

## Art

Art review

★★★★★  
Critic's Rating

## Tom Holmes, "Silly Rabbit: A Gravestone and an Urn"

The artist turns a Trix box into a meditation on despair.

Dispatch, through Feb 14



Tom Holmes's first solo show in New York comprises only three objects: a metal folding chair, a cinder-block stele painted yellow and a Trix cereal box, neatly bound with wire, containing cremated human remains. These last two works are, respectively, prototypes for a grave marker and a funerary urn designed by the artist (the occupied urn on display is strictly a floor model and not for sale). A group of terrific works on paper—including watercolors and ink-jet photo collages—presents a range of design and color options. A vital addendum to the exhibition is a farewell letter, signed by someone calling himself Bobby Wilson, that begins, "This town sux and so doos u..." Bankrupt, disillusioned and angry, Bobby is leaving New York; he's both profane outsider and dark alter ego: Holmes himself will be taking a sabbatical from the city at the end of the month.

The artist, who trained as a photographer, is adept at creating layered visual fields, usually from found images and quotidian materials, around which new meanings and narratives coalesce. The yellow gravestone, seen in one study inserted into the gridded landscape of a cemetery, is transformed from formal object to unassimilable fruity presence, while the General Mills box transcends Pop appropriation, becoming an allegory for exclusion, containment and isolation. The Trix Rabbit—a memorably creepy character—is, after all, not only the "silly rabbit" barred from eating the cereal in the ad campaign, but also the "silly faggot" of the popular homophobic T-shirt that concludes "dicks are for chicks." This is an uncomfortable show, redolent of institutional limbos and marginal lives, with shrill bottom notes of failure and fear. But it is also beautiful, neatly made, unfussy, and full of conceptual and visual interest. Holmes avoids easy solutions. May he return to New York soon.—*Anne Doran*