



Phoebe Washburn, *Nothing's Cutie*, 2004, mixed media, dimensions variable.



Andrea Loefke, *When the green frog changed into a happy prince the nearby well—splish, splash—turned into sweetened lemonade*, 2004, mixed media. Installation view.

the intellectual—categories that Morris saw as regrettably divided, rather than joined, by technology.

—Martha Schwendener

PHOEBE WASHBURN

LFL GALLERY

Phoebe Washburn's undulating, room-sized sculptural installation, *Nothing's Cutie*, 2004, looks at first like a colorful topographic model of a densely populated futuristic urban metropolis plunked down on a desert island: Rio meets Las Vegas meets Cancun, or maybe Kuala Lumpur. Hundreds of vertically inclined wooden planks of different lengths and dimensions, each briskly handpainted a pastel hue, have been screwed together, forming clusters (or neighborhoods) that open into little clearings of sawdust. Daintily punctuated with unsharpened pencils, packing tape, thumbtacks, and other stuff procured from office-supply stores, the installation stands on stilts and creeps up to the gallery's removed ceiling.

Like the Minimalist sculpture to which it alludes, the work provokes a particular kind of encounter with the viewer: It is both static object and unfolding environment. *Nothing's Cutie* involves ready-made materials—found, scavenged, and store-bought—but (unlike much of Minimalism) is massively, even obsessively, intricate. It is literal and, with its profusion of two-by-fours, in some ways geometrically based, but it is anything but inert: Pulsating, organic, and improvisational, it combines a whooshing painterly gestural-ity with blocky, quasi-institutional forms.

Washburn's installation bears the unusual

distinction of connecting the otherwise obverse practices of Jessica Stockholder and Sarah Sze. As with Stockholder there's an everything-including-the-kitchen-sink quality to Washburn's work—*Nothing's Cutie* contains an apparently incidental box of screws that might have been left over from a recent gallery reconstruction—but each component seems carefully placed. Her use of construction materials, the way the work occupies the gallery's corners, and especially the element of color seem indebted to Sze, though, title aside, there's nothing particularly precious or "cute" about Washburn's much heavier-feeling sculpture. And yet the topographical sensibility in Washburn's practice, the way it seems to push and pull space, points to affinities with painting and drawing: Julie Mehretu's colorful, organic, but somehow cartographic work comes to mind. Even though Washburn's colors (of the Benjamin Moore interior type) seem hastily, almost serially added, they enliven the work and add dimension, calling attention to *this* piece of wood, *that* pool of sawdust.

In other recent exhibitions Washburn has demonstrated a fascination with reusable materials—her *Second to Something* installation at P.S. 1 this summer was a wooden ramplike structure paired with found newspaper formed into organic, cell-like shapes, displayed along with shipping crates and custom-made cardboard boxes. And for *Between Sweet and Low* at LFL in 2002, she created a giant whirlpool—colored an institutional light brown with sections in pink, green, and other pastel tints—made from thousands of flattened cardboard boxes. But her attachment to the recycling ethos (*pace* some still-practicing

"Earth artists") seems less ideological critique and more simply a response to the mundane reality of life as a city-dwelling artist. Hers is the kind of material you might find behind a U-Haul lot or artist-supply store, or on a building site awaiting a permit. The rudimentary architectural structures that she fashions from those materials may not have much street cred, but in their own way they are undeniably a product of the streets.

—Nico Israel

ANDREA LOEFKE

PH GALLERY

An adept young bricoleur with a light touch and a flair for playroom fantasy, Andrea Loefke made her first New York solo show a candy-colored zone of purposefully preadolescent ebullience. Her modest set-piece arrangements—featuring tiny barnyard animals emitting speech bubble baas and brays; small groves of flora made from string, wire, plastic sheeting and pipe-cleaners; nursery-school wallpaper; and puffy white clouds more suggestive of cotton candy than cumulonimbus—were temperamentally sweet enough to set the average visitor's teeth on edge. Even the show's preposterously saccharine title, "When the green frog changed into a happy prince the nearby well—splish, splash—turned into sweetened lemonade," seemed strategically calculated to raise viewers' blood sugar to dangerously high levels.

In a contemporary art world where optimistic earnestness remains the kiss of death, this show's preternaturally cheerful tone felt positively uncanny. Was it all a send-up, a *détournement* of childhood,

a subversive critique of innocence? Viewers scouring the show for irony would have found little among Loefke's loosely connected scenarios. The gallery was dominated by a swath of blue vinyl "sky" that started at one wall and trailed across the floor. On it little clouds of cotton batting floated past a happy, yellow yarn sun toward the show's sculptural centerpiece, a cardboard chimney that suggested stage scenery from a grade-school play. The tiny white billows entered the bottom of the flue and emerged near the ceiling as cartoonlike puffs of smoke, now dark blue yet as cuddly and harmless as when they entered. Meanwhile, a small band of cardboard animals seemed to have escaped from an expanse of alphabet wallpaper and were sidling toward a nearby clump of fantastical plants.

Loefke's playtime world was enchanted, to be sure, but with pure white magic—her conceptual frame a kind of affirmative cocoon within which the act of making is a purely sensual one, unchecked by an internal voice urging more gravity or rigor. The artist's untroubled creative id was particularly vivid in the dozens of discrete objects that populated a wall of small shelves, delicately cloddish sculptures looking like something from the workroom of Franz West's little sister: tiny houses and containers and doll-like protuberances, all made from ad hoc combinations of craft-basket bits and bobs in taffy pinks, baby blues, and creamy yellows, sewn and glued and pinned together, then sugarcoated with glitter and lace. These pieces had a casual charm that further emphasized Loefke's already-clear preference, articulated in an artist's statement, for the "whimsical, humorous, synthetic, girly, intimate, alien, glittering, sexy, soft, innocent, explicit, humming and obscure."

Viewers who ran this gauntlet of cuteness and emerged with their suspicious natures intact could discover (or at least imagine) occasional cracks in the shiny happy facade of Loefke's universe: a tiny but possibly ominous tongue of blood red fabric beneath a cheery little ankle-high creature; a pair of paper collages in which it actually seemed to be (gasp!) raining. One work in particular suggested that the artist realized that even "sweetened lemonade" starts with something sour: a low-key wall painting in robin's egg blue depicting the silhouette of a picket fence with a jagged hole in one corner, alluding to an unexpected escape from, or unwanted intrusion into, her carefully constructed daydream. It was the tiniest bit of menace, but it went a long way toward preventing the show's otherwise unrelieved affability from becoming simply insipid. For all its obvious promise, Loefke's work needs such a foil—after all, even the sweetest fairy tales have villains.

—Jeffrey Kastner