

Randall Beck Gallery/Boston

Ilana Manolson: The Unstill Life

Usually inanimate objects ascend, soar, rotate, and gyrate in Ilana Manolson's *The Unstill Life*, this accomplished artist's fifth one-person show at the Randall Beck Gallery. In this likable exhibition, Manolson uses ordinary kitchen objects to show the motion and emotion of everyday life. The artist explains, "I try to capture the fragile balance of competing demands, as stacked plates or bowls strain to avoid falling." This kinetic crockery, with its connotation of home and hearth, captures the imbalance, upheaval, and strain of the domestic realm.

There is a definite feeling of weightlessness and things spinning out of control in many of the thirteen monoprints: the contents of cups spatter up and out, bowls oscillate as if they are about to blast off. In *Motion/Emotion*, green bowls and cups teeter precariously on the edge of a table and an elongated spoon almost becomes a projectile hurtling upward. Oddly enough, the unsettled feeling brings to mind Cézanne's still lifes in their distorted angles and highly manipulated perspective.

In *Coffee Cup Dreams* four stacked bowls appear to have been dropped, their fall caught just before impact. A sense of arrested movement is heightened not only by the energetic composition but also by the active brushstrokes, splotches, and sprays of vibrant color. Amid the upheaval, a small red cherrylike form appears to be the only static object in the composition, a stable reference point in the flux of dishes.

Hues used throughout the show—marigold yellow, saffron, red-orange, chartreuse, parrot green, Caribbean blue—are radiant, thanks to the artist's inspired juxtapositions. In *Tea and Tango*, an image with two blue-green bowls on a turquoise table, one small orange orb balances the group; in *Kitchen Flight*, swirls of yellow-green shoot out in spirals with the energy of a tornado unleashed from inside the cupboard.

The show includes several more subdued, restful works. *Ghost of Tea Times Past* could take place underwater, the murky blue-green palette accented by white air bubbles. In

Forged Path, deep blues, greens, and purples form two cups in a bowl rocking and swaying in the frothy waves. Only the glimpse of a table edge, a small bright orange zip, brings us back to terra firma.

Dirty Dishes, the only oil painting exhibited, depicts several thick, weighty jars crammed into a heavy, round, shallow bowl. Compared with the hyperactive locomotion of the cups and saucers, the jars look in dire need of liberation. Perhaps these tightly capped jars could also benefit from letting off a little steam of their own.

—Susan Mulski