



Robert Kinmont:
Home Sweet Home,
 2010-11, soil, pine,
 plywood, pillows
 and mixed mediums,
 12 by 60 by 82
 inches; at Alexander
 and Bonin.

ROBERT KINMONT
 ALEXANDER AND BONIN

A few of Robert Kinmont's recent works in this exhibition were fairly big, although even these are equivocal about materiality. *Log Hollowed Out and Filled with the Memory of the Artist* (2009) is the shell of an upright tree trunk stripped of its bark and sawed off just above eye level (there is a hole to peer through, although there's nothing to see inside). Running up the log's side is the stenciled injunction, or dedication, "Be Quiet." *Unfinished Weapon* (2009) also features a hollowed log, this one lying on a sawhorse, and opened up and partly filled with balls of crumpled paper. The show's press release says each piece of paper contains a little rock, and half have (unseen) ideas written on them. Penciled faintly on the sawhorse are working notes: "trying to make a weapon that has a positive effect"; "unsuccessfully making a positive weapon." Clearly, failure—of communication, of social betterment—is accepted without prejudice.

So is mortality. *Home Sweet Home* (2010-11) consists of three long pine boxes, like coffins except the dirt is inside instead of out; one box is otherwise empty, a second also contains a clean white pillow and the third an old bolster, stained brown and crumpled against one end. What might otherwise be read as a visual koan becomes, in the context of Kinmont's work, a kind of epic. Born in 1937 in Los Angeles and long a resident of northern California, he was making wry and decidedly modest conceptual artworks in the late '60s and early '70s (not on view here). One series of small black-and-white photographs from that period shows him doing handstands in various natural spots. Another features favorite dirt roads. John Baldessari, David Ireland and Ed Ruscha were proximate peers; more distant kinships with Smithson, Morris and Duchamp can also be felt. Having favored the slightest of gestures, Kinmont, by 1975, had drifted away from the art world altogether.

A few years ago he returned. Among his new works are such mordant (though less gentle-spirited) photographic pieces as *Home Repair* (2011), which joins an X-ray of (presumably) a body part with a wince-inducing color photo of stitched flesh, looking like overstuffed upholstery. Two shallow, wall-mounted boxes strung with wire contain landscape photographs; in one, fragmentary handwritten paper notes are hung like laundry on the stretched lines. On a table, wooden boxes, partly filled with feathers, also have notes in them, written in various hands. Other boxes contain rocks, or combinations of these materials: enigmatic conjunctions of the implacably obdurate and the seductively yielding.

Inscribed on the edge of one box is the suggestion, "When you have three hundred and forty ideas you should hide and wait . . . then sort them out." Ambivalence about renouncing his art abstinence can be felt to varying degrees throughout Kinmont's recent work. The force of this reluctance, in a culture of epidemic self-expression, is remarkably sharp.

—Nancy Princenthal