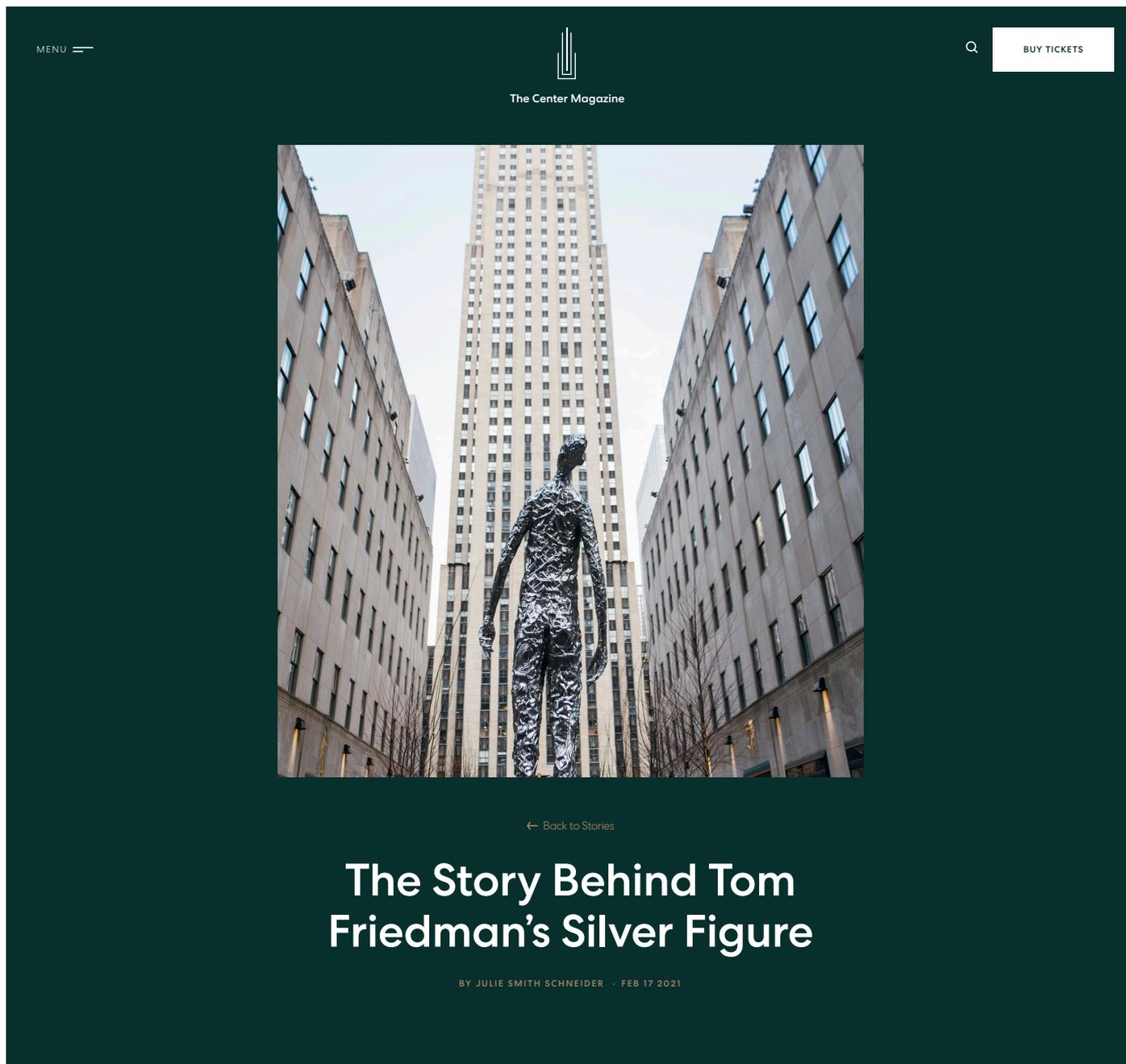


Julie Smith Schneider: “The Story Behind Tom Friedman’s Silver Figure”, Rockefeller Center Magazine, 17 febbraio 2021.

<https://www.rockefellercenter.com/magazine/arts-culture/the-story-behind-tom-friedmans-silver-figure/>



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## The Story Behind Tom Friedman’s Silver Figure

BY JULIE SMITH SCHNEIDER · FEB 17 2021

On Fifth Avenue, a lone figure stands frozen in apparent wonder, with body curved back, head tilted to the side, and eyes cast upwards. But it's not alone for long. Passersby feel compelled to pause and join in for a spell, matching this being's stance with their own bodies and following its magnetic gaze to a peak in the cityscape: the tip-top of 30 Rockefeller Plaza, and the sky beyond. On one frigid afternoon in late January, a couple wearing matching red jackets bring their scooters to a halt on the sidewalk and lean in for a closer look.

The sun reflects off of the figure's silvery, larger-than-life body, which stretches about 10 feet tall—the height of a regulation basketball hoop—and glints off the crumpled terrain of its surface. Closer examination reveals that it is imprinted with the textures and forms of aluminum roasting pans, pie plates, and assorted baking tins. This is "Looking Up," a public sculpture by conceptual artist Tom Friedman that's on display at the entrance to the Channel Gardens (on Fifth Avenue between 49th and 50th Streets) through March 19.

Friedman's professional art career spans three decades, marked by an ever-expanding constellation of ideas and visual feats that play with the boundaries of logic and perception. Rather than a stylistic throughline, it's Friedman's distinctive way of turning ideas into tangible, physical forms, often laced with deadpan humor and painstaking attention to detail, that underpins his work. "I don't like being pigeonholed into doing one particular thing, which makes it fun for me," Friedman says. "Maybe [that] makes it difficult for people to see the thread through my work, but I like that. It challenges people to

# VISTAMARE | VISTAMARESTUDIO

see a continuity. The continuity is the lack of continuity.”

Born in 1965, Friedman grew up in St. Louis, Missouri, and now lives and works in Massachusetts. Ever since his parents put a crayon in his hand, he says, he hasn't stopped making art. After studying graphic illustration at Washington University in St. Louis, he earned a Master of Fine Arts in sculpture from the University of Illinois at Chicago. There, in his second year of grad school, he unlocked his particular “point of departure” as an artist and started making the pieces—rooted in meditative ritual, intensive labor, circular logic, and irreverent materials—that would launch the early part of his career: A bar of soap inlaid with an immaculate thin, spiraling black line made from the artist's own pubic hair. A tangled maze-like mass made from a box of cooked and dried spaghetti noodles connected end-to-end to form a single continuous loop. An explosive starburst sculpture made from 30,000 toothpicks.

An arrow-straight timeline isn't important for understanding Friedman's body of work. “It's almost like molecules,” Friedman said in a [2018 video](#). Conceptually and in gallery settings, his artwork “can be put together in many different ways. The chronology isn't so important.” It's more like an interconnected web. A particular material, say a pencil or aluminum foil, that was the basis of one sculpture might reappear years later with a totally different reinterpretation.

“I tend to do one thing and then look to the opposite,” Friedman noted in one [video](#) about the making of Rockefeller Center's “Looking Up.” True-to-form, Friedman had made a sculpture called “Looking Down,” featuring a standing, slouched figure doing just that while peeing. Swinging his creative pendulum in the opposite direction, Friedman decided to make a sculpture of a figure gazing upwards. Versions now exist in varying scales and postures, installed in a few locations—all titled “Looking Up” to reference the literal stance of the figure, as well as the other meaning of the idiom: a sense of optimism and positive change.

With each “Looking Up” installation, the figure takes on new associations as the setting changes. Its current home on the Rockefeller Center campus lends the grandeur and history of the surrounding architecture. Mere steps from the bustling sidewalk of Fifth Avenue, buzzing with city life, the figure pauses in a place where locals and tourists mingle. “It's a temporary sculpture; I feel like it's a tourist,” Friedman adds. “In a way, it's mimicking what a tourist would do: looking around—especially in that iconic location with the [30 Rockefeller Plaza] building, jutting up into the heavens.”

“Looking Up” was unveiled in Rockefeller Center's Channel Gardens on January 20, which was also Inauguration Day. “There was something significant about the time that it was installed and the positive references to it, at least for me, of looking up and what that represents: maybe a new beginning, hopefully,” Friedman says. The familiar, everyday materials most prominent in the making of the sculpture—lightweight aluminum pans—also may add to the sense of lightness of being, though the sculpture, in reality, weighs 700 pounds.

