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Under the Rainbow

Tastes Like Chicken Art Space
June 2005

Part of the inaugural Project Diversity series, Under the Rainbow presents the diverse works of fourteen artists selected from over 1,000 entries for the broader show, which includes 200 artists at seventeen spaces across Brooklyn. Tastes Like Chicken, an artist-run space in East Williamsburg, was chosen to house the larger works in the show. The resulting exhibition is a series of paired formal investigations that create stark contrasts and interesting parallels.

Andrea Löffke's "One early morning when the campfire was still smouldering..." is one of the most ambitious works in the show. Löffke's centerpiece is a pregnant, teepee-like structure covered in patterned fabric, which links three small sculptural vignettes. The smaller works, including a foam campfire and cotton-ball clouds, illuminate a surreal, cartoonish narrative reminiscent of Chris Johanson's early installations. Löffke's work blends ornament and nature with a playful sense of humor that suggests a kind of benign colonization of the gallery space. The emphasis on craft and narrative contrasts with Meridith Pingree's multimedia sculpture, which seems to take off from Renaissance ideas of flight. The interactive work is composed of skeletal wooden wings and jars of water suspended over an exposed speaker. The laden wings are activated when the viewer steps on a grid of green squares and the speaker emits a sonorous bass note. The quirky interaction is startling, despite the obvious signs that something is going to happen. The two works share a rather anthropomorphic suggestion of living systems, but they represent two recent strains of contemporary sculpture. While Löffke is closer to West Coast-style comic narrative, Pingree seems to grow out of the DIY practice of artists like Tim Hawkinson.



Andrea Loeffke, "One Early Morning When the Campfire Was Still Smouldering..." detail.

In the smaller gallery space, Rita McDonald's lovely wall piece "Come Undone" is an elegant contrast to Judy Hoffman's organic sculpture "Fertile Ground #5." McDonald's spare installation of white plaster leaves outlined with blue colored pencils creates a fluid, minimalist illusion that bends against the flatness of the wall. Bowing in the opposite direction, Hoffman's paper-and-wire sculpture reads like a truncated, alien tree. The two works seem rooted in formal languages specific to the late 1970s: minimalism and craft.

With their roots in older aesthetic movements, both works suggest the temporal nature of artistic practice. McDonald and Hoffman are working out of languages that seem somewhat dated. By contrast, Löffke and Pingree represent recent trends in art, such as the use of common materials and ornament. That the rest of the show operates in a similar manner is a something of a history lesson and a political reminder that artists are still working through the formalism engendered by modernism, either sincerely or with postmodern interventions. Eric Pessa's "Untitled" is an interlocking web of wooden tendrils that feels resolutely modern from its perfect craftsmanship to its traditional base. Situated near its base is James Huang's "Dark Slurpee," which inverts Pessa's overt formalism. Black wax Slurpee cups, pop cultural artifacts, sit atop a wax base in a wooden drawer. The unorthodox base consists of wooden ovals that rise topographically from the gallery floor.

The curatorial premise of Under the Rainbow seems to have been to represent

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The Independent Press Association-NY recently honored *The Brooklyn Rail* with the following awards:

1st place: Best article about Immigrant Issues or Racial Justice--Gabriel Thompson, "One Immigrant's Journey" (September 2004).

1st place: Best article about the Arts--Amy Zimmer, "The Brownsville Rec. Center" (April 04)

2nd place: Best article about the Arts--Brian Carreira, "Harlem Arts: A Faux Renaissance" (Dec 03/Jan 04).

2nd place: Best editorial or commentary--T. Hamm, "The Issue is Free Speech" (Dec 03/Jan 04).

the diverse practices in contemporary sculpture across the continuum of modern and postmodern art. Hoffman's other sculpture, "Fertile Ground #16," is positioned next to Noah Loeburg's wax-and-cardboard wall sculpture "Modular Bracket." Loeburg's geometric armature plays off minimalism's use of heavy materials next to Hoffman's raglike figure. There is a sense that the contentious arrangements of the works were meant to invoke a discussion about the trajectory of contemporary art. Highly polished works like Jim Osman's "3 Light Window" seem to face down works like Susan Spencer Crowe's willowy "Underneath the Ruffles," a brilliantly hued organism that looks like it grew out of Monet's garden.

The divergent use of craft and materials creates an interesting mix of styles, but the show lacks a substantive, conceptual vision to bring the topsy-turvy playfulness together. Everything in the show is relatively benign, including Yoshiko Kanai's "Sea of People," a plaster basin filled with fish and water that sits beneath an array of plaster jets strung on wire across the gallery. The political implications of the work, with its doomed feeder fish beneath the streaking military jets, make it one of the few in the show that have much critical content. Noah Baen's "Uncounted Ballots," a series of photographs of wire-and-paper sculptures and a site-specific sculpture, tries to imbue an aesthetic similar to Hoffman's with political meaning, but it feels forced. It is a heavy-handed effort at investing formalism with political meaning.

The show is a relatively good collection of works by individual artists that are certainly diverse, but it seems to be missing a critical edge to highlight the necessity of the show itself. As an opportunity for underrepresented artists to exhibit, it succeeds admirably. As an exhibition of objects without external concerns such as race, gender, neighborhood, or age, the show does not help the works to transcend their own formal boundaries. There are a lot of reminders in the show of where art has been, but few works signal where it could go. It's strange that so many artists would choose to work in the deeply rigid and codified language of modernist formalism, which grew out of a paternal Western history of art.

—William Powhida

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3rd Place: Best Investigative News Story--Marjory Garrison, "Minimum Matter of Survival" (May 04)

Honorable mention: Best Investigative News Story--Williams Cole, "Housing vs. the RNC" (June 04).

Honorable mention: Best Original Feature--Yvette Walton, "My Life in the NYPD" (Dec 03/Jan 04).
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