

The New York Times

Group Exhibition

Tom Cugliani Gallery
508 Greenwich Street
Through Jan. 27

This very good show of four artists — two who are emerging and two who are unknown here — is about the different ways younger artists integrate language, the staple of Conceptual Art, with visual effect. Félix González-Torres has contributed a knee-high stack of blotter-sized sheets of paper, each printed with the single phrase "Ten Men Came, Only Three Returned," telegraphing a manly tale that might require reams of newsprint to recount in full.

Jessica Diamond is already known by her jokes and exclamatory statements writ large directly on the wall. Her latest, an enthusiastic homage that announces "Yes Bruce Nauman" in eye-splitting visual terms, is accountably funny. After all, Mr. Nauman has written his own name somewhat larger than usual in a 1967 neon piece titled "My Last Name Exaggerated 14 Times Vertically."

Appropriately, the two newcomers are given more space. Douglas La Tourette presents "How to Build a Better Birdhouse," a wall installation piece that combines wood birdhouses, dictionary drawings of birdhouses, two books (one by James Michener, the other by John James Audubon), and a series of poems. These gradually reveal that the artist equates birds with punctuation, words and thoughts and that his better birdhouse concerns the mind itself.

This is the first New York showing for the paintings of David Robilliard, a young British poet and artist who died of AIDS in 1988. His cryptic words and equally cryptic images, whose open outlines have the simplicity of letters, often give tender advice. "Nobody finds a dream man till they're asleep," says one painting. Robilliard's lines are dispensed in pure colors — black or the primaries — that charge his expanses of white canvas with a powerful radiance. Considering their simple means, these are unusually strong paintings. It is tragic that this artist's talent will develop no further.