To create this piece, Friedman made the rounds at grocery stores, collecting aluminum pans with an assortment of ornamentation. In his studio, he created an armature and bulked it up with chunks of styrofoam and spray insulation, moving it around until the posture of the figure felt right. Hot-glue gun in hand, Friedman covered the foam body with a metal “skin,” using a mishmash of entire aluminum pans that added a bulbous surface quality and cut-up pieces, keeping the imprinted words and textures. (On the left foot, you can spot in backwards type, like a secret missive, these words: “Never lift by sides only. Always support the bottom.”) Once the silvery skin was in place, he covered gaps with aluminum tape and adjusted the figure's stance again, since it shifted in the process. Then, a fabricator cast the whole thing in stainless steel, using a lost-wax casting process, and polished it to a satisfying gleam. As substantial as the finished sculpture looks, its walls are only ¼-inch thick.

When it comes to dreams for what viewers will take away from their encounters with “Looking Up,” Friedman has soaring aspirations. “I hope that they look into the sky and have an epiphany. I want it to change their lives forever and make them into a better person, and then they're going to go out and do good things and spread the goodness around,” Friedman says, laughing and striking an exaggerated, starry-eyed tone. But he's not just joking around. “It's absurd, but I mean, isn't that what artists want?”

*“Looking Up” is on view at the entrance of the Channel Gardens, located on Fifth Avenue between 49th and 50th Streets, through March 19.*



Antonio Scoccimarro, “Conversations. Tom Friedman ‘Ghosts and UFOs; Projections for Well-Lit Spaces’ at Vistamarestudio, Milan”, *Mousse magazine.it*, 02 May 2018

Mousse Magazine ( <http://mousse magazine.it> )

## CONVERSATIONS

### Tom Friedman “Ghosts and UFOs; Projections for Well-Lit Spaces” at Vistamarestudio, Milan

Share



Courtesy: the artist; Vistamarestudio, Milano; Luhring Augustine, New York; Stephen Friedman Gallery, London. Photo: Ugo Dalla Porta

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

#### Tom Friedman and Antonio Scoccimarro in conversation

Vistamare first opened its doors in Pescara in 2001, headed by Benedetta Spalletti. Despite being in a “peripheral” location, over the years the gallery has earned itself the fame of being one of the most active research spaces in Italy, putting together a series of solo shows by artists from various generations and backgrounds: Getulio Alviani, Giovanni Anselmo, Pedro Barateiro, Rosa Barba, Pavel Buchler, Mimmo Jodice, Joseph Kosuth, Armin Linke, Louise Nevelson, Mai-Thu Perret, Ettore Spalletti and Haim Steinbach, to name but a few. Therefore, the announcement of the opening of a second gallery venue in Milan—Vistamarestudio—came as no surprise, and this time in collaboration with Lodovica Busiri Vici. For the opening show, the two gallerists decided to present a project that in a subtle manner takes possession of the gallery space, highlighting its volumes through a rarefied exhibition built on the very immateriality of light. The apparently empty spaces of Vistamarestudio thus host the light projections that make up *Ghosts and UFOs: Projections for Well-Lit Spaces*: a solo show by Tom Friedman (previously featured in Milan in a solo curated by Germano Celant in the Fondazione Prada venue in 2002) who for more than twenty years has worked on a witty Pop-conceptualist parody of Minimalism, process art and modernist reflexivity. On the occasion of the opening chapter of this new project, we posed a few questions to Friedman himself.

Antonio Scoccimarro: Can you tell me more about how you envisioned this new series of works? When did the process start? How did you select the subjects of these works? Is this the first time you've dealt with light projections?

Tom Friedman: This new work arose from several things coming together. My wife and I always have morning coffee together in bed where we chat about everything. During this time, especially in the spring we would become mesmerized by the slowly changing sunlight shining in through the waving trees and through the window, onto our bedroom wall. So I was thinking about doing a body of work that would signify a break in my artistic investigation, which had always focused on the use of material. I wanted to produce a show devoid of material, and projected natural light phenomena seemed like a good place to start. There was something interesting about the natural light projections on a wall not in a darkened space and without the standard video projection frame. They had the potential to be like hallucinations. Also, I was thinking about the effects of technology/social media on the self. Although it seems to be a vehicle for representing oneself, it actually draws us outside ourselves, in the search for self-affirmation. With this affirmation, we don't look at ourselves; we look to support those who allow us to affirm ourselves. My project has never been about aesthetics. It is about how we understand and process an experience. Art is the only medium for compressing an experience and asking one to reflect on that experience. Coming to the thought of simulating the phenomenon of light projected onto a wall in a lit space, I had to learn to use video-editing programs. The subjects of these projections came from my learning of possibilities in the video-editing processes. *Bugs*, one of the first projections, came from learning how to superimpose two separate videos. *One Minute Egg* came from learning how to take an image and rotate it in time. *Sun* and *Guardian* came from learning how to accumulate an animated sequence. Then I learned how to cut out parts of video footage to make *Shaky Window* and *Dotted Line*. I also learned how to construct a projection purely in the program with *UFO* and "Pong". There is so much that happens through this learning, and I am not a language person. Language for me is an obstacle.

AS: How did you plan the show in Milan? Is there any compositional difference from the presentation you did in New York at Luhring Augustine last year?

