

ART IN REVIEW

Mary Mattingly: ‘House and Universe’

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*Robert Mann**525 West 26th Street, Chelsea**Through Oct. 19*

After exhibiting eco-science-fiction photographs early in her career, Mary Mattingly started experimenting with real-life situations, living on her “Waterpod” project, drifting around New York Harbor in 2009 and more recently in various self-sufficient “Flock Houses.” Here, she returns to photography and works that are scruffier than her earlier ones, but more personal and poignant. They’re often funny, too — although the underlying message, as with most things eco, is apocalyptic.





“Pull” (2013), with what the artist, Mary Mattingly, calls a “boulder,” in her solo show “House and Universe.” Courtesy of the artist and Robert Mann Gallery

For the [exhibition](#), Ms. Mattingly bound up virtually all her possessions, creating what she calls “man-made boulders,” which resemble postminimalist sculptures. One photograph finds her pulling a boulder down a city street, while another, “Ruin in Reverse” (2013), is reminiscent of photographs of Ana Mendieta, the Cuban-American performance artist — except here a gravelike trench is filled with a bundle of castoff objects rather than a woman’s body.

Art history allusions abound, since Ms. Mattingly’s possessions include, unsurprisingly, lots of art books and ephemera. A copy of “Janson’s History of Art” can be spotted in “Ruin in Reverse.” Another photo fills Michael Heizer’s earthwork “Double Negative” (1969-70) in Nevada with a bright blue-green “boulder,” also reminiscent of Christo and Jeanne-Claude’s wrapped objects.

Photography’s recent history is also invoked. Where digital manipulation was embraced in the ’80s and then eschewed in the aughts, Ms. Mattingly chooses a third path: her clumsy and obvious Photoshopping looks like an environmental disaster someone was either too arrogant or lazy (or incompetent) to clean up — which works perfectly in this context.

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