

Myers, Holly. Review. *Los Angeles Times*, 24 May 2002, p. F26.

The first piece inside the doors of Mungo Thomson's exhibition at Margo Leavin Gallery consists of about a dozen pencils—all hand-made by Thomson to look perfectly mass produced—stuck irregularly into the ceiling of the gallery's foyer, as though left there by a bored assistant during installation. Titled "Between Projects" and presumably conceived in a lull betwixt this and his first solo show at the gallery, the work is a poignant expression of ennui. It arouses sympathy for Thomson's creative block, as well as appreciation for the artistic fortitude that compelled him to forge through the block and carve his own pencils rather than reverting to readymades.

By offering a glimpse into the lowest reaches of the artist's conceptual grab bag, however, the work casts a curious light on the rest of the show. Judging from the number of subsequent works on view, the ennui was clearly temporary.

But one can't help but wonder whether that grab bag has had adequate time to replenish itself. Though all of the works are perfectly clever, commendably labor-intensive and conceptually promising, they feel notably incom-

plete—like stray fragments of raw material moving toward a yet unimagined whole.

The best are simple but genuinely humorous. One of these is "Antenna Baldessari," a series of foam antenna balls endowed with the Santa Claus-like face of conceptual artist John Baldessari and priced to sell. Equally satisfying is "Clipping," an ink-jet rendition of a New York Times front page that announces the opening of Thomson's own show, optimistically proclaiming: "Art Exhibition Opens, Changes World."

In the show's three larger works, however, the humor runs thin. Thomson falls back upon the presumably intrinsic power of popular imagery.

"Royal Leerdam Crystal Beer Bottle Candle Holders" consists of just that: three dozen lead-crystal beer bottles, mouth-blown by the renowned Dutch glass factory and plugged with melted candle stubs. "Love and Joy" is a life-size replica

of a stained-glass window occasionally depicted in the TV cartoon "The Simpsons." And "The American Desert (for Chuck Jones)" is a DVD projection of Road Runner and Wile E. Coyote cartoons from which Thomson has digitally removed the characters, leaving only a series of trippy landscape backdrops.

Each is compelling—the latter certainly inspires an appreciation for the animator to whom it's dedicated—but their benign lack of irony, however heartening in principle, leaves the work feeling flat and directionless. Appreciative appropriation, however cleverly assembled or painstakingly crafted, simply isn't enough to carry the work to fruition.

With a spare, conceptually oriented show of this ilk, one hopes to find—or at least sense behind the scenes—a grab bag spilling over with ideas, a cache of concepts plentiful enough to lend a quality of tautness to the refined final

product. This work is pointing in that direction; one suspects it just needs some time.