

NATIVE

Signs of Chaos

by David Hirsh

Strange Attractors: Signs of Chaos
 New Museum of Contemporary Art
 583 Broadway
 September 14-November 26

Candy Ass/Cary Leibowitz
 Stux Gallery
 155 Spring Street
 September 6-30

Few artists explore being gay in their artwork as starkly as Cary Leibowitz, who signs his work Candy Ass. His humorous and sometimes wrenching installation at Stux Gallery has the flamboyance and courage of a drag queen whose struggle is defined by staying alive against the odds and whose defiance is defined by gestures that wouldn't, for a moment, be dropped. Leibowitz lays bare his vulnerabilities; the press release for this current show applies adjectives like "neurotic" and "pathetic."

Leibowitz concentrates on everyday emotions with open autobiographical honesty rather than with issues. This common or down-home quality is emphasized as soon as one enters his installation. It's like entering a young boy's bedroom, with pennants ("Homo State") and cut-outs covering the clipper-ship wallpaper.

It's a valuable, outrageous, and even good-looking show expressed in the vocabulary of modern art.

Following are excerpts from a recent interview with the artist, who was born in Manhattan and now lives in Boston.

"This is the first time I've been given a whole room for an installation. A lot of the smaller work wasn't done specifically for this show. The work done specifically for this show is the wallpaper, the three large paintings, the 'I love...' names around the perimeter of the room and the pennants.

"The clipper ships and the two bowls of fruit are stock imagery that I use because they're typical and don't leave a lot of room for metaphor. They're pictorial elements that allow the graphics to work. It's easy to rely on metaphor; I could become pretty trite pretty easily. That's why most of the collages are just two pieces juxtaposed, to state the fact of my original intention more clearly.

"'Happy Birthday' and 'Get Well'—those greeting-card type things—are immediately identifiable by everyone. 'Loser' is just a word I've been using a lot. 'Happy Birthday Loser' just seemed to hit home—I don't know. . . . My birthday was right after the opening and it kind of fit in well.

"I work with a lot of easily identifiable stuff because it keeps me working. Doing one of those pieces gets me into the swing of working. Originally it came out of more of an art history context, in the same way that, 30 years ago, Jasper Johns was doing his flags. It's kind of post-modern and all, but I just had to go back to an easy reference point. And I do feel compelled to hit the viewer over the head with what I'm saying, I guess. I don't want to feel that I'm keeping secrets.

"One of the biggest influences in this room is Robert Venturi, the architect, who comes out of the whole ugly and ordinary position. And, of course, Andy Warhol. I'm usually influenced by everything I see, if I like it. The little-boy feeling probably comes from—you know—when you're in the fourth grade, Norman Rockwell is pretty seductive." ■