

# The New York Times

ART IN REVIEW

THE NEW YORK TIMES, FRIDAY, MARCH 19, 2004

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## Manfred Pernice

Anton Kern  
532 West 20th Street  
Chelsea  
Through tomorrow

Storefront for Art and Architecture  
97 Kenmare Street, at Centre Street  
Little Italy  
Through April 3

If you have trouble wrapping your mind around the arcane yet appealing work of the German artist Manfred Pernice, these shows may do the trick. At Kern, he is showing new benchlike sculptures that characteristically blur the boundaries between art and design, sculpture and pedestal, public and private space. Titled "Commerzbank" or "Merzbank," the low-lying works play on the fact that bank is German for both bank and bench.

They also pay tribute to Kurt Schwitters's "Merzbau" environments, whose materials came from the street and whose nonsense name was excerpted from a 1919 bank advertisement. Made mostly from chipboard, the works' unassuming modesty is belied by oddly deliberate, even meticulous details and structural deviations. They suggest sturdy public benches that have been domesticated, with bits of tile, photographs and, in one case, a glazed ceramic object — so that they also become pedestals. Their indeterminate scale also evokes models for urban plazas and bunkers as well as horizontal paintings.

Although he has a wide cerebral streak, Mr. Pernice gets a lot of mileage from his feeling for materials and consummate sense of touch. This is confirmed in "Small Works, 1994-2004," at the Storefront for Art and Architecture, which is the perfect prologue to the sculptures at Kern. It includes 38 small works, most of them resembling architectural models.

Presented in suitably Pernicean chipboard vitrines, the models can seem architecturally plausible and current in their asymmetrical forms, cross-fertilization of commercial and residential formats and vivid touches of color and tiny images. A few are maquettes for large installations. But they are also finely detailed objects — painted sculptures or three-dimensional collages — in their own right.

Like all of Mr. Pernice's work, they isolate forms from across the manmade landscape and give them an indelible human touch. It is part of their appeal that you want to see them larger, so that they could actually change that landscape as well as our perceptions of it.

ROBERTA SMITH