

Julianne Swartz



Josée Bienvenu, through Fri 29 (see Chelsea)

For her second solo show at Josée Bienvenu, Julianne Swartz takes a cue from fabled toy maker Gepetto and instills complex human emotion into her low-tech inventions. As its title, “Hope,” understatedly implies, Swartz’s show of eight kinetic sculptures—crafted from steel wire, concrete and ticking clock motors—manages to express some of the deep-seated desires and apprehensions of our post-9/11 society.

In the spindly, Calderesque sculpture *Flag*, a long antenna sprouts from a stack of five concrete blocks, reaching ten feet into the air. At the tip of the wire a teensy white flag quivers, rotating slowly, as if in halfhearted surrender. Another work, *Obstacle Mountain*, features a tiny plastic bag that seems to drag itself in fits and starts around a pile of stones (it’s actually being pulled by a nearly invisible wire attached to a clock motor). At every circuit, the feckless sack encounters a chunk of concrete in its path; each time it fails to scale the impediment (think: ant and rubber-tree plant).

Three sound works offer an antidote to whatever Sisyphean futility the other sculptures might impart. *Body*, a tangle of electronic



cords, hangs from the ceiling like a jellyfish. Attached to its tentacles are 24 miniature speakers, each one whispering “Don’t worry” and “You don’t have to be afraid.” Crack the lid to *Open*, a maple box on the gallery floor, and countless voices escape, repeating “I love you” until you shut them into silence.

In the room-size installation *After All*, more than 100 music boxes play rounds of the utopian lullaby “It’s a Small World” in a tinkling symphony. In her bewitching, animated objects, Swartz manages to strike a sentimental chord (even borrowing a tune from Disneyland) without seeming gimmicky or schmaltzy—a magical feat indeed.
—Emily Weiner