

Art in America
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Reagan Upshaw

Robert Therrien at Leo Castelli, New York

To visit Robert Therrien's recent exhibition was to find oneself reduced to Lilliputian size. In a corner of the gallery, one leg and a portion of the top of a gigantic, 10-foot-high table emerged from the wall. In the center of the room stood an 8-foot-tall stack of huge 5-foot-wide plates. On one wall, five silver drops signified rain, presumably emerging from the little black fiberglass cloud that hung next to them. Any mess that the drops might make when they hit could be cleaned up with the oversized scrub brush that lay on the floor. A section of "wooden" flooring, made of fiberglass and slightly larger than normal, functioned as a wall relief, as did an 8-foot section of wall bearing five tiny red devils. There was a cartoonlike, slightly goofy feel to all this.

In the back gallery, the scale returned to normal. A stack of 24 found china plates was affixed to the wall. A wooden form resembling a livestock feeding trough functioned as a sculpture. An excised section of anonymous institutional wall bearing a towel rack with a linen towel was hung as a relief. Therrien's drawings, also shown in the back gallery, suggested plans for other enigmatic projects: a silk screen and watercolor of a grid with tambourines, a tempera of a blue towel, a pencil drawing of a stack of bowls in which erasures look ghostly.

As he takes familiar objects and renders them foreign, either by a change in scale or by removing them from their everyday context, Therrien seems to be a fabulist attempting to realize modernism's command to "make it new." If the works were exhibited individually, the viewer could simply take in the large ones with a childlike sense of wonder. The exhibition as a whole, however, implied narrative: a story only partly told or a rebus to be decoded.