

# Art in America

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### Sarah Hobbs at the Knoxville Museum of Art

Apprehension, frustration, confusion, indecision—emotions that trouble the soul—are the subject of Sarah Hobbs's photographs. The Atlanta-based artist manifests these psychological states in carefully constructed environments that she captures in seductive, large-scale color images; they entice viewers to delve into her heavily charged spaces.

*Untitled (Insomnia)*, 2000, for example, shows a close-up shot of an empty bed. The rumpled sheets and turned-down coverlet allude to one who has recently risen. Suspended from the ceiling on pieces of string are little Post-it notes, with lists of things to do and reminders of projects yet unfinished. They hang just inches above the pillows. These nagging thoughts seem to have driven the slumberer from the warm and comfortable bed. We've all been there, just before we sleep or as we wake, a little tape recorder in our heads playing all the things we still need to do.

Her images seem intensely personal, yet almost every viewer can relate to them. *Untitled (Perfectionist)*, 2002, shows an empty chair at a desk, a stack of clean paper and a pen neatly arranged on the top. Piled up around the desk is a monstrous mound of crumpled, discarded sheets of paper, half-baked thoughts or ideas that never made it past the drawing board. *Untitled (Indecision)*, 1999, shows a single chair tucked into the alcove of a dormer window. The three walls surrounding the chair are covered floor to



Sarah Hobbs: *Untitled (Perfectionist)*, 2002, chromogenic print, 48 by 60 inches; at the Knoxville Museum of Art.

ceiling with multicolored paint swatches. With so many choices, the weight of a single decision somehow becomes almost paralyzing.

Viewing the nine works that constitute this series, one can see that Hobbs relies on a certain formula. Each photograph is a close-cropped view of an uninhabited room. An empty chair, stool or bed invites viewers to position themselves in the situation. Clothing, books, posters—any personal effect that might prevent viewers from making the space their own—are absent. Within this recurrent scheme, however, Hobbs creates distinctive images. She is a storyteller, and she deftly uses compositional elements—framing, lighting, color—to evoke a particular situation. She provides the scenarios, but we must provide the narration by looking within ourselves and examining our own emotions.

—Rebecca Dimling Cochran