experience.

found that there were few ways to ignore this advice. Just a few feet inside the locked storefront lay another storefront that looked exactly like it, down to the neon, the graffiti, the lonesome potted plant in the window and the gum stains on the floor. And just inside that window was another one. And then another and another.

The little yellow paper note(s) taped to the door(s) that read "Back in 5" was, it turned out, a literal description. The storefront repeats five times, like a hiccup in reality's hard



Fred R. Conrad/The New York Times

"Potential Store Fronts," an art installation at Maiden Lane, Lower Manhattan, created by Beth Campbell, a Brooklyn-based artist.