

FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 13, 2004

Paula Hayes

'Forest'

Salon 94

12 East 94th Street, Manhattan

Through March 17

If you are into house plants, this is the show for you. Paula Hayes specializes in making gardens as site-specific artworks. Here in the spectacular home showroom that is Salon 94 she has distributed a selection of plants in biomorphically shaped planters, some clear blown glass, some made of soft, rubbery silicone or polyurethane. The display includes species that range from miniature to small tree size and that botanically sophisticated people will be best equipped to appreciate. (The check list gives Latin names like *Davallia Canariensis*, *Euonymus* and *Paphiopedilum*.)

Anyone can see how lovingly the plants have been tended and appreciate the relationship of the plants and their containers. An asymmetrical bonzai tree is in a glass vessel that bulges in the same direction as the tree's branches, which look as if they are blowing in the wind. Inside a terrarium in the form of an oblong, horizontal bottle you see what looks like a miniature prehistoric landscape.

But most of the plant and planter configurations, however beautifully realized, appear too conventional to register persuasively as exciting works of art. The idea of plant cultivation as a form of sculpture and maybe as a spiritually elevating enterprise is not uninteresting; you would just like to see it taken to more imaginative extremes.

KEN JOHNSON