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## ART IN REVIEW

### **Larry Mantello**

*Jose Freire Fine Art*

*SoHo*

*Through Nov. 10*

If pop culture gave itself a party, it would look like Larry Mantello's chockablock, more-is-not-enough debut at Freire. Working entirely with the bright and mostly worthless trinkets to be found in souvenir stores, gift shops, toy stores and party-decoration outlets, Mr. Mantello has turned the gallery into maze of zany installations and overloaded assemblage sculptures. He has also painted some walls hot pink, covered others with wallpaper or with blown-up resort photographs, and levitated helium balloons all over the place. Disco music emanates from one work, air fresheners from another. With repeated appearances of fake food - hamburger-shaped yo-yos, plastic bagels, chocolate-kiss pinatas, furry ice cream cones and elaborately iced cakes that the artist makes himself - there is virtually no sense that isn't aroused, or at least assaulted. Take the young ones, but stick around, for this is a show that grows on grown-ups too.

Despite the initial sense of chaos, the individual works are surprisingly distinct in terms of merchandise, color and composition. "Isle Lands Inn," one of the best, consists entirely of crepe-paper fruits, flowers and vegetables swaying under a pair of palm trees. Its more intense neighbor, "Leisure Lei Ole" centers on little plastic carousels (for drying delicate hand-washables?) decked with paper leis, plastic key chains and little stuffed American flags. Christmas, Election Day, sex, Garfield in countless spinoff incarnations - they're all here.

Mr. Mantello's art, which might be described as Neo-Geo lite (and frothy), makes popular culture look as beautiful as it is vacuous. His work floats. It lacks the mind-boggling perverseness, and craft, of Jeff Koons; yet his enthusiasm is far from whole hearted. Some of the cakes are topped by interracial couples; the piece with the chocolate-kiss pinatas, which also enlarged Coke and Pepsi bottles, is clearly anti-sugar, and "Guest Star" includes a pair of plastic handcuff among its bright gew-gaws. They seem to say, "Stop me before I shop again."

*-ROBERTA SMITH*