

Art in Review

Daniel McDonald

Bohemian Monsters

Broadway 1602
1182 Broadway, Apt. 1602
Through Oct. 25

Daniel McDonald has been so important a part of the New York art scene since he arrived from California in 1989 that it's hard to believe "Bohemian Monsters" is his first local solo show. But it is, and it's been worth the wait.

In the 1990s he was a member of Art Club 2000, a collaborative devoted to, among other things, exposing the corporate infrastructures of pop culture and fashion. (The group had a legal run-in with Gap for appropriating advertising.) At the same time, he was building an impassioned fan base as the creator of a jewelry line called Mended Veil, distinguished by a kind of cheapo sci-fi-Goth chic.

The sculptures at Broadway 1602 relate stylistically to the jewelry and conceptually to the critical agenda of Art Club 2000, but exist in a category of their own. Each piece is a painstakingly detailed and realistic miniature environment akin to a model stage set. And in each, the struggles of impoverished artists in a gentrifying city are enacted. One figure huddles in a room barely large enough to hold him. Another drinks himself into oblivion. A third takes a despairing leap from a tenement roof.

The artists are all instantly recognizable, not from the streets of Chelsea, but from Hollywood B films of yesteryear. Wolfman, the Mummy, and the Bride of Frankenstein are the creative souls subject to harassment here, embodied in figurines of a kind Mr. McDonald has collected for years and often subtly altered with transplanted body parts or specially designed costumes.

In each case, the final tableau goes beyond being ingeniously entertaining, though it is certainly that, into subtle metaphorical and social terrain. And the pertinence to present economic conditions is obvious: when the Wicked Witch of the West has to furtively sell Warhol's celebrity portrait of her to pay for a broomstick, as she does here, you know artists have hit bad times.

HOLLAND COTTER