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LOST IN (OFFICE) SPACE

On a recent Thursday morning, Eugene Frank, a white-haired 67-year-old in a blue shopkeeper's smock and a pair of black-rimmed glasses, stood on a ladder, tabulating the final inventory for Joseph Meyer Office Supplies Inc. The narrow, dust-choked shop at 48 Howard Street in Soho will close its doors at the end of August, after more than 70 years in the neighborhood.

"Oh yes, yes, yes," said Mr. Frank. He had found what he was looking for: a carton of ribbon for a teletype machine. "You'd see them in these old black-and-white pictures. The police would say they were receiving information over 'the wire.' They looked like a big electric typewriter spinning out stuff on a roll of paper."

Sorting through the shelves, Mr. Frank—the son-in-law of the store's deceased founder—turned up all manner of outmoded items and long-defunct office-supply brands left over from the 1950's and 60's. There were two-foot-long leather-bound accounting ledgers, Burroughs adding-machine ribbons, Cooks "Burro" paper clips ("In 'Burro' There Is Strength") and Lilliputian boxes of "Noesting" gold paper-fasteners. For 50 cents, there was a Blaisdell "Klenzo" typewriter eraser—the same kind Eugene O'Neill used.

Mr. Frank was not exactly mystified to see the old stuff go. But if he wants to see it again, he can—in a British art gallery, as part of an installation by a conceptual artist named Christine Hill. Ms. Hill has been amassing a cache of Mr. Frank's inventory to convert into a series of art exhibits. In addition to paper clips and erasers, she now owns Mr. Frank's handwritten cardboard signs and the pulley system he built to hoist documents and supplies up to his mahogany desk on the second-floor balcony.

"I think she's putting together a gallery of, uh, I guess you'd call it 'Back to the Future,'" Mr. Frank said. "I gather she's doing sort of a retro shop. I wouldn't want to use the word

'museum,' because to me that's a rather... I don't want to say 'rigid,' but frozen sort of thing."

On Thursday morning, Ms. Hill, a tall, coltish woman, nosed around the inventory and rhapsodized about Joseph Meyer, whom she referred to as an "authenticity provider." She'd been frequenting the store for nearly two years, and in that time she'd developed an addict's passion for office wares. Ms. Hill spoke of recently finding a "mother lode" of Avery gummed labels, which she called "hard to find and quite beautiful."

Ms. Hill's first installation from the Joseph Meyer store will be in Liverpool, in a refurbished boarding school acquired by the Henry Moore Foundation. After that, Ms. Hill will set up another version of the office in the Ronald Feldman Fine Arts gallery on Mercer Street in Soho. Later, she plans on using the materials to open a working stationery store in Williamsburg, Brooklyn.

"A living diorama," Mr. Frank called Ms. Hill's idea.

Ms. Hill smiled. "Exactly."

Such recreations are not new for Ms. Hill. In 2000, she created a replica of a late-night TV show based on *Late Night with Conan O'Brien*. She built a studio and shot a pilot in the Feldman gallery, featuring herself as host. As one art critic wrote of Ms. Hill's "social sculpture," her "concept of art is so far out of the known universe that its confusion with life is nearly total." (It turned out that Mr. Frank isn't a stranger to conceptual artists: His landlords are Christo and Jean-Claude; the artists known for swathing large tracts of land in reams of fabric. "Very, very good landlords," Mr. Frank said.)

"I've got something fabulous for you to see!" Mr. Frank exclaimed to Ms.

Hill. He pulled out a pale green posting machine covered in a half-inch of dust. "If you want to go retro, that's the machine. It's about three generations older than what they're using today. I don't have anything older than that."

The machine proved to be too ugly for Ms. Hill's sensibility. Mr. Frank looked disappointed. Ms. Hill turned her attention to the dark recesses of his office, where piles of unidentified packages were crammed. She wanted to know if other office-supply sellers had been snooping around.

"Are colleagues of yours buying this stuff out?" she asked.

Mr. Frank said no. "They want stuff they can sell," he said. "They don't want stuff that belongs to the dodo birds."

—Joe Hagan