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Art in Review



SYLVIA PLIMACK MANGOLD AND BROOKLYN MUSEUM

Sylvia Plimack Mangold's "Floor With Laundry No. 3" (1971), which spoofs scatter art with feminist wit.

Sylvia Plimack Mangold

'Floors and Rulers, 1967-76'

Craig F. Starr
5 East 73rd Street, Manhattan
Through March 26

Sylvia Plimack Mangold started making precisely realistic paintings of hardwood floors, bare or with objects on them, and viewed from a bird's-eye angle, toward the end of the 1960s. The subjects of "Floors and Rulers, 1967-76," a fine time capsule of a show at Craig F. Starr, these paintings partly allude to the '60s revolution that found sculptors like Anthony Caro and Carl Andre ditching pedestals and placing their creations directly on the floor. (In a recent interview, Ms. Plimack Mangold mentioned that Mr. Andre had asked her to paint a portrait of one of his sculptures. She demurred.)

In "Floor With Laundry No. 3" (1971), Ms. Plimack Mangold

Painted three pieces of clothing on the floor, in that way spoofing the Post-Minimalist trend known as scatter art with feminist wit — that is, women do laundry; real men don't.

She further complicated matters by painting rulers on her floors. In "Exact Ruler II," from 1974, an 18-inch Exact brand metal ruler lies flat and perpendicular to wooden floor boards running from foreground to background. This sets up a play between the objective and the subjective.

In the real world, standard rulers enable measurements that will be the same from any and all perspectives, near and far. But a ruler appearing within the illusionary, elastic space of a painting cannot be trusted. There is reality as it appears to conscious beings, and reality as it is in itself, independent of any mind's perspective. Ms. Plimack Mangold's works explore this endlessly inviting conundrum with admirable efficiency.

KEN JOHNSON