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ART IN REVIEW; Larry Mantello

by Holland Cotter

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Larry Mantello's terrifyingly funny "Box Rap" is like a walk-in CARE package of contemporary Americana, ready for shipping anywhere. Within a closetlike compartment, the artist has packed a cornucopian jungle of Disney dolls, cartoon videos, lollipops, Christmas ornaments, junk food containers and condom packages; accompanying the assemblage is a star-spangled sound track of patriotic songs.

As befits a paean to a culture fueled by sheer appetite, Mr. Mantello's sensational installation doesn't let up for a minute. Just when you think you have taken in every last scintilla of cuteness and crassness, there's more, along with some pesky impurities: a Daffy Duck doll wearing "Stop the War in Iraq" buttons; a half-hidden photo of Che Guevara; another of Bob Marley smoking a stupendous joint; a window shade emblazoned with a memorial image of the Twin Towers.

Mr. Mantello extends his gift for acidic confection into series of collages, one made from newsprint, the other from magazine photographs. Weaving together fragmentary images of cartoon characters, professional athletes and body parts, they suggest a culture composed of a whole lot of everything in which nothing is whole. If this is the America being aggressively distributed out across the globe, no wonder at least a few recipients are having serious second thoughts.