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By ROBERTA SMITH

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**John Franklin**

*Loughelton Gallery*

*19 Second Avenue (at First Street)*

*Through May 31*

John Franklin's exhibition involves so many different materials and techniques that it has some of the impact of a group show of several young, talented artists. Still, its ranginess is very lively and makes one curious about what will happen next.

In true 80's style, Mr. Franklin is mining several veins at once, attempting, in general, to produce a witty self-aware abstraction that includes elements of representation. The best piece on view is a blank canvas that has been stretched as tight as a drum and that comes complete with its own wood-carved drumstick, should you want to prove it. (It makes a great sound). A square surface coated only with clear glue, it is discreetly framed with thin strips of pony skin — possibly the material of choice among emerging artists this season. Exactly why Mr. Franklin uses the pony skin remains unclear, but it gives the painting a strange anthropological poetry that evokes the Wild West, where both ponies and drums saw quite a bit of action.

Almost as good is a wall piece that juxtaposes an image of wood grain printed in black on clear plastic with a cube of real wood, painted white so that its grain is sensuously apparent. The arrangement seems to propose the plastic image as an X-ray of, or two-dimensional extraction from, the real thing, while, a little distance above them, a burnished wood knob suggests itself as a reconstitution back into wood of the knot at the center of the plastic image. Here various notions of conversion and opposition accumulate, again, with a light poetic touch. Backed by Mr. Franklin's ease with an assortment of materials and structures, this supplies all the consistency his work seems to require for the time being.