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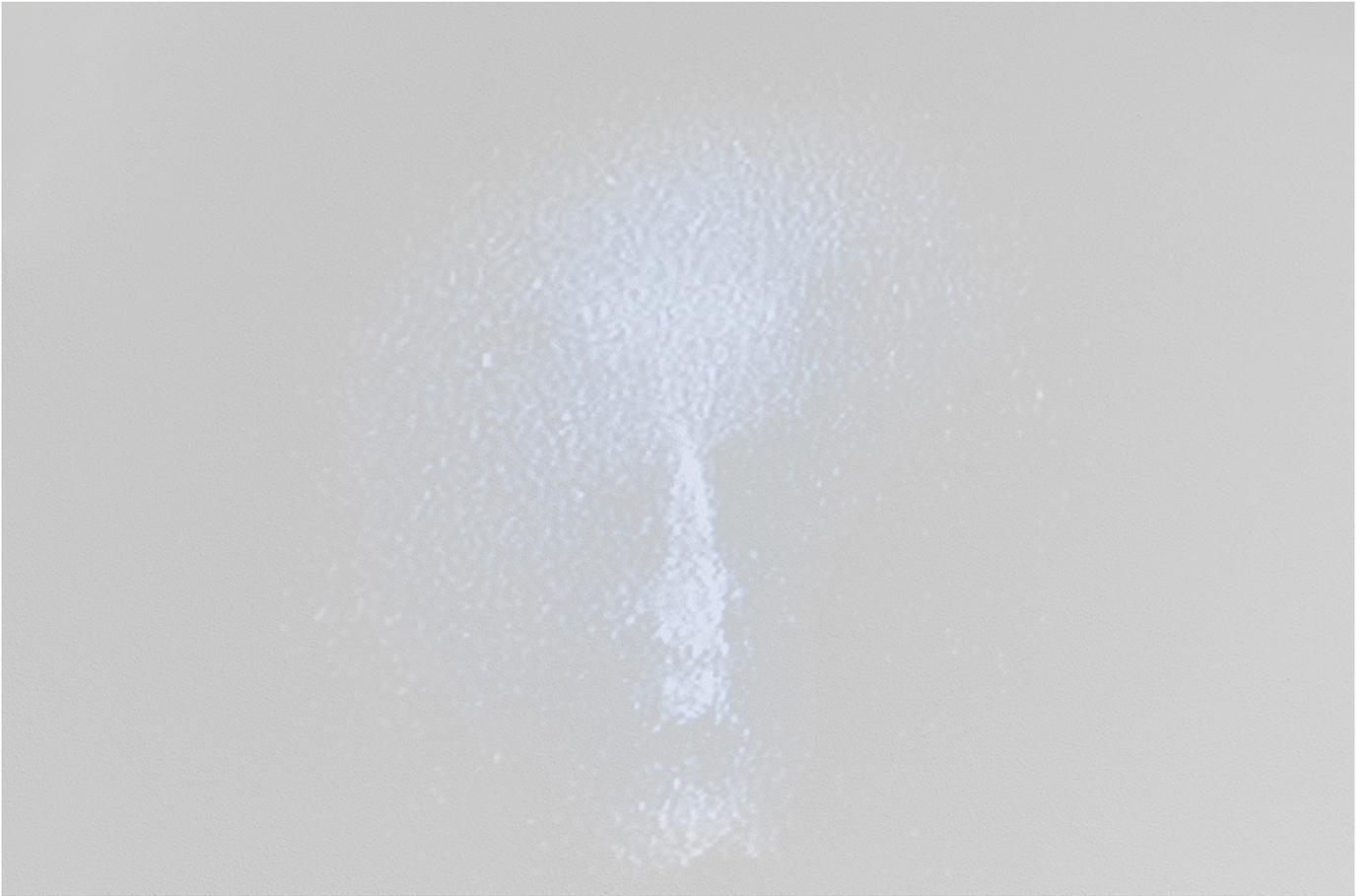
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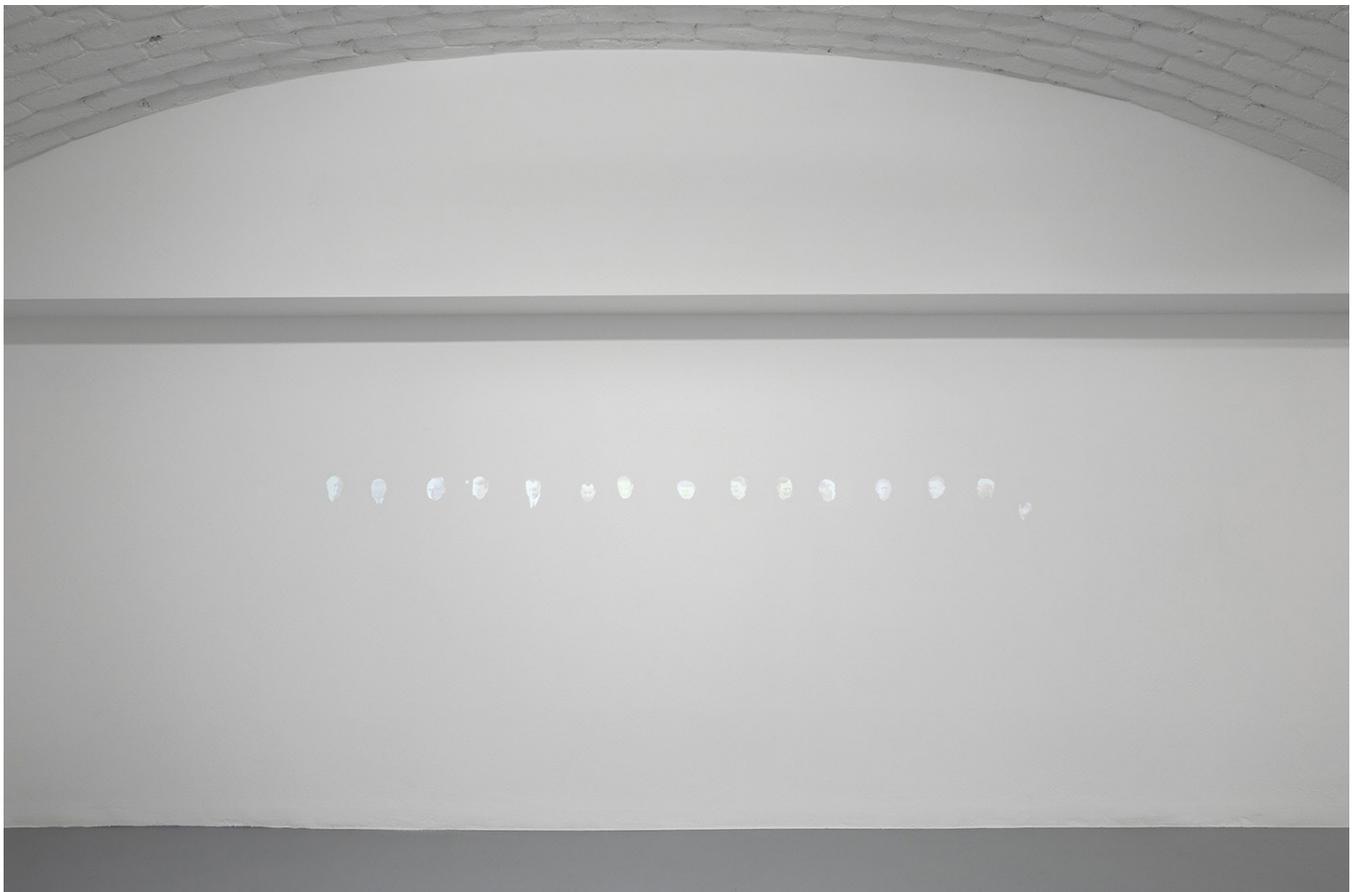
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at Vistamarestudio, Milan

(<http://www.vistamarestudio.com/>)until 26 May 2018



Courtesy: the artist; Vistamarestudio, Milano; Luhring Augustine, New York; Stephen Friedman Gallery, London. Photo: Ugo Dalla Porta



Courtesy: the artist; Vistamarestudio, Milano; Luhring Augustine, New York; Stephen Friedman Gallery, London. Photo: Ugo Dalla Porta



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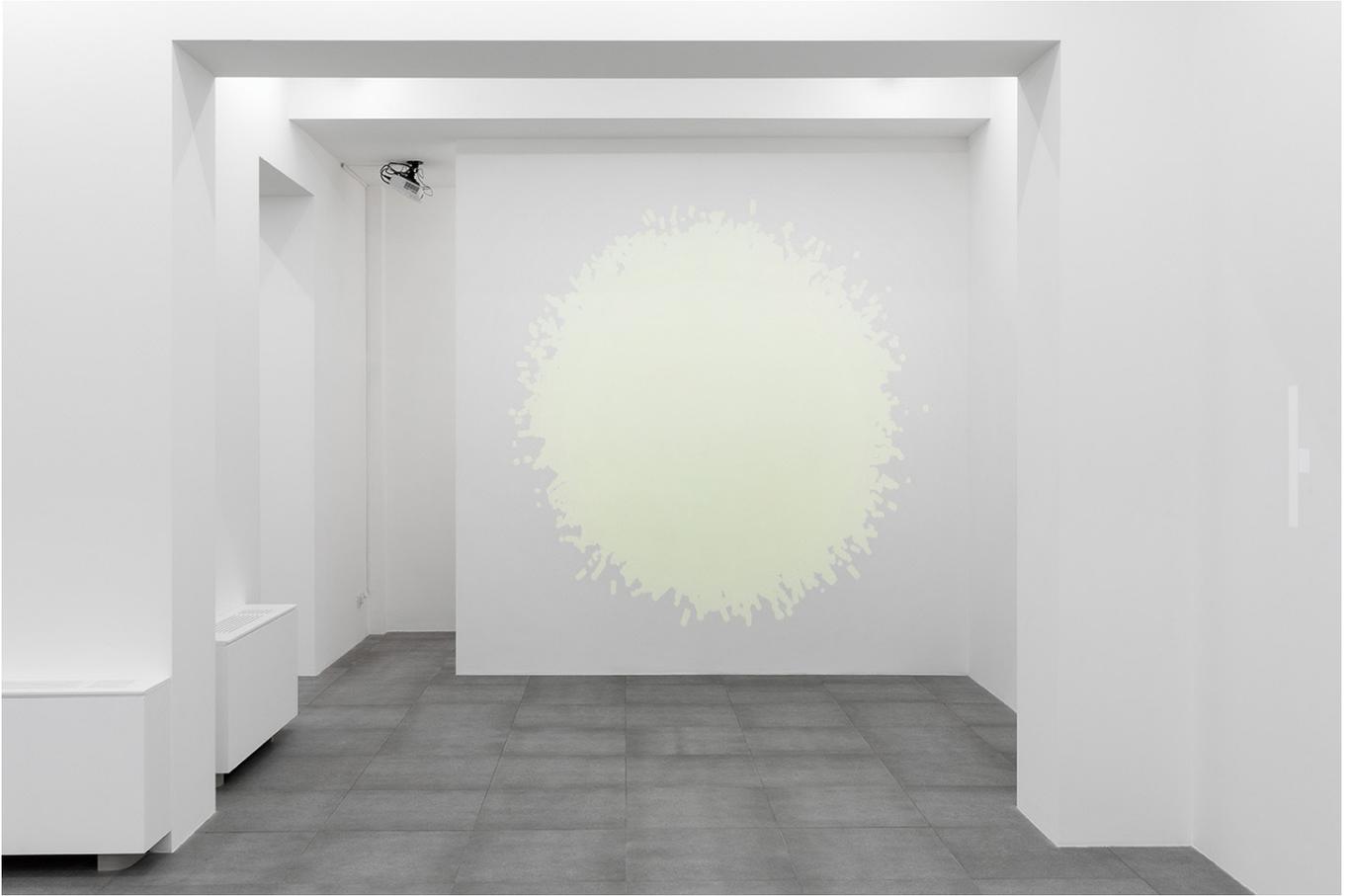
Courtesy: the artist; Vistamarestudio, Milano; Luhring Augustine, New York; Stephen Friedman Gallery, London. Photo: Ugo Dalla Porta



