

late the abstract shapes inherent in nature or to mediate seasonal moods—now joyous, now somber—aesthetically and ecstatically, but also to restore vitality to abstraction that had become too pure for its own good, and lost its “experiential basis,” as the artist George Segal put it in the 1960s. Gussow shows that it can be as fertile and dramatic as nature, innate to it yet doing its peculiarly independent dance of life.

—Donald Kuspit

Tony Feher D'AMELIO TERRAS

Five bright pink fan-shaped pieces of polystyrene, each four feet high, a foot deep, and eight feet wide, were laid out on the gallery floor for Tony Feher's recent exhibition. Taking literally the appellation of construction company Owens Corning's Fanfold insulation—plainly printed on the verso of each object—Feher simply partially unfolded



View of “Tony Feher,” 2009.

the pink sheets around a central pivot to make them appear like fans resting on the ground. Each was titled *Blossom*, 2009, as was the exhibition itself.

A selection of Minimalist tropes are here present and correct: monochromatic color, the emphasis on scale, the deployment of rhythmic repetition, the use of industrial materials, the withdrawal of the artist's hand, and the corresponding rise in the importance of the

viewer's role. These are taken as given. But the cumulative impression created by these objects at first hand—the cherry-blossom hue and the fanlike unfolding—at the same time produces an irrefutable sense of their relation to actual blossoms. Feher thus introduces interference into the phenomenological purity central to Minimalism, whose seductions art audiences now readily yield to, by connecting it with the contrary pull of the original artistic impulse of mimetic representation—as well as the now also venerable history of the *objet trouvé*.

Simply put, Feher has his cake and eats it. This is, I suspect, why the cheerful exuberance these sculptures evince as a first impression appears not only celebratory but triumphant. Their rejection of Minimalist gravitas veers close to being but doesn't ultimately come across as facile, since the barely there mechanism of Feher's intervention defuses the charge. Instead, the very simplicity of the materials and the process offers him a means of jumping across and through the boundaries of art, non-art, and anti-art.

The press release notes that extruded polystyrene is “notable in the industry for its ‘well established reputation for long-term reliability and superior resistance to the elemental forces of nature: time, water, cold, heat, and pressure.’” That is to say, the material itself is also taking a stab at transcendence—yet this historically charged notion is simultaneously undermined by being a property not of art but of an everyday industrial commodity. Furthermore, a tension exists between this supposed transcendence and the emphasis on efficiency—the insulation's unmentioned *raison d'être*—which is embodied in dissimilar ways in both its original function and Feher's re-presentation.

Relentlessly logical, entirely materialist, yet also illusionistic and arguably even soppy or at least sentimental, the exhibition offered a tongue-in-cheek reconsideration of the place of sculpture between art and the world. Feher's previous experiments in the repurposing of unlikely objects—featuring, for instance, columns of multicolored beverage crates, or plastic bottles topped with marbles or filled to varying degrees with liquids—have too often been unintentionally damned with the faint praise of being “poetic” or “lyrical.” That risk was certainly present here, too, but to my mind the interest and the appeal of these appropriated, modified polystyrene panels lies instead in the wildly divergent answers they offer to the basic question of how much or how little they have in actuality been transformed.

—Alexander Scrimgeour

Spencer Finch POSTMASTERS

In a darkish room you focus on the outline of a window, cast on a wall by a street lamp outside. Every so often a brighter light sweeps through the space, from the headlights of a car driving past, briefly lifting the room from darkness to a kind of twilight and then disappearing. There is nothing else to see.

This is Spencer Finch's *Paper Moon (Studio Wall at Night)*, 2009. But there is no street lamp, no window, no car; the work is an effect, or series of effects, laboriously re-created with various media, including a model train on a track, to bring to viewers this particular artifact from the artist's catalogue of memories. The endeavor is not unlike what is attempted by the narrator of Tom McCarthy's novel *Remainder* (2005), who, having lost a great deal of his memory, spends untold millions trying to re-create a feeling of authenticity he once had when entering an apartment building, going upstairs, and smelling liver being cooked—and it is an analogous effort that in part makes Finch's installation compelling. What also contributes is the uncanny universality of what is evoked—the press release may describe *Paper Moon* as “very boring” and “clearly not for everyone,” but this seems a rather cunning dismissal, meaning something very close to the opposite of what it says.

No memory is for everyone—it's very nearly part of the definition. But Finch argues this inarguable territory, grasping at the ungraspable, remaking the fruits of his own perception for consumption by others. In *The Shield of Achilles (Night Sky over Troy)*, 2009, he takes the process a step backward, relying on a historical catalogue of the constellations identified by Ptolemy to create a rendering of the night sky in 384 tin cans, each with a tiny pinprick light, hung from the ceiling in clusters. Here the epistemological catechism of his work involves not just wondering how one's perception of the thing matches or doesn't match the artist's; it involves imagining the artist imagining the original night, some two thousand years ago.



Spencer Finch, *Paper Moon (Studio Wall at Night)*, 2009, mixed media, dimensions variable.

