



Karl Mann

**RICCO/MARESCA
THROUGH APRIL 1 2**

Mann combs flea markets for sort of junk most of us ignore. Rusting kitchen utensils, plastic doll parts, fishing lures, tacky china figurines, and other detritus of kitschy mass production find a home in his ingenious reliefs, which are seldom more than a foot or so high. The pieces in his first solo show are all untitled, and that's probably for the best since any literal interpretation could ruin the pleasure of these strange assemblages.

A small wooden Indian head sits atop a Dutch wooden shoe; a snarling dinosaur rears from a wooden tape measure; a stuffed duck's head pops out of a drain spout. These are combined with other elements—cheap religious statuettes, 1950s ashtrays—in cunning and well-resolved juxtapositions.

The obvious antecedents here are Joseph Cornell and Kurt Schwitters. But Mann's poetry is rougher than Cornell's. He's more a scavenger of the ordinary than a devotee of romance and enigma. And his esthetic is less pack-rat maniacal than Schwitters's. There's a peculiar, sneaky identification with some of these fossils: your kid brother might have collected dinosaurs like that, and aren't those your aunt's salt-and-pepper shakers? But the work is not dependent on nostalgia and is most successful when it provokes a certain surrealist frisson—a pair of shapely doll legs kicking upward from a cheese grater (shades of Larry Flynt)—or when it contains a formal unity dependent on a few well-chosen pieces, all falling neatly in place because of shape or color.

ANN LANDI

*Karl Mann, Unfitted. 1996,
mixed media, 20" x 16".
Ricco/Maresca.*