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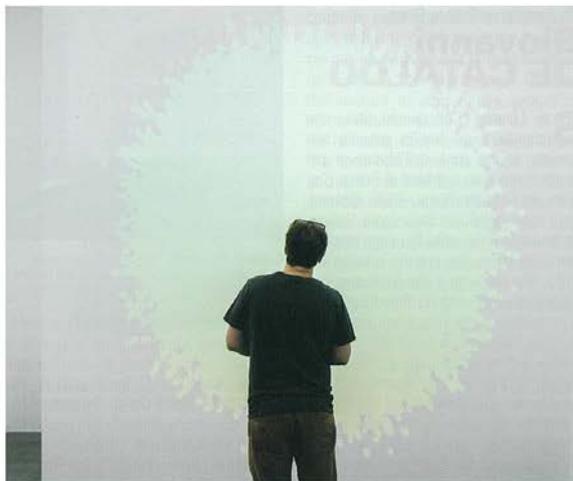


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Vistamarestudio, Milano

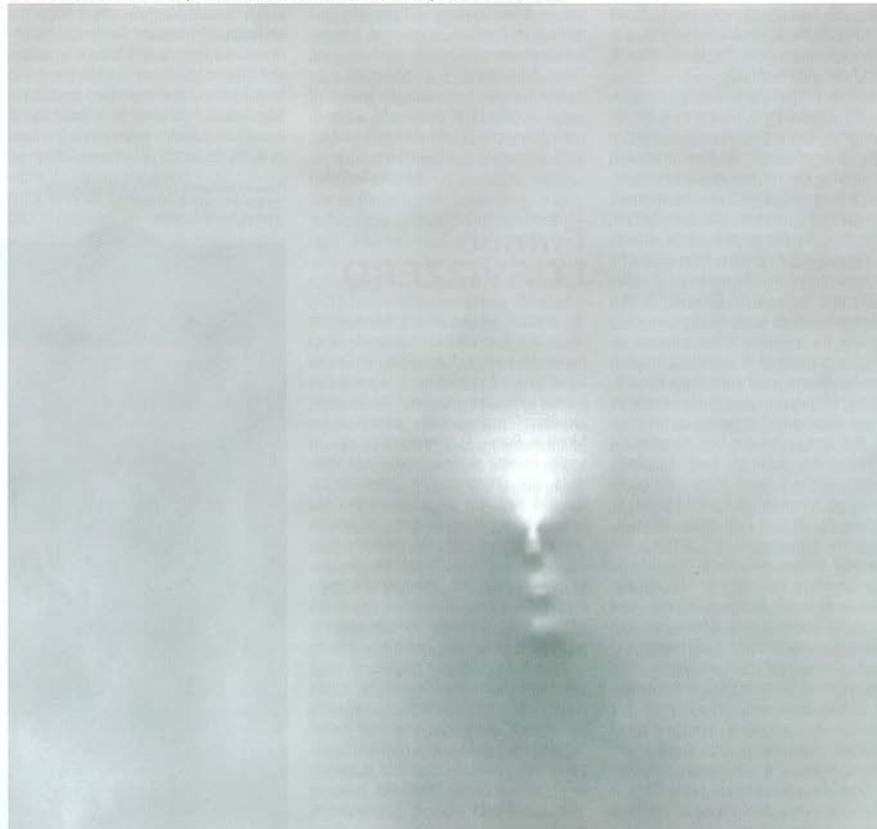
**Tom  
FRIEDMAN**

**H**a aperto a Milano Vistamarestudio con un solo show dell'artista americano Tom Friedman, grazie al quale il gusto e le tendenze del nuovo spazio sono apparse subito evidenti. Benedetta Spalletti e Lodovica Busiri Vici sono le due anime pulsanti di Vistamarestudio progettato insieme allo studio newyorchese "S4A – Space4Architecture" e descritto, sin dalle primissime dichiarazioni di entrambe, come un luogo neutrale privo di interventi architettonici particolarmente caratterizzanti e senza ostacoli alla vista dove, ad essere protagonisti sarebbero state solo le opere. Le aspettative non sono state tradite e l'intervento di Tom Friedman pare avere enfatizzato ancora di più il concept immaginato dalle due galleriste. Al fine di rispettare l'idea di valorizzazione delle opere, Friedman stupisce non inserendo alcuna opera (da intendersi quale oggetto fisico e toccabile, quadro o scultura che sia) ma agendo esclusivamente attraverso il mezzo video, aspetto che fra l'altro segna un nuovo inizio nella sua ricerca sulla smaterializzazione dell'oggetto tangibile in relazione allo spazio e alla luce. Sono tredici per l'esattezza le proiezioni installate nello spazio letteralmente il-

Tom Friedman, *Ghosts and UFOs*; Projections for Well-Lit Spaces Vistamarestudio, Milano

luminato a giorno, proiezioni velate ma intese che hanno avuto la capacità di movimentare lo spazio, svelandone i vuoti e pieni, sostanzialmente rendendo vivo ciò che per definizione è inanimato. Friedman ha concepito una vera e propria sinestesia del luogo partendo dall'osservazione della luce del sole filtrata dalle finestre in momenti diversi della giornata, i cui raggi dobbiamo immaginare essere stati percepiti dall'artista alla stregua di delicate presenze/non presenze – fantasmi o

ufo – reali/non reali ma comunque la si voglia pensare "vive". Ogni lavoro è presentato in loop con una diversa durata: si passa dal silenzio statico, dall'immobilità all'apparizione di oggetti, colori e figure che, come allucinazioni, confondono chi osserva e si fondono con l'ambiente. In questo modo, lo ribadiamo, Tom Friedman è stato capace, attraverso un'attenta e approfondita indagine fenomenica di restituire un nuovo volto al visibile.

**Gioia Sala**Tom Friedman, *Sun*, 2017 Video proiezione, muto. Dimensioni variabili. Courtesy Vistamarestudio, Milano

## Tom Friedman: Ghosts and UFOs; Projections for Well-Lit Spaces

Interview by Antonio Scoccimarro

Vistamarestudio  
Via Vittorio Veneto 30  
Milan, Italy  
vistamarestudio.com  
Through May 26

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Tom Friedman, *Wall*, 2017, *Ghosts and UFOs; Projections for Well-Lit Spaces* installation view at Vistamarestudio, Milan, 2018.

Courtesy: the artist and Vistamarestudio, Milan. Photo: Ugo dalla Porta.

