

Art Review:

Richard Aldrich /

Bortolami

I used to like Richard Aldrich's small canvases: empty but for a few tentative gestures or the remains of a larger pattern, painted mostly on masking tape and stripped away. They seemed to be pushing for haiku, establishing complex structures from little and allowing the unpainted to speak. A few hints of this remain in his current show: a scumbled surface of white and brown, neither colour able to hold enough of the surface to dominate; an off-square canvas with green and black outlines suggesting the chamfered flaps of an envelope. But these gestures, which pack a quiet but riveting punch, are overwhelmed by too much 'this and that': the word 'coward' spelled out in black fabric and torn shirt sleeves, a brushy mess of grey and green; two lengths of ripped cloth joined by splintery fragments. The result is diffuseness. It's late; I'm tired. I'm sick. Sick of galleries too numerous to mention. I tell myself, I'm glad they're here, proud there is this much art happening here in my beloved city, which I believed was the greatest in the world so many decades ago when I was a kid and the world seemed very different. I understand that what I'm seeing, in the main, and what I'm writing are at the bottom of the pyramid, the foundation that supports the Picassos and the James Joyces and everyone else in between. But I'm tired. I'm tired of art with 20 moving parts, and of figures that look a fifth-grader's diorama. I'm tired of paintings with lightbulbs in them; I remember them from when they were new, and New York was the greatest city in the world. I'm tired of casual photos of scruffy artists celebrating being scruffy and drunk. It's fun to be down and out when you're on the way up, or you're white and educated. And it's fun to drink and fuck and be proud of the big barf. But it's old now, and it's a lifestyle, minus the fun, that a lot of people are falling into these days. But what's worse is the attitude expressed in the greeting cards that celebrate the downfall of money with lines like, 'Missed you in Miami this year. Thinking of you in this difficult time', because what's happening is too scary for that kind of sour-grapes humour.