



November, 2008

Sarah Braman
Museum 52

Though she is well-known among habitués of the Lower East Side, sculptor Sarah Braman is no city slicker. In her central Massachusetts studio, she typically works in series (“batches,” she calls them) that are defined by a particular unifying material, such as cardboard or colored gels. The five 2008 works in “Love Songs,” her first New York solo outside of the gallery Canada, where she is a partner, incorporate found furniture—low-end, prefab stuff. In *TV in bed*, the halves of a busted-up, dirty-white particleboard desk are propped together, forming a dubious roof over a slab of spray-painted foam rubber. In an impressive balancing act, Braman foregrounds both the formal potential of the demotic objects she uses and their erstwhile domestic utility. The result is disheveled but not unmonumental, compact, delicately poised, carefully tweaked, tough as nails.

A chrome-and-mirror vanity and a plain-Jane desk seem to grapple like wrestlers in *Love Song (soft rock)*. Tilted at about 45 degrees from the floor, patchily painted in blue and magenta, the piece seems to be all structure and no facade. The viewer walks around it, looking for the front. It recalls the sculpture Michael Gitlin made in the 1980s by clamping together office furniture at wacky angles.

Molly’s House deepens the dizzy, Woodstockish groove. A slab of fake-wood paneling daubed with burly rose and violet is slapped onto the center of an inverted photo, printed on vinyl and over 6 feet across, depicting a sun-drenched tangle of potted ferns and hanging ivies. In her thinking, it would seem, if any thing can be sculpture, any photograph is a photograph of sculpture. In another context, the smallish, untitled prop piece made of off-the-rack, fake-grain cabinetry and topped with a slab

of yellowing foam would not be sculpture but an abandoned weekend project.

The cherry-red cap from a pickup truck dominates the show’s largest piece, *Sleeping Out Summer Night*. It is propped at a crazy angle between a hunk of cheapo plywood paneling and a hefty slab of clear Plexiglas bent into an L shape and draped with a

length of luxurious fabric with pink blossoms. The piece seems to be frozen in mid-tumble, and its contrast of visual textures is as acute as the clashing indicators of domestic taste.

Braman is downtown’s answer to Maureen Gallace, whose charming, diminutive paintings prettily (and with a bit of bite) picture the southern New England of comfort and entitlement. Braman’s work has to do with vulnerability, the perpetual inadequacy of most folks’ domestic arrangements, the ad hoc nature of the roots we put down. Her work’s lack of polish will be off-putting to some, but it is just that neglected-backyard quality that gives her upcountry assemblage its particular twang.

—Stephen Maine



Sarah Braman: *Love Song (soft rock)*, 2008, found furniture, linoleum, mirror and paint, 75 by 64 by 68 inches; at Museum 52.