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**CORRIERE DELLA SERA**

# la Lettura

#332

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**Tom Friedman**  
per il Corriere della Sera



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## laLettura



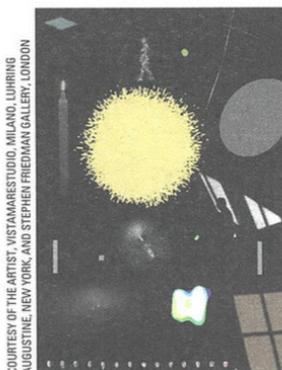
### Una copertina un artista

#### Il paradosso della fantasia



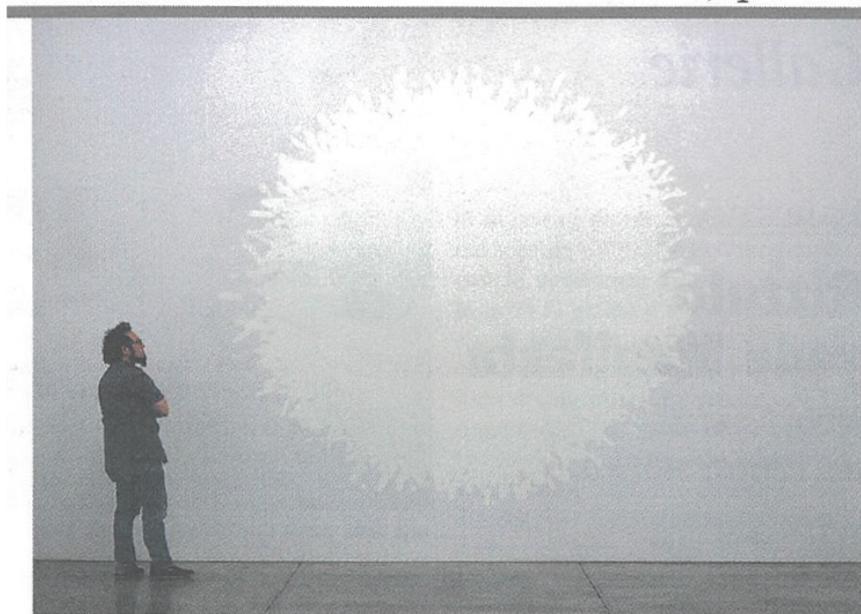
Una macchia gialla si impone al centro della copertina, mentre la luce di una candela fa da contrappunto a un insieme di elementi visivi: un volto stilizzato,

la figura di un uomo nell'ombra di una finestra, l'impronta di una mano, la memoria del primo videogame di tennis, e in basso, tanti piccoli ritratti dei presidenti degli Stati Uniti, da Truman a Trump. Tom Friedman (Saint Louis, Missouri, 1965) è un celebrato artista concettuale e ha realizzato per «la Lettura» una cover nella quale riunisce, con una buona dose di ironia, elementi autobiografici e la complessità della sua visione. Non a caso Friedman fa del paradosso e della fantasia surreale la sua cifra riconoscibile. Affermatosi con lavori scultorei in cui scomponeva e ricomponeva frammenti della mitologia quotidiana, Friedman si concentra sul concetto di smaterializzazione della realtà: ne sono prova le opere più recenti (alcuni video sono ora alla galleria Vistamarestudio a Milano) in cui spazio, luce ed esperienza diventano protagonisti di un lavoro incorporeo sulla consapevolezza della conoscenza. D'altronde, lo ricordava anche Giordano Bruno: «Colui che vede in sé stesso tutte le cose è al tempo stesso tutte le cose». (gianluigi colin)



COURTESY OF THE ARTIST, VISTAMARESTUDIO, MILANO, LUHRING AUGUSTINE, NEW YORK, AND STEPHEN FRIEDMAN GALLERY, LONDON

IL GIORNALE DELL'ARTE Numero 385, aprile 2018



«Sun» (2017) di Tom Friedman

© Tom Friedman. Courtesy of the artist, Vistamarestudio, Milan, Lühring Augustine, New York, and Stephen Friedman Gallery, London

## Milano

# Vistamare con vista Navigli

*La galleria abruzzese raddoppia la sede*

**Milano.** Sempre più attrattiva, Milano ha indotto una galleria propositiva e brillante come **Vistamare** (fondata nel 2001 a Pescara da Benedetta Spalletti, nipote del celebre artista) ad aprire un nuovo spazio anche nel capoluogo lombardo. Insieme a Benedetta Spalletti nella nuova galleria c'è Lodovica Busiri Vici, della storica famiglia romana di architetti, che si è formata prima da Barbara Gladstone a New York e Londra, poi da Lia Rumma a Milano. Le due galleriste hanno scelto uno spazio in viale Vittorio Veneto 30, nella zona di piazza Repubblica, accanto ai Giardini Montanelli, battezzato **Vistamarestudio**, e hanno affidato il progetto allo studio newyorkese S4A-Space4Architecture,

che ha realizzato uno spazio neutro e rigoroso, in cui le sole opere (che saranno in prevalenza site-specific) siano protagoniste. Per l'inaugurazione hanno scelto l'artista concettuale americano **Tom Friedman** (nato a Saint Louis, Missouri, nel 1965, vive e lavora nel Massachusetts) che, pur muovendosi all'interno della consueta indagine sul rapporto sensoriale tra osservatore e opera, presenta qui lavori appartenenti a una sua nuova ricerca sulla smaterializzazione dell'oggetto per effetto dell'interrelazione tra spazio e luce in una mostra intitolata «**Ghosts and UFOs; Projections for Well-Lit Spaces**» e aperta sino al 26 maggio. Nello spazio intensamente illuminato, muovendo dall'osservazione della luminosità delle finestre nelle diverse ore del giorno, l'autore mette in scena dodici proiezioni video di diversa durata, ognuna in loop, che invitano l'osservatore a un nuovo approccio sensoriale, grazie all'alternarsi di silenzi e momenti d'immobilità spezzati dal rivelarsi improvviso di oggetti, immagini, colori, dall'apparenza inafferrabile e allucinatória che, confondendosi con l'ambiente, inducono un effetto di spaesamento.

□ **Ada Masoero**

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Cristiana Campanini, "Tom Friedman scultore della luce inaugura la galleria Vistamarestudio", *La Repubblica*, 24 Marzo 2018, N. 71, pag. 15



La musica



Giuseppe Grazioli dà brillantezza alla Sinfonia di Kalinnikov

ANGELO FOLETTO

Del piacevole calco sinfonico cialkovskiano incarnato dalla *Sinfonia in Sol minore di n.1* di Vasilij Kalinnikov, la Verdi aveva già dato un'occasione d'ascolto quasi vent'anni fa. Il ritorno oggi, nella lettura consapevole e brillante di Giuseppe Grazioli (foto), dà lustro alla partitura oggi nota più per l'ammirazione che ne ebbe Arturo

Toscanini (e di cui è testimonianza l'impetuosa, quasi frettolosa, lettura del 1943 con l'Orchestra NBC) che non per testimonianza dal vivo. La partitura è ingenua e non sempre elaborata con fantasia soprattutto nelle sezioni centrali (lo sviluppo del primo tempo gira musicalmente a vuoto, ad esempio) ma è un bell'esempio di ispirazione e struttura tematica "nazionalistica". I due soggetti musicali caratteristicamente russi dell'*Allegro* d'avvio della sinfonia del 1895-96 (due anni dopo, ma sembra trent'anni prima, rispetto alla *Patetica* e alla morte di Ciaikovskij che aveva aperto ben altre strade) forniscono carburante musicale anche al tempo conclusivo, e i canti orienteggianti del "notturno" *Andante* centrale - punteggiati dallo sgocciolamento dell'arpa, inserimento anomalo rispetto all'organico sinfonico dell'800 - svelano un paesaggio sonoro delicatamente lirico. Grazioli la lavora con cura, sgrassandola da eccessi e lungaggini; puntando a rendere tersa più che sapida, colloquiale più che pomposa, la trama orchestrale. Facendola suonare snella e più prossima di quanto la scrittura non dica allo spirito ispirato e raffinato del *Concerto per violino* di Ciaikovskij, prima parte del programma della Verdi (replicato all'Auditorium domani alle 16), che già nella prova generale ha offerto a Stefan Milenkovič l'ennesima opportunità di dimostrare classe e strumentalismo smaltito e adamantino. La soavità nella *Canzonetta*, l'acume dei passi virtuosistici, inclusa la cadenza, e il finale scapricciato e veloce (ma non abbastanza per deludere gli echi di *Onegin* tra i legni) cifrano una realizzazione in cui non urge il peso dello strumentista ma la finezza dell'interprete.

