

ARTFORUM

Molly Smith

KATE WERBLE GALLERY

83 Vandam Street

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When Franz Roh coined the term *magic realism* in 1925, it was to herald a return to the obsessive replication of objects in Golden Age Dutch painting, particularly still lifes. It is amusing that nearly a century later, during the isolating reign of computer interface, many artists are finding solace in Roh's desire for a sincere materiality, but through the actual objects instead of their two-dimensional likenesses.

Helen Mirra's Minimalist displays of blankets and wooden pallets are one example of this, as is Molly Smith's current exhibition, "Tidal," her second at this gallery. Smith's seven new sculptures and two works on paper (as well as an ever-changing window display of small watercolors and photographs) make up an exhibition that is dominated by raw materials. Rocks, wood, dye, muslin, metal, paper, and plaster imbue the show with a subtle, earthy palette. Tenuous arrangements and aberrant combinations provoke a range of emotive qualities for the viewer. In *Sure* (all works 2012), a six-foot shard from a tree that was downed during a tornado is propped upright with a Hydrocal cylinder, as if in an attempt to reimagine the wood as still living. The precariousness of this piece ignites both an anxious tension and a genuine sense of awe. *Dawn* is merely a taut wire strung over a gallery wall, draped with colored handmade papers and punctuated with a rock at either end. Yet the result is a wistful string of pennants that shift through lovely shades of white, red, green, and gray.

More often than not, these works reference natural phenomena, with their use of hurricane salvage and tornado debris. Smith doesn't begin and end her practice with her own hand; instead she extends it to the realm of the elements. From the Dutch painters to the Fluxus group, artists have searched for beauty in the fleeting realm of reality, and Smith's latest show extends this tradition with exceptional tenderness and grace.



Molly Smith, *Sure*, 2012, Hydrocal, pigment, weight, rocks, wood, 75 x 4 x 6".

— Ryan Steadman

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