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VMAGAZINE

In The The Gallery

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TEXT JENNIFER PIEJKO



Strauss Bourque-LaFrance, "All Ways Us Living Love" 2011.

It's difficult to be sure where a work by artist Strauss Bourque-LaFrance begins and ends. Installations expand and contract, pausing to add an ornament here or there. Materials and references narrowly miss each other or hide behind one another, reaching out over wall-to-wall white carpeting. His solo exhibition "In The The Spring," opening tonight at KANSAS in lower Manhattan, is an environment of sorts, an installation of installations, works overlapping, many composed of familiar and overlooked matter. Sculptures settle within sculptures, showing signs of life, and past lives.

In The The Spring is titled after "Paris in the the spring," a phrase commonly used in psychological testing as a visual trick: most people will miss the mistaken second "the" in

the phrase. The textual illusion serves as a reminder to pay attention, to see things as they present themselves, to not assume—a perspective that worsens with age, as we grow confident in what we know. This attitude is most visible in works such as "All Ways us Living Love" (2012), a mantel-like shelf adorned with small sculptures. *Living Love* also contains another visual trick: a very small square painting on canvas, mounted on the wall, is actually made of clay. A larger square leaning on the shelf contains an even coating of gray splatters on a super-smooth surface, resembling a block of Formica, a slice of indistinct childhood kitchen memories here elevated to abstract canvas. The fake poop on the shelf is the cynical teenaged foil, the antithesis to countertop wholesomeness.

Weaving through the space, it becomes clear that adjustment is the true medium of this show. The gallery's press release describes Bourque-LaFrance as a "curator of his own wares"—kitschy curiosities (playful cat sculptures; marble wishbones; found vacation photographs of mountain views, no doubt aspiring to capture postcard perfection) mingling with glossy visual salutes to queer identity politics (the shiny, sunny yellow vinyl glory hole wall treatment of 2012's "Glory"); roundabout allusions to theories of love, desire, and art history from Michael Hardt and Douglas Crimp; and late '80s nouveau-riche detailing. "Breathing on a Mirror" (2012) leads the show into the abstract: the precarious vertical column loosely resembles an inverted exclamation point, the near-universal symbol of expression hinged on a book of lines: a book containing no information, only graphic line exercises. The exclamation mark is stripped of its power of exclamation (and explanation), deteriorating to a formal gesture only.

There are no illusions that the white carpeting and walls will stay pristine for the duration of the show; residue of footprints and fingerprints are even welcome. Objects are strewn throughout the gallery, not as part of installations, but simply as another layer of visual detail: *In The The Spring* is decorated, as if the artist were taking advantage of access to a prop store. Together the playful objects both part and independent of artworks build in content, context, density, tension. The installation is a theater, and audience members are the actors walking across an empty stage, no one clearing the debris away before the next performance. Bourque-LaFrance is an artist in residence in Judson Memorial Church's Movement Research program, the holy church of modern dance, so it's no surprise that so many of the works here ache to be touched, moved, leaned on. They also reveal the artist's deep interest in design, the architecture and engineering of experience and expectation, the second "the" waiting to reveal itself in the aesthetic textures we take for granted everywhere we turn.

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