MANFREDI LAMARTINA

Il teatro

L'identità di genere tra ironia e amarezza

SARA CHIAPPORI

Essere un eschimese di per sé non sarebbe grave. Lo diventa se, anziché tra i ghiacci del Nord, si ritrova in Amazonia. Il disagio è inevitabile, fa troppo caldo, i vestiti di pelle di foca sono inadeguati, il suo idioma pure. Insomma, è il contesto a generare il problema. Un *eschimese in Amazonia* (titolo rubato all'attivista Igb Porpora Marcasciano) è l'ultimo capitolo di una trilogia sull'identità di genere firmata da Liv Ferracchiati per la sua compagnia The Baby Walk, in decisa (e meritata) ascesa, anche dopo il passaggio all'ultima Biennale Teatro. Questa volta Ferracchiati, che declineremo al maschile perché tale si sente

dentro un corpo femminile e una terza possibilità linguistica ancora non la possediamo, è anche in scena a dichiarare concluso il discorso. Non perché si sia esaurito, ma perché l'Eschimese si è stancato di spiegare. Il problema non è lui/lei e in fondo nemmeno l'identità sessuale. Se le domande sono banali, lo saranno anche le risposte. Come per Silvia Calderoni in *MDLXX*, anche qui il dato autobiografico è imprescindibile come lo sono i riferimenti al filosofo Paul B. Preciado. Ma se lo spettacolo dei Motus è una spudorata confessione lisergica, quello di Ferracchiati sceglie l'ironia come esercizio dell'intelligenza applicata alle possibilità del

teatro e all'invenzione di una drammaturgia antinarrativa che introietta e restituisce il corto circuito della comunicazione contemporanea. Dunque c'è lui, felpa e cappuccio, e c'è un coro (Greta Cappelletti, Laura Dondi, Giacomo Meretelli Priorelli, Alice Raffaelli), tutti uguali, parlano, scandiscono, si muovono all'unisono. Compatti, impermeabili e impenetrabili come il pensiero dominante con il suo immaginario ultrasemplificato. Un reality di Maria De Filippi, Masterchef, Lady Oscar, Holly e Benji. Arrivederci amore ciao e Vita spericolata, lo slang social, la bulimia indotta da internet, Trump e la Corea del Nord. Tutto è uguale a tutto, nel frullato pop assunto in dosi massicce anche dall'Eschimese, a sua volta sprovvisto di parole che non siano stereotipi nonostante le "sudate perifrastiche". Divertente, acuto, disincantato, questo spettacolo è un'ipotesi di sconfitta che non rinuncia alla ribellione. Ferracchiati.

personalità schiva con qualcosa di selvatico, non ama apparire, ma in scena ha una luce speciale, qualcosa di magnetico. Ci piacerebbe non fosse l'unica apparizione. A Campo Teatrale, via Cambiasi 10, ancora oggi e domani. Tel. 0226113133.

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ROCK NOTES

Marlene Kuntz prima acustici poi super rock nella stessa sera

MANFREDI LAMARTINA

**CONCERTO DOPPIO** S'intitola "Il doppio" un appuntamento speciale dei Marlene Kuntz previsto per il prossimo 31 maggio al Magazzini Generali: in apertura un'esibizione in acustico per sole 150 persone e, a seguire, un concerto decisamente rock per un pubblico più ampio.

**DE LEO SUONA DA SOLO** Francesco De Leo, voce dei milanesi L'Officina della Camomilla, ha recentemente pubblicato due canzoni da solista, *Muse* e *Mylene*, tra il cantautorato degli anni Sessanta e il pop del Duemila. L'album, prodotto da Giorgio Poi, uscirà ad aprile.

**ALLA SCALA IN PEDALÒ** La fine dell'inverno fa già venire voglia di mare, anche a Milano: "Alla Scala tutti in pedalò, in piazza Affari prendi l'ombrellone, sandali ray-ban e parei, voglio lei, solo lei. Siamo milanesi al mare", cantano gli Zen Circus in *Milanesi al mare*.

DIETRO LE QUINTE

Con Goldoni il Piccolo va alla conquista del Mediterraneo

SARA CHIAPPORI

**ADULTI SOLO CON MINORI** La bugia infantile spesso è creativa. Più contigua all'invenzione letteraria che alla menzogna opportunistica. Si basa su questo la performance interattiva per ragazzi *Remember the Dragons* del collettivo belga Berlin, oggi e domani al Lac di Lugano. Gli adulti entrano solo se accompagnati da un bambino e compongono per loro è predisposta una stanza separata perché i nordici sono meno mammoni di noi e i figli li lasciando andare. Intelligente e divertente, arriverà anche a Milano il prossimo autunno a Zona K.

**DUE SPETTACOLI IN TOURNÉE** Domani al Grassi, ultima replica del Teatro comico di Goldoni diretto da Roberto Latini. Giusto il tempo di fare i bagagli e lo spettacolo parte per Tunisi, dove sarà in scena il 29 marzo per poi andare a Istanbul, mentre l'intramontabile *Arlecchino* di Strehler è atteso ad Algeri. Piccolo e Commedia dell'Arte alla conquista del Mediterraneo.

CHI SALE, CHI SCENDE

Casa Boschi dov'è costei? Urge segnaletica per i visitatori

CHIARA GATTI

**PORTALUPPI IN RESTAURO** Comune e FAI si incontreranno la prossima settimana per valutare il piano dei restauri. Partiranno a breve i lavori all'Albergo Diurno Venezia in piazza Oberdan, gioiello di art déco nel sottosuolo di Milano, progettato da Piero Portaluppi e affidato al Fondo Ambiente Italiano. L'intervento, che durerà circa un anno, renderà lo spazio adatto per una apertura permanente. Finalmente.

**PORTALUPPI NASCOSTO** La Casa-Museo Boschi Di Stefano, nel palazzo di Piero Portaluppi, è uno dei luoghi della Milano nascosta più amati dal pubblico. Peccato che, per raggiungerla, in via Giorgio Jan, molti si perdano in assenza di indicazioni. Non sarebbe male abbinare, in metrò, al nome della fermata "Lima" anche il nome della casa e poi seminare una manciata di indicazioni agli incroci di Buenos Aires con via Redi e via Plinio.

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La mostra



Tom Friedman scultore della luce inaugura la galleria Vistamarestudio

CRISTIANA CAMPANINI

Basta un'ombra a parete. Oppure un riflesso che irrompe da una finestra di prima mattina. Nella sua opera Tom Friedman distilla lo stupore per le piccole cose con un rigore formale affilato. Lo raccontava la personale allestita alla Fondazione Prada nel 2002, dove disseminava insetti e oggetti minimi, ai margini della nostra esperienza quotidiana.

E lo conferma la mostra che inaugurerà stasera alle 19 da Vistamarestudio (via Vittorio Veneto 30), new entry milanese animata dalla gallerista di Pescara Benedetta Spalletti e da Lodovica Busiri Vici, con lunga esperienza in galleria, da Barbara Gladstone a Lia Rumma. Classe 1965, maestro del concettuale americano, Tom Friedman è scultore dagli echi post pop, già al MOMA, ma anche eterno ragazzino che sceglie la schietta campagna del Massachusetts per inseguire nella solitudine del suo studio una ricerca a caccia di emozioni inaspettate e piccole magie. Al centro della sua opera c'è stata finora la materia. Qui lascia il posto alla luce. Nel neonato white cube su due livelli, Friedman scandisce gli spazi con una sequenza di 12 video in loop, brevi apparizioni ironiche e ipnotiche, già esposte l'anno scorso a New York. In spazi luminosissimi, i confini delle proiezioni si fanno evanescenti. Nessun respiro narrativo, solo pura astrazione. Ogni immagine prende spunto dalla vita reale: un aquilone al vento, la sua mano che tenta di uscire da un muro, un uomo che passa davanti a una finestra (sempre lui, in ogni opera), una candela che brucia senza sosta, il frammento di un film (dal musical di Gene Kelly e Fred Astaire alla fantascienza di George Lucas) o un videogame dalla sua adolescenza, il Pong, agli albori del digitale. Proiezioni a parte, forte resta la tensione verso la terza dimensione. «Non è ancora possibile trasformarli in ologrammi. Ma sogno già che si materializzano al centro di una stanza». Di nuovo scultura quindi, ma questa volta di luce.

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Cristiana Campanini, "Tom Friedman scultore della luce inaugura la galleria Vistamarestudio", *laRepubblica.it*, 24 Marzo 2018

Sei in: Archivio > la Repubblica.it > 2018 > 03 > 24 > Tom Friedman scultore del...

## Tom Friedman scultore della luce inaugura la galleria Vistamarestudio

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Cristiana Campanini

24 marzo 2018 | sez.



