

Art in Review



LISA COOLEY

An installation view of "chair w/ paintings," a show of spindly pieced-together sculptures by Andy Coolquitt, at the Lisa Cooley gallery on the Lower East Side.

Andy Coolquitt

'chair w/ paintings'

Lisa Cooley
107 Norfolk Street, near Delancey
Street, Lower East Side
Through May 6

Andy Coolquitt pulls out all the stops in this ambitious show, and it may be a few too many. His third solo with Lisa Cooley fills her big new gallery with spindly, pieced-together sculptures, creating the look of an eccentric tag sale while straddling the fashionable divides between outsider and insider, self-taught and educated, trash and assemblage; and among art, craft and design. The results are both appealing and off-putting, sincerely modest yet weirdly and subtly self-aggrandizing.

Mr. Coolquitt's efforts cover the spectrum between found and made in illuminating ways, evoking homelessness, drug use and life at the edges of a chronically wasteful society. He pointedly makes sculpture from whatever is at hand, be it an immense faded plywood box that he encases in clear Plexiglas and surrounds somewhat preciously with ritualistic scatterings of detritus, or a small, equally faded box titled "family tragedy." According to the gallery checklist, it contains the remains of a squirrel litter he accidentally killed after finding this container lodged in the eaves of his studio.

Closed volumes aside, Mr. Coolquitt's preferred sculptural form seems to be a kind of extended multicolored rod welded together from the plastic lighters used by crack addicts or from short sections of discarded bicycle frames. Leaning against the wall singly or in groups, these suggest new versions of ceremonial staffs or divining rods. He also fashions occasional paintings from small pieces of cheap striped or dotted fabric.

In addition he makes wide use of objects he calls "somebody-mades": things fitted together and then left behind by other people. These range from yellowed stacks of once-white plastic cups to clusters of odd poles and broomsticks, duct-taped together or extended with electrical plugs or tennis balls. In a piece titled "this vitrine don't work" such elements lean against the wall like scraps in a backyard shed but are set off by a nearly invisible cantilevered Minimalist cube made of thin steel ribbing.

"Straws" masses together empty soda cans with straws in paper bags on a small, nicely distressed little bench, along with a couple of ugly but functioning lamps. Two similar works crowd the tops of pedestals that resemble cobbled-together floor lamps with ersatz modern statuettes and sculptures of hands with raised middle fingers: a rather sophomoric affront to good taste.

But actually quite a bit of Mr. Coolquitt's work is in good taste because it is familiar, if not actually rather ingratiating and twee. It derives from other connoisseurs of the castoff and cobbled together, including Gabriel Orozco, Jack Pierson, David Ireland, Martin Kippenberger and Jim Lambie, as well as sundry recycling DIY designers who have been borrowing from outsider and tramp art for years.

Also familiar is the way this crowded show as a whole bristles with old-time male-sculptor ambition. That the individual pieces succeed at saying something different and more affecting makes Mr. Coolquitt an artist worth watching.

ROBERTA SMITH