

UP NOW

'Image in the Box'

Hollis Taggart

Through January 10

Joseph Cornell (1903–72) was the first great master of what has come to be called box art. His assemblages of scavenged objects—often alluding to places he'd never been and to people he'd never met—lovingly arranged in shallow, glass-covered boxes, first made their appearance in the 1930s and are now considered icons of the art form.

In this fascinating exhibition 14 pieces by Cornell are displayed alongside works by five contemporary American artists—Elspeth Halvorsen, Maureen McCabe, Leo Rabkin, Lucas Samaras, and Ted Victoria—who have, so to speak, taken the box and run with it. And they have done so in remarkably diverse directions.

toria's boxes projected images of such banal objects as a razor blade and a metal pop-top tab eerily materialize on a darkened screen. Halvorsen's almost monochromatic boxes feature ladders and architectural elements ordered with a geometric rigor that recalls the constructions of Louise Nevelson.

By contrast McCabe's boxes, festooned with gaudy feathers and toy animals, have a riotous, carnivalesque quality. *Ionia* (2007), one of many constructions incorporating antique pinball-game boards, pays homage to the celebrated lady illusionist of that name, who vanished mysteriously in 1911, as well as to the artist's own Celtic heritage with its paganism and magic. Rabkin's delightfully whimsical works are notable for their ingenious use of found objects. In one, miniature moonlike orbs that appear to float in a carrying case are in fact the glass balls used for roll-on deodorant.

As an interesting art-historical aside, the show includes a group of trompe l'oeil paintings of objects in fictive boxes by French Surrealist Pierre Roy (1880–1950), which, according to exhibition curator Jeffrey Wechsler, may constitute an important but heretofore overlooked source for Cornell's box constructions. Their inclusion dovetails nicely with the issues of artistic tradition, influence, and originality raised in the show.

—Elizabeth Wilson



Maureen McCabe, *Ionia*, 2007, mixed media on 1930s game board, 32¼" x 18¼" x 4¾".

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A glass-covered Samaras box of drafting compasses suspended like flies in a web, above a pebbled ground, at first seems remarkably close in format and technique to Cornell's reliquary-like (*Untitled*) *Sun Box for Carol* (ca. 1962) and *Soap Bubble Set-Lunar* (1958–59). But while Cornell evokes a world of childlike innocence, Samaras portrays an uninviting and possibly dangerous place. In Vic-