

The NEW YORK Sun



511 Gallery (formerly Miller/Geisler) celebrates its name change with a group show of 13 of its artists. The exhibition is ambitious, aspiring to stretch common understanding of what constitutes painting and sculpture. But lurking here is the assumption that tradition is an antique, like the stiffened antimacassar on the back of great-grandpa's chair. It is an attitude aimed at audiences who comprehend tradition as a reiteration of the past rather than an inheritance to be interpreted by each generation for its own purposes.

511 showcases the fruits of that mistake. Post-industrial folk art is the reigning genre. Unlike the pre-industrial kind, made by untrained individuals, this variant is a mass product made in an art-school vernacular. Outsider art is now insider art, a reversal enabled by pundits, promoters, and academics, for whom artwork exists as mere incident en route to commentary.

Jennifer Odem dyes a cheap, crocheted tablecloth red, soaks it in acrylic medium, then flops it on the floor to set. Ed Fraga takes the votive path with "Cathedral" (2001), a crude plywood construction that cobbles a headless Christmas ornament with a tiny landscape cut to the shape of a palladium window. Epoxy is his crucial medium.

Matt Ernst's series of small "Guideboats" (2002) gives a good imitation of the sort of thing children carry home from camp. Mark Cooper's "Endless Column" (2002) is a roadside totem, cousin to ones that appear along the East River Drive under the overpass to the Triborough Bridge.

The most persuasive works are by those artists who are not straining for a style. Painter Bryan LeBoeuf's "Trois Bateaux" (2004), the centerpiece of his recent solo show, gives evidence of maturing to certain artistic convictions — something quite different from style. He combines sympathy for the human figure with a quirky, mildly surreal compositional wit. Sculptor Mark Mennin is similarly mindful of the traditions of his craft. His single, small marble "Head" (2003) is a finely worked image of a fleshy, homely male elevated by materials to a solemnity the model might lack in life. It projects from the wall at a slight angle, reminiscent of medieval gargoyles or a portrait head from the sedilia in Westminster Abbey.



Bryan LeBoeuf, "Trois Bateaux" (2004)