



Adriane Herman's 'Wall of Intention' reflects human eccentricity

By ALICE THORSON
The **Kansas City Star**

Adriane Herman exerted a creative and stimulating presence in the Kansas City art world a decade ago, when she made art from cakes and chewing gum and launched a supermarket-style "Slop Art" shop.

Now on sabbatical from her teaching post at the Maine College of Art, she has come back, trailing a flurry of scraps of paper.

"Adriane Herman: Pick Me Up (a few things)," at the **Epsten Gallery** at Village Shalom, is an exhibit entirely devoted to other people's lists.

Printed, scripted, typewritten, in multiple sizes and colors, they make for a particularly lively array in the piece "Wall of Intention," a bulletin-board like barrage of grocery lists, to-do lists, lists of personal goals, favorite things, errands, treasures and familial communication.

"Hey Babe, Don't forget to put the seat down!" blares a message printed on toilet paper.

Signed with a heart symbol and the name "Liz," it includes a P.S.: "Your turn to clean the bathroom."

Nearby, a lovelorn woman itemizes her coping strategies: "Get comfortable with the notion he will never call." "Remember not to swear at the computer when he doesn't email." "Remember suffering and change are certain." "Eat more ice cream."

The lists reveal a lot about these people we don't know — their lifestyles, values, budgets and priorities.

A scrap of Hello Kitty stationery enumerates what one woman wanted to accomplish before having guests for dinner: "Gym." "Tidy for guests." "Tidy studio." "Sex." "5 p.m. cook."

Crossed-out items on many lists speak to a sense of accomplishment, and, as curator Marcus Cain points out in the accompanying brochure, become "evidence of life being lived, moment-by moment, letter-by letter, line-by line."

Procrastination also lurks within these lines. The writer of one to-do list has completed such quotidian tasks as "refill Rx" and "knit Bastia's scarf" but has yet to "start on memoir" and arrange for "will & power of attorney."

Unintended humor is one of this exhibit's great rewards: "1 Clean your room. 2 Read for 30 min. 3 Practice your piano for 30 minutes," reads a message left by a mother for her child. "If you are not doing this Becca will call me at work to tell me. Have a great day. Love Mom."

At a time when there's so much talk about a nation divided, Herman's exhibit radiates empathy and generosity of spirit, demonstrating our shared struggles with life, love and death and how much the little things matter to us all.

"I'm a conduit," Herman said in a recent interview at the **gallery**. "For me they're so potent, the stuff of life from the most mundane."

Herman has been avidly collecting and soliciting other people's lists since 2005 and estimates she now has about 1,000. She treasures them.

One of her favorites was written by the grandfather of her partner, artist Brian Reeves. The four short words "bananas, eggs, cookies, bread" conjure fond memories for Herman.

On visits, he would always cook breakfast for them, she said, making eggs in so much oil they came out "practically deep-fried" and serving them with "squishy white bread." He told her he stopped buying green bananas when he turned 90.

The "bananas, eggs, cookies, bread" list is reproduced on the cover of the catalog for "Checking It Twice," Herman's 2007 solo exhibition at the Center for Maine Contemporary Art in Rockport, Maine.

In preparation, she recruited lists by placing return envelopes at local coffee shops and libraries.

"Trade me your tired, your torn/Your crumpled lists of tasks/yearning to be done," she enjoined on the inside flap of the envelope, which contained a free artist-made decal for the list donor.

Her Village Shalom exhibit incorporates newly solicited lists from the **Kansas City** community.

Designer Jack Rees gave Herman a photocopy of a list made by his late mother of things she loved, including "McDonald's arches" "Pumpkins — bright orange" "Saul Steinberg" "Italian restaurants" "bare feet."

Herman transformed it into a vinyl decal and posted it at an entrance to Village Shalom.

"Joan Loves" is one of a dozen large vinyl decals installed throughout the facility, including photographer E.G. Schempf's list of items to pick up from his mother's home following her death. It includes clothing, jewelry and other possessions.

Herman said she deliberately posted Schempf's list at an entrance, to designate "that this is home and a place where residents keep things that are significant to them but also likely had to give up some things of significance when they moved into a smaller space."

Besides the unruly originals displayed in "Wall of Intention," the **gallery** features selected lists that Herman traced and incised into tablets coated with burnishing clay.

The presentation lends gravitas and importance to these humble scratchings of groceries to be bought and goals to achieve. One bears the heading "living w/in means" and details the writer's plans to sell his house and land and pay off debt.

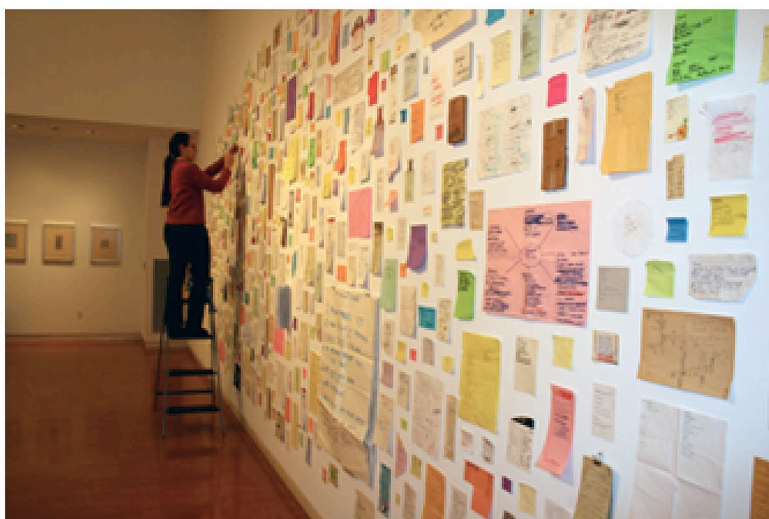
Herman also made photo etchings of several lists, including "No Pie....," a veritable inventory of weight-watching self-denial encompassing ice cream, salt, meat, candy and potatoes. It hangs near a photo etching of a shopping list — for beer, cigarettes, pop and pizza.

Herman devoted one large wall in the **gallery** to "Sticky Situations," featuring enlarged, relief-print versions of many Post-it notes in her collection. The theme of the display is the "notion of stickiness," she said. Each note has "an aspect that could be literally or figuratively sticky."

Many are reminders or warnings: "no toilet paper," "no lights until Tues. morn.," "edible but don't eat the sequin eyes." Throughout this exhibit, Herman's choices reflect her delight in anomaly and human eccentricity.

It's "about consciousness, being mindful," she says. Her exhibit offers an intimate look at what it means to be human. The list becomes a window to the soul.

More News



ON DISPLAY

"Adriane Herman: Pick Me Up (a few things)" continues at the **Epsten Gallery** at Village Shalom, 5500 W. 123rd St., Overland Park, through March 6. Hours are 11 a.m. to 4 p.m. Tuesday-Friday and 1-4 p.m. Saturday and Sunday. Closed Monday. For more information, call 913-266-8413 or visit www.kcjmca.org.

To reach Alice Thorson, call 816-234-4763 or send e-mail to athorson@kcstar.com.