## Immagini sotto la superficie / Vistamarestudio

Mar 31, 2018 | Arte e storie simili



Quando da bambini si guardavano le immagini che i giochi di luce proiettavano sulle pareti, spaventati di vedere in quelle figure, un essere mostruoso che spiava ogni movimento, tutto era intriso di una fede, resa cieca dalla paura, **nel fantastico**.

Quell'idea di visione apparente (che etimologicamente ha a che fare con l'apparizione) viene mantenuta da **Tom Friedman** che a **Vistamare**, nuova sede a Milano, presenta alcuni suoi lavori realizzati tra il 2016 e il 2018.

**Sono tutte figure video del linguaggio del quotidiano** che vengono proiettate, muovendosi, sulle pareti bianche della galleria.

Esistono in uno stato di **latenza eterna** perché si ha la sensazione che l'immagine non emerga mai e al contempo ricordano lo stato tipico dell' **apparizione**, come già riportato, che ha vaghe affinità con le fantasmagorie settecentesche di cui non mantengono, nonostante il titolo, l'analogia con il mondo delle tenebre e con la spettacolarizzazione.

I lavori di Friedman risultano delicati nella loro impercettibilità che appunto si gioca su una linea molto sottile tra manifestazione e scomparsa, ma non hanno nessun intento ludico o scenografico.

La loro consistenza, o mancanza di consistenza, **le rende più delle parvenze**, delle memorie, degli echi che sottraggono, senza farlo però del tutto, il referente, valorizzandolo nella sua presenza che si fa più opaca.



*Tom Friedman, Shaky Window, 2017 Video proiezione, muto. Dimensioni variabili Video projection, silent. Dimensions variable © Tom Friedman; Courtesy of the artist, Vistamarestudio, Milan, Luhring Augustine, New York, and Stephen Friedman Gallery, London.*

Un aquilone, un sole, una candela, una finestra sono tutti oggetti immediatamente riconoscibili che nell'istante producono associazioni con figure tangibili che siamo soliti conoscere molto bene, ma la loro natura impone una riflessione più paziente.

La loro presenza sulla parete sembra messa in discussione dalla mancanza di concretezza dell'opera.

Ho fatto una prova: ho provato ad oscurare una figura, usurpando il diritto di visibilità della proiezione, compromettendola,

vulnerabilità che è insieme il suo valore.

L'inconsistenza dell'immagine che c'è e non c'è, che viene percepita, direi quasi **sotto pelle, sotto la superficie del sensibile** appartiene alla sfera dell'allucinazione e dell'illusione che abita lo spazio del liminale e per sua natura è imprevedibile.

La vedi, ma ti sfugge sotto gli occhi.

Al limite, al confine, nel limbo della visione, Tom Friedman ha riflettuto a partire da un fattore con cui ha avviato il suo progetto, ovvero la luce e la sua interferenza nello spazio e nel tempo con cui viene ripensata la consapevolezza della visione e della visibilità, recuperando un valore aggiunto nell'assenza dell'immagine che lascia andare ormai l'oggetto e il significante.

*Cecilia Angeli*

*In cover: Tom Friedman, Alien, 2018 Video proiezione, muto. Dimensione variabile. Video projection, silent. Dimensions variable © Tom Friedman; Courtesy of the artist, Vistamarestudio, Milan, Luhring Augustine, New York, and Stephen Friedman Gallery, London.*

Ghosts and UFOs: Projections for Well-Lit Spaces / Vistamarestudio

dal 24 marzo al 26 maggio 2018

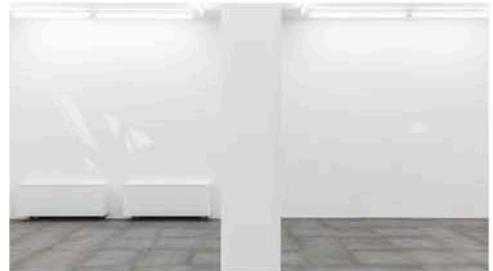
presso Vistamarestudio, Viale Vittorio Veneto 30, 20124 Milano

**[www.vistamarestudio.com](http://www.vistamarestudio.com)**

Simone Menegoi, "Tom Friedman", *Artforum*, Marzo 2018

## ARTFORUM

CRITICS' PICKS



Installation view of Tom Friedman's "Ghosts and UFOs: Projections for Well-Lit Spaces," 2018.

MILAN

## Tom Friedman

VISTAMARESTUDIO

Viale Vittorio Veneto 30

March 24 - May 26

Usually, the minimum condition for projecting a video is that the room is dark or at least in semidarkness. Not in Tom Friedman's case. The videos in this exhibition—the American artist's first works in the medium and their inaugural showing in Italy—are conceived to be displayed in fully illuminated spaces. The projected images are mostly simple outlines of light in motion, white on white walls: an ovoid that slowly rotates on an axis (*One Minute Egg*, 2017); the silhouette of a man—the artist—walking (*Guardian*, 2017); a simulated blazing sun (*Sun*, 2017). Friedman contrived the unusual approach after he witnessed squares of sunshine refracted by a window onto a wall in his home. One of the most alluring works in the show, *Shaky Window*, 2017, reproduces precisely this phenomenon, to unsettling effect. Observing what appears to be slanted daylight, one's first impulse is to look around in search of a window that isn't there.

Friedman's incursion into video is interesting for more than one reason. First of all, he proposes an evocatively "regressive" use of the projector, transformed into a mere source of white light. (Only a couple works, such as *Candle*, 2016, resort to color and chiaroscuro.) Secondly, he removes the projected image from the usual black box and places it in a white cube, rendering the latter integral to the work. *Wall*, 2017, for example, is the projection of a hand, palm open, which seems to emerge from the wall's surface. Finally, with these white-on-white projections, evanescent as mirages—the show's title is "Ghosts and UFOs: Projections for Well-Lit Spaces"—Friedman seems to have found an approach to video that is completely consistent with his poetics: a meticulous exploration of the fantasies and hallucinatory potential hidden in the interiors of everyday life.

*Translated from Italian by Marguerite Shore.*

— Simone Menegoi

Sarah Cascone, "Spring Art Shows", *Artnet News*, 5 April 2016

## See New York's Most Stunning Public Art Shows This Spring

Despite the fluctuations in temperature, the change in seasons is undeniable: Spring is here at last!

In honor of the onset of warmer weather, we've rounded up the city's most exciting art installations, [just as we've done the last two years](#). From Central Park and the High Line to Rockefeller Center and Park Avenue, here's the lowdown on what to put on your to-see list.



Tom Friedman, *Looking Up*.  
Photo: courtesy Luhring Augustine.

# STEPHEN FRIEDMAN GALLERY

Artnet news  
Spring Art Shows  
5 April 2016  
Sarah Cascone

## **10. [Tom Friedman](#), *Looking Up*, [Park Avenue](#)**

Don't forget to tilt your head skyward next time you find yourself on Park Avenue in the 50s, where Tom Friedman's whimsical 33-foot-tall figure, *Looking Up*, stands tall.

Formed from crushed aluminum foil roasting pans and cast in stainless steel, the project is a joint presentation by New York's [Luring Augustine](#), London's [Stephen Friedman Gallery](#), [New York City Parks](#), and the [Fund for Park Avenue](#). (Another edition of the sculpture is [permanently on view the Contemporary Austin](#).)

*Park Avenue between East 53rd and 54th Streets; January–July 15, 2016.*

MEAD MUSINGS: “inspired by the collection of the Mead Art Museum at Amherst College”, 2016

## MEAD MUSINGS

inspired by the collection of the Mead Art Museum at Amherst College

≡ MENU



## Interview with Artist Tom Friedman

An exciting exhibition opens this month at the Mead Art Museum, for which artist Tom Friedman has created eight works based on significant parts of the museum's permanent collection. Known for his unique approach to materials and everyday objects, the artist uses, in this case, glitter, glue, Styrofoam, and acrylic in translating classics such as Monet's *Morning on the Seine, Giverny* (1897) for contemporary viewers.

An artist whose work has been shown all over the world, Friedman lives nearby and teaches in the art department at the University of Massachusetts Amherst. He talked recently with the show's organizer, Vanja Malloy, curator of American art at the Mead, about everything from his work process to the philosophy he lives by.