The artist's methods are thorough and scientific—the colorimeter, the digital anemometer—and his ends are poetic. It would be too easy, in his installation *366 (Emily Dickinson's Miraculous Year)*, 2009, to neatly flip the operation and turn poetry into science, but instead Finch mounts an elegant defense against the flattening effects of time and scholarship, with a spiral configuration of 366 candles, in which each candle corresponds to a poem the prolific Dickinson is said to have written in 1862. Each candle burns for twenty-four hours—a gallery assistant lights the next candle in the sequence daily—and contains the color mentioned in the poem; if no color is mentioned, a plain white candle is used. Certainly plain and white are qualities overridingly associated with Dickinson, but the yearlong memorial, which exhorts us to remember the length of the effort as well as its results, is remarkably colorful, with frequent yellows, golds, and oranges.

Finch's work brings to mind James Turrell's installations, in the creation of perceptual effects through everyday techniques; artists such as Steve Roden and Jason Salavon, in the abstraction of information; and Ceal Floyer, in the careful reconstruction of things most people wouldn't look twice at. His practice would be arid if it were simply about the scientific re-creation of things past, but there is a great deal of real pleasure in encountering his work—*The Shield of Achilles* is a nifty little shortcut to the sublime; *Paper Moon* has an economic melancholy—as well as in the kind of mental exercise it entails. In trying to capture fleeting things, he runs the risk of or even courts failure, but this itself leads us to think about how precise any depiction of anything at all can be, and thus his efforts bloom into something new, something just to the side of what one might be expected to remember—not the poetry but the colors, not the window but the anxiety—something that arises from the combination of a memory and the desire for it.

—Emily Hall

Sopheap Pich

TYLER ROLLINS FINE ART

Sopheap Pich is one of very few Cambodian artists exhibiting internationally at present, having appeared in exhibitions in Hong Kong, Singapore, and Norway, and in triennials in Japan and Australia. At the end of Pol Pot's devastating rule, an eight-year-old Pich together with his family ended up in relocation camps in Thailand, where they lived for several years before making their way to the United States. Pich received an American university education and attended graduate



Sopheap Pich, *Junk Nutrients*, 2009, bamboo, rattan, wire, plastic, rubber, metal, cloth, resin, 65 x 49 x 29".

school at the Art Institute of Chicago. He returned to Cambodia, at age thirty-two, in 2002.

Though Pich had studied to be a painter, in 2004 he started making sculptures from rattan, bamboo, and wire; he abandoned painting altogether the following year. His earliest sculptures were abstract installations or replicated forms of internal organs. He has occasionally returned to these works, as with the lung sculpture *Silence, Version 4*, 2009, which was included in this exhibition along with several other sculptures based on organ shapes, including a semiabstract double stomach-shaped sculpture made of rattan and wire (*Cycle 2, Version 3*, 2008).

While aspects of these two works are reminiscent of the refined contours of ancient Khmer statues, they also owe a debt to the penchant for carefully realized, idiosyncratic forms of his influential teacher Ray Yoshida at the Art Institute. Pich identifies the bamboo and rattan materials with the fishing culture of his boyhood in the Battambang province (the bamboo is harvested locally with the help of assistants). He also comments, however, that the see-through cross-ribbing that makes up both the armature and the surface of these objects is symbolic of the desire for a transparent political system.

In the catalogue accompanying the exhibition, titled "The Pulse Within," Pich states that it is his intention to explore "the underlying aspects of the country." In the context of the history of Cambodia, Pich's materials are common, even utilitarian, although it seems pertinent that rattan furniture was a staple of the colonial household, too. He is seemingly following the implicit instruction for artists expressed in the philosopher Hubert Damisch's observation that "one must have perfectly assimilated the past before going forward."

Junk Nutrients, 2009, one of two sculptures that have a solid, opaque surface, is a long, curling, tubelike object that has the approximate circumference of a soccer ball and is made of bamboo, rattan, wire, and burlap that has been dyed the color of dried blood. From one end of it spills a thick mass of nylon rope, fishing line, long necklaces of plastic pipe, stuffed bicycle inner tubes, and stringed lengths of various plastic caps. These are discarded items found on the shores of Boeung Kak, a large lake in Phnom Penh, where the artist has a studio. These objects, partially strung or woven into long strands, resemble semiabstracted versions of bricolage, which is the primary quotidian art form among the populace of the city, who improvise shoes, bicycle baskets, rice scoops, etc., from oilcans, old tires, plastic caps, and found ammunition.

The largest piece in the exhibition, *Raft*, 2009, collects long, box-shaped, vaguely architectural forms into a kind of spectral cityscape resting upon a pair of pontoons that also resemble large shell casings. This is an allusion to the huge number of bombs dropped on eastern Cambodia by the US during the Vietnam War, some of which were retrieved from the countryside for their steel to be used in rebuilding Phnom Penh. In another sense it is the rising city floating toward the artist as the lake in front of his studio is filled in to receive new urban development. *Raft* thus has a more satiric edge than the other works and seems to move beyond the dichotomy of abjection and quiet opulence to something at once humorous and monstrous.

—Joe Fyfe

White Columns Annual

WHITE COLUMNS

For the opening only, a video made in conjunction with this past summer's exhibition "Mirror Me" at Dispatch in New York's Chinatown was the lodestar of the fourth iteration of "Looking Back: The White