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Mixed Signals

By Jonathan Ringen
[The Metropolis Observed](#)
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"A lot of my work centers on medical institutions, psychotropic drugs, and phobias," animator Marina Zurkow says of her skewed "Hospital Poetry" series of pictographs. Best known for the experimental cartoon *Braingirl* (three episodes were included in the Sundance Film Festival in January), her one-woman studio O-Matic has recently branched out into the design of objects--including glassware, pillows, and T-shirts--that feature her characters. Among the products she's making is a beautifully crafted light-box, done in collaboration with furniture designer Jeff Ford, whose Lucky Rabbit Brand studio manufactures them. The boxes--which come with five interchangeable translucent pictograph panels and mount flush against the wall--already have a celebrity clientele: literary siblings David and Amy Sedaris bought a couple in Los Angeles.

Offsite:
 The O-Matic line is available at Totem Soho, 83 Grand St., New York, (212) 219-2446, www.totemdesign.com; Orange, 8111 Beverly Blvd., Los Angeles, (323) 782-6898; and online at www.o-matic.com.

The panels play with the idea of iconographic language but intentionally defy immediate comprehension. "A sign's purpose is to provide a single piece of information as clearly, succinctly, and compactly as possible," Zurkow says. "But the goal of these is to see if you can communicate more--something funny or absurd, even something that linguistically short-circuits the meaning of the sign. You should be able to read it immediately, but then there's a double take. That's where the fractured little haiku emerges--in the second look."



Photo: Annie Schlechter

