

**"I'M DRAGGING ANCHOR"**

You couldn't see any of this through the one telescope in Lower Manhattan dedicated to the city's self-analysis. On the northeast corner of Chase Manhattan Plaza there appeared, as if overnight, a telescope trained on a nondescript window high in a nondescript office building where, presumably, a nondescript person, using relatively nondescript objects – always three at time – could communicate with the plaza-dwellers below using a phraseology once belonging to those who sailed the seas.

A collaboration between the Public Art Fund, the artist Nina Katchadourian and an anonymous attorney (who, we learned, possesses a potpourri made to look like an apple pie), *Office Semaphore* is one of those projects for which the charm of its very existence sometimes threatens to eclipse the reach of its art. Each day, the office's 'message', determined by a grouping of knick-knacks belonging to the office worker – the work's ostensible 'hero' – will change, offering to the telescopic view of participants on the ground one of more than a dozen stock phrases drawn from the flag-based language of maritime transport.

One phrase, 'message received but not understood', could stand as the motto of the piece, though surely in such a case understanding is overrated. Experience, like much contemporary art, is *Office Semaphore's* currency, but here it is the experience of habit that is rewarded most: the anonymous attorney regularly, perhaps ritualistically, changes his office's 'tune' so as to supplement, in the most subtle way, the distraction of those workers on the ground, whose cigarettes and coffee breaks may afford them a new but distant friend, one who has been given the power to make things talk.

clockwise from above:
 Passersby take in Nina
 Katchadourian's *Office
 Semaphore*, Downtown
 Manhattan; Tim Eitel in
 front of *Süden* (2006),
 at Pace Wildenstein;
 Trevor Paglen, blinded by
 a bit of mid-November sun;
 a photographer in front
 of Paglen's *Control Tower
 /Cactus Flat, NV/11:55am
 /Distance - 20 miles*
 (2006); a moment of quiet
 reflection in front of
 Eitel's *Stroller* (2006)