

Los Angeles Times

ART REVIEW

Larry Mantello at CB1Gallery

March 10, 2011|DAVID PAGEL

Larry Mantello's second solo show in Los Angeles picks up where his last one left off: using cheap souvenirs and tacky novelties to tell a story whose high points revolve around love, loss and redemption and whose low points look toward meaninglessness as a welcome release from the despair of self-loathing.

Mantello's first solo show in L.A. was 18 years ago. Back then, his installation stuck out like a sore thumb on steroids. At a time of hyper-serious identity politicking, his mind-scrambling extravaganza threw its lot in with pleasure and excess to herald a new era, which has gone a long way to define the present.

At CB1Gallery, "Together Again" is tighter, more focused and loaded. It reveals an artist whose vision and delivery have matured, growing more complex and nuanced while losing none of the youthful insouciance — and cheeky verve — of Mantello's earlier works.

It consists of 34 discrete pieces, each made up of hundreds, if not thousands, of images, stickers and temporary tattoos, as well as a vast array of cigarette lighters, key chains and cellphone cozies that seem to sprout, like rampant viruses, from checkout counters everywhere.

Mantello's works fall into three deliriously dense groups. Some of the best pieces are the simplest: haunting drawings made from water-soluble tattoos. Other wall-works consist of overlapping sheets of cellophane and acetate. They evoke high-tech spider webs that capture bits and pieces of ersatz imagery to create disturbingly attractive worlds-within-worlds.

Mantello's sculptures come in three formats: wall-reliefs that spill out of their frames, tabletop pieces that explode from jampacked lunchboxes and free-standing pieces so cockeyed they would never find their way into chain stores.

That's the beauty of Mantello's comically commercial art. Both boss and employee, he has no one to answer to but himself. That's more complicated than it sounds and it's also the reason Mantello's art resonates so deeply, both despite, and because of its die-hard superficiality.



“Together Again” at CB1 Gallery

◆ *CB1 Gallery, 207 W. 5th St., L.A., (213) 806-7889, through April 3.
Closed Mondays and Tuesdays
www.cb1gallery.com*