

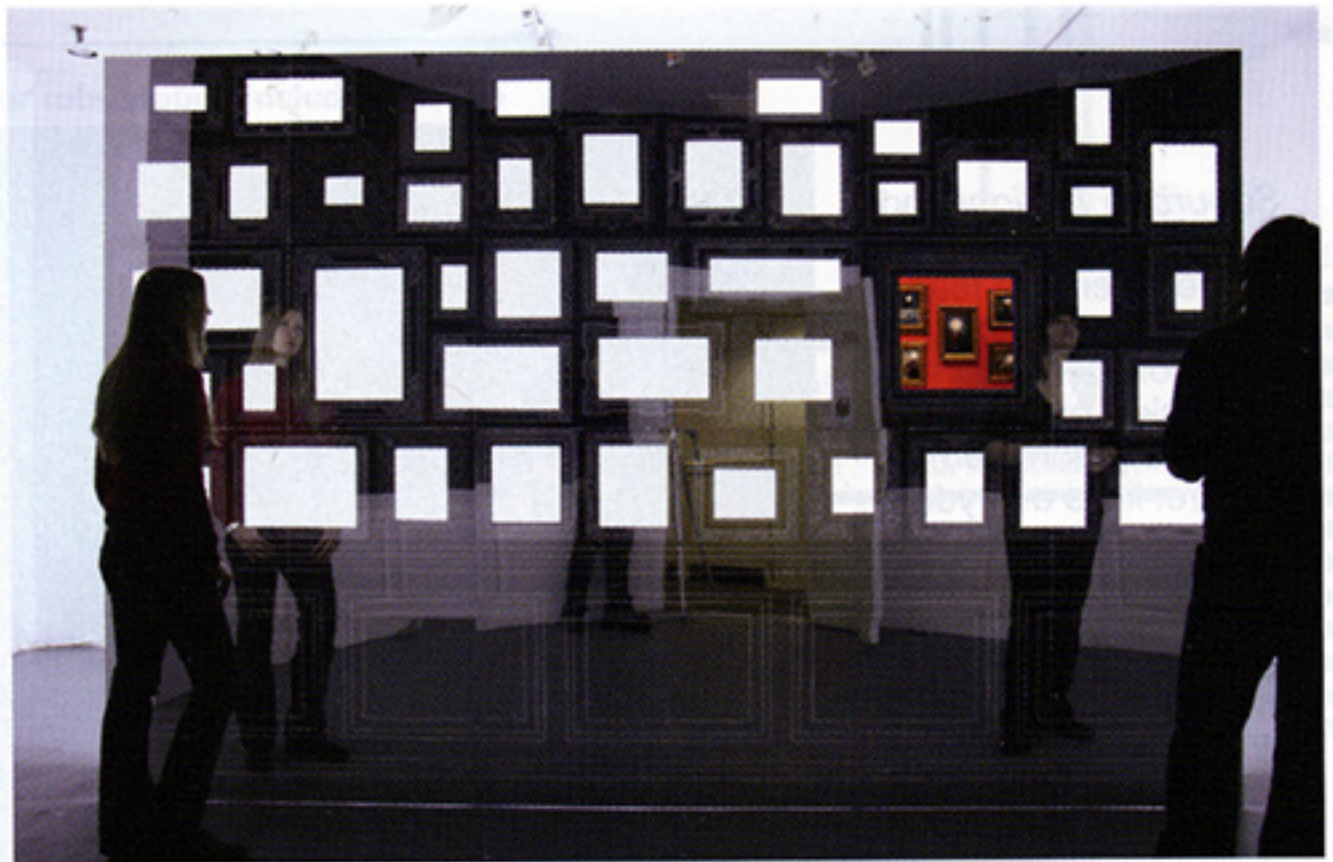
Ellen Harvey at Luxe

Ellen Harvey's recent exhibition, "The Museum of Failure," was another installment in her critique of the museum as an institution. It is an ongoing project—part of Harvey's obsession with art about art; with authenticity, fakes and cultural valuations; with the gap between the imagined and the actualized—conceived as a series of salons, three of which were presented at Luxe. Harvey transformed the modest-sized midtown gallery into a convincing evocation of rooms in a traditional European museum, using essentially only paint and the insertion of a partial wall and two other simple architectural additions to accomplish this effect. This factitious museum was less elaborate than, say, the Kabakovs' project at the Sculpture Center a few years ago, but no less effective.

The viewer entered the gallery through a doorway symmetrically flanked by curved walls painted a discreet, formal gray appropriate to the 18th or 19th century, as distinct from the currently ubiquitous white box. Approaching *The Collection of Impossible Subjects* (2007), the viewer faced a shining, freestanding, 8-by-12-foot wall of mirrored Plexiglas lighted from the rear and dividing the main gallery space. Delicately etched into this wall were ornate frames of different sizes, arranged salon style. However, each of these beautifully rendered frames, incised by hand, surrounded nothing but a void, a radiant, reflective surface with only the bright, solipsistic image of the viewer thrown back at him. The exception was one cut-out frame through which the "second room" of the Museum of Failure was visible, bounded by the back wall of the gallery. On this elegantly painted red wall, actual paintings were hung, also salon style. The nine small *Invisible Self-Portraits* (2007) were executed in oil and embellished by elaborate thrift-shop frames that match the incised ones. Based on snapshots of the artist taken in different locations, all in front of a mirror, Harvey's face is, in each case, obscured by the flash of the camera, which erases her features in another take on the venerable convention of the artist's self-portrait.

The third "room" was *End-*

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Ellen Harvey: *The Collection of Impossible Subjects*, 2007, hand-engraved Plexiglas, aluminum and fluorite lights, 96 by 144 by 12 inches; at Luxe.

essly Breaking Mirror (2006). In the back office, a video was projected onto Plexiglas suspended on floor-to-ceiling metal rods to form a gridded 16-part image. The video documents the engraving of a mirror, a task that took an hour to complete. Afterward, the mirror was shattered. The process was repeated 16 times to depict a composite of the ruined grand vestibule of a museum. The video was on a loop, the action compressed into five minutes for the engraving, expanded to five minutes for the destruction. What we are given, then, is a multi-level depiction of the cycles of the creative process, the institutions that house its results, and the destruction of both. If Harvey's Museum is an intentional failure—and she maintains that, ultimately, all art institutions are failures—it represents a salutary antidote to our present, deep-seated inability to acknowledge failure of any kind, or to admit to the often greater richness of implication to be found in that which does *not* succeed.

—Lilly Wei