

Sensory Overload

By Aaron Zimmerman

published Zoo Magazine No. 10. (2006) pg. 76



Larry Mantello, Tri-Sectional Resurrectional, 2006

His name is Spongebob SquarePants. He's yellow, square and the center of interest in Larry Mantello's recent installation Tri-Sectional Resurrectional at New York's Kustera Tilton Gallery. Images from the successful low budget cartoon about a sponge and his friends in the sea are featured here on towels, buckets, necklaces, mini-stereos, trinkets, baubles, balls, shoestrings, and more. They cascade from the ceiling like a master-marketer's waterfall. Faux pot leaves and Bob Marley banners supply the visual subtext.

Mantello, a 41 year old native of Rockford, Illinois has been working from his New York apartment for the past 10 years. The expansive Tri-Sectional Resurrectional was constructed there in parts. "The length of this installation is the length of my living room. says Mantello. I have a 9' ceiling while the gallery ceiling is 15', so I saw the completed work at the same time as everyone else."

Mantello picks up the pieces for his art at every step of his daily travels. "I look everywhere I go." he says. "I've found things at a residency in Costa Rica and recent trips to The Dominican Republic and Miami. Here in NYC I walk the streets constantly. I live in Harlem and I love the street life. I'm drawn to small shops, novelty stores, drugstores, and sidewalk vendors."

So what is Mantello saying when grouping this dollar store detritus? "I haven't made a conscious attempt to frame a literal interpretation of any one particular subject," says the artist, whose work is in the permanent collections of The Whitney Museum of American Art and The Miami Museum of Contemporary Art. "Issues of race, materialism, and sexual identity are all fair game, as are many other subjects. I rely heavily on a world of visual and sensory overload to stage a living confusion. I have courted distraction as a means to focus. In the end, the pleasure I get from my work comes from excessive use of materials and the associations they arouse."