

The Sun

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THURSDAY, JANUARY 30, 2003

ARTS & LETTERS GALLERY-GOING

By ALEX MAR

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Ross Knight is an old-fashioned formalist with a defeated, knowingly contemporary heart.

The sculptures in his exhibition at Team Gallery are languid and cheap, mostly constructed from aluminum tubing and ready-made corrugated plastic in IKEA yellow and blue, the joints held together with neat plastic ties. These pieces have the quality of newly assembled pool furniture stretching itself out in a moment of lazy, graceful inspiration.

Mr. Knight's sculptures resonate with the clarity of Minimalism — but without the heft. He deals in classical geometries — the arc, the line, the plane — but realizes these forms through deflated materials. His industrial materials are suburban-industrial.

The grand tons of Richard Serra's work once infamously led to the death of a worker installing one of his pieces. Mr. Knight's work, even as it confidently cuts up the space, has none of that danger. Each piece can be disassembled, tucked under the arms, and carried out. It's portable; this stuff would easily blow away in a storm.

In the small front space, "American Sculpture" (all works 2003) does not really hold its own, but I found myself eyeing the edges and floppy spine of the boards which make it up. The painted magenta finish of one of the horizontal panels, which at first looks like a throwback to 1980s design, is actually sloppy, with the drippy direction of the paint left visible. When measured up close, the geometry of the pieces begins to collapse.

The strongest pieces in the show are the smaller-scale "They're Dangling" and "False Prop," which both take formalism in a precise, loopy direction. "They're Dangling" is one long, continuous stretch of aluminum tubing which winds into a free-standing rectangle, inset with a continuous row of translucent plastic teeth as slender and colorless as icicles. "False Prop" consists of a waist-high, horizontal arc of blue corrugated plastic, atop which reclines an elegant, bifurcated length of tubing, one arm capped with a red rubber tip. These are strange, unexpected pieces: DIY-friendly materials twisted by some cool, secret logic.

In the back gallery, "Come On" similarly manages to transform the stuff of middle-class backyard projects into something Other. This time, it's a long, serpentine figure that rises to draw a circle in the air, its lower body held to the ground by an arc of translucent yellow plastic.

It is hard to tell whether it's modesty or an almost-irritating cleverness that lurks at the edges of Mr. Knight's work. After all, the use of pathetic materials is far from new and at times disappointingly ironic. It can suggest a young artist throwing up his hands at the (gasp) weight of history, rather than upping the ante.

But in person, the work transcends what it's made of. Mr. Knight manages to use this stuff to produce accomplished forms with an unfamiliar elegance. The work wins through flimsy surprise.

"Ross Knight: False Props" at Team Gallery until February 8 (527 W. 26th Street, between Tenth and Eleventh Avenues, 212-279-9219). Prices: \$7,000–\$15,000.