

April 17-24, 2003

Larry Mantello, *Box Rap*
Henry Urbach Architecture, through
May 3 (see Chelsea).

Larry Mantello's installations are typically composed of heaps of cheap gift-shop bric-a-brac, toys and tacky tourist souvenirs. More often than not, they have been branded as blissful accumulations of junk that celebrate the pleasures of impulse buying. With this show, however, Mantello has introduced an explicitly political dimension into his work that complicates such straightforward readings.

Box Rap features piles of Kodak film boxes, Ben & Jerry containers, cupcakes topped with Disney characters and thousands of other trinkets—all roped off by bright yellow police tape. Strings of colored lights blink merrily, while marching-band songs compete with a recording of "The Star-Spangled Ban-

ner" that blasts from one corner. Bottles of mineral water emblazoned with the words *peace* and *joy*, and a T-shirt that reads NO WAR ON IRAQ, peek out discreetly among the small American flags that are scattered throughout.

If you stay long enough among the dizzying array of objects, their sheer quantity and the overdose of colors, lights and sounds will elicit a claustrophobic, even panicky feeling. Neither a blind embrace of consumption and the commercialization of political discourse nor a diatribe against them, Mantello's work employs the language of kitsch in a manner that is at once alienating and alluring. It is precisely this calculated avoidance of judgments about "good" and "bad" taste and politics that makes *Box Rap* unsettling in unexpected and interesting ways.—*Talya Halkin*



Larry Mantello, *Box Rap*, 2000–2003.