**Vanja Malloy:** Your forthcoming exhibition at the Mead, *Tom Friedman: Untitled (Foundation)*, features eight new artworks inspired by works in the Mead's permanent collection. What motivated you to look at the museum's collection?

**Tom Friedman:** First of all, I love old art. It has more of a mystery to me than contemporary work. So the thought of being able to work with the Mead's collection was really interesting.

**VM:** For this new body of work, how important was it for you to know the history of the artwork you were responding to?

**TF:** I really wanted to respond to the image and the information that was there empirically and visually, make decisions, and then once I reached a certain point, I would read a little more about the work. I think that when I'm done, I'll probably have read a bit about each piece, but in the beginning, I really like the idea of not knowing. Interesting things come out that I didn't realize, like with [Dorothea Lange's] photograph *Migrant Pea Pickers*. Even though it's really about this line of immigrants, I noticed the subtext about the mother and son.



Dorothea Lange (American, 1895-1965). *Migrant Pea Pickers*, 1938. Vintage FSA silver print. Museum Purchase with Wise Fund for the Fine Arts, 2000.321



Tom Friedman (American, b. 1965). *Mother and Child*, 2016. Ink-jet print. Copyright Tom Friedman. Image courtesy of Tom Friedman Studio

**VM:** What's your working process? Is it different every time or is there a way you usually go about things?

**TF:** It's usually a process of me leading the artwork, and then the artwork leading me. But for this exhibition, I found the original works sort of beginning the process of leading me. I made a selection of works that I thought would be interesting, and then just tapped into my visual vocabulary, my history of works.

I found it similar to how I used to work, where I would respond to a familiar object and there was a really clear objective. And then as I transformed it, it would sort of turn back to the memory of what that original everyday object was. In this case, I feel that the work functions as the everyday object, and I'm responding to it, and it goes back and forth, creating this dialogue between the original piece and what it's becoming, what my piece is.

**VM:** You use everyday materials in your art — such as Styrofoam, aluminum, pencils, and plastic cups. Why is that?

**TF:** Well, in the beginning it was sort of, Okay, here's a pencil. What can I do to the pencil to transform it so that it's a transformed pencil but still relates back to the

pencil? And every so often I come back to that.

I think the last piece I did, at UMass University Museum of Contemporary Art, was a paper plate. What can I do to this paper plate? So I cut it in a certain way and then flipped it inside out. So it's an inside-out paper plate. The final piece and image — knowing that it was a paper plate really was important to it.

I also have an interest in Zen Buddhism, which is all about the everyday, and the magnificent in the ordinary. It doesn't matter what you're looking at. The profundity of seeing an opera and shopping at the grocery store can be equal in a way. That's a very Buddhist idea.

But right now, it tends to be more I use what is the most reasonable and efficient. I also have to think about archival issues to a certain degree.



Left: Tom Friedman (American, b. 1965), *Untitled (Flute Player)*, 2016. Styrofoam, paint, cotton shirt, socks, flip-flops, 66 x 25 x 49 in. Copyright Tom Friedman. Image courtesy Tom Friedman Studio. Right: Greek, Flying flute player, Myrina type, 2nd century BCE (late). Terra-cotta, 13 5/8 x 5 3/8 x 8 5/8 in. Bequest of the William R. Mead (Class of 1867) Estate, M.1936.3

**VM:** What role does the audience have in your process? Do you think about how a viewer will respond to the work?

**TF:** It's a part of my thought process. Early on I was always interested in sort of phenomenology, the phenomenon of the experience, and in fact my early work

really tried to dissect that. Thinking about the viewer — specifically, I think about the general tone that the museum, the institution, the gallery space, the viewing space — somehow creates channels.

Although it's not going to be the same experience for everyone, I think of it like — and I've made this analogy before—like making art is like making medicine. Medicine has this psychological function and it has a tendency toward a certain thing, like relieving a headache or aches and pains, but it responds to everyone in a slightly different way.

**VM:** What's the most indispensable item in your studio?

**TF:** My studio assistants. Do they count as an item? They've been with me for many years. And they've gotten to the point where they kind of can read my mind.

**VM:** Do you have a philosophy by which you work and/or live by?

**TF:** I believe in goodness. I think that if goodness is what you're thinking about and it's behind the scenes in a way, then everything you do comes from that. It's kind of hard to define what that is but that's what I think about.

**VM:** You teach at UMass and take on a mentor role for your students. What's the best piece of advice you've ever received?

**TF:** Once you put your ego aside, that's when you'll really start learning. Because when I was an undergrad I thought I knew everything and no one else knew anything. Once I was able to put my ego aside and really listen to people, that's when I started learning.

**Tom Friedman: Untitled (Foundation)** opens Tuesday, Feb. 16. A reception with the artist takes place from 6 to 7:30 pm. The public is invited to attend free of charge. The exhibition runs through June 26, 2016.

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Above: Tom Friedman, *Snowflakes*, 2016. Ink-jet print, paper, and paint, 74 5/8 x 60 in. © Tom Friedman. Image courtesy of Tom Friedman Studio

Amherst College: Tom Friedman: Untitled (Foundation), 2016

Amherst College

## Tom Friedman: Untitled (Foundation)

On view February 16–June 26, 2016



A life-size sculpture by Tom Friedman (left) corresponds to an ancient Greek figurine from the Mead collection (right).

This special exhibition unveils new works by renowned conceptual artist Tom Friedman, and marks the first time Friedman has drawn artistic inspiration directly from a museum collection. The works on view correspond to existing works in the Mead's permanent collection, and represent a contemporary dialogue with art from the past, in ways that introduce subtexts, narratives and new ways of thinking about the Mead's art collection.

An ancient Greek terracotta figurine, the bequest of William R. Mead, an 1867 Amherst graduate, inspired Friedman's life-size sculpture in Styrofoam and paint (pictured above), while a wood pagoda from eighth-century Japan has been recast in acrylic. Other works Friedman reimagines include one of the Mead's masterpieces, Monet's *Morning on the Seine* (1897), and Dorothea Lange's *Migrant Pea Pickers* (1938).

Friedman works in a range of media, most famously using Styrofoam and paint to sculpt objects that resonate with contemporary audiences, such as pizza, a cardboard box and Hostess treats. Other works include abstract pieces in yarn and figures constructed from stainless steel, most recently *Looking Up*, a large-scale (over 30 feet high) figure gazing skyward.

Originally from St. Louis, Missouri, Friedman earned degrees from Washington University in St. Louis and the University of Illinois at Chicago. His work has appeared in numerous solo and group exhibitions, and is in the permanent collections of major museums including the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, and the Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles. He lives in Massachusetts and teaches in the graduate program in art at UMass Amherst.

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This exhibition was organized by Vanja Malloy, curator of American art. Assistance was provided by Tom Friedman Studio and Luhring Augustine, New York. The exhibition is presented with generous support from the Hall and Kate Peterson Fund.

Images: (Left) Tom Friedman, *Untitled (Flute Player)*, 2016. Styrofoam, paint, cotton shirt, socks, and flip-flops, 66 x 25 x 49 in. © Tom Friedman. Image courtesy of Tom Friedman Studio. (Right) Greek, *Flying Flute Player, Myrina type*, 2nd century BCE (late). Terracotta, 13 5/8 x 5 3/8 x 8 5/8 in. Bequest of the William R. Mead (Class of 1867) Estate. M.1936.3

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“Tom Friedman Sculpts A Peeing Figure From Foil”, *Designboom*, December 17, 2013

## Tom Friedman Sculpts A Peeing Figure From Foil



untitled (peeing figure), 2012  
stainless steel  
from an edition of 3 and 2 artist's proofs  
image courtesy of luhning Augustine

American artist tom friedman has sculpted 'untitled (peeing figure)', a highly detailed stainless steel casting of standing man, his pants rolled down to the floor, urinating. originally constructed from varying bits of aluminum foil, turkey-basting pans, plates and roasting dishes, the finished structure is made only of metal, including the stream of waste

that flows down to the floor, which is made from metallic wiring. folding and crimped into the silhouette of a human model, the towering character recently exposed himself in south beach, presented by luhning augustine and stephen friedman gallery for 'public' - the

public sector of art basel miami beach, a division which allows visitors to explore the many site-specific artworks located along the tropical landscape.



(above/below images) untitled (peeing figure), 2012



'untitled (peeing figure)' at 'public' in miami's collins park  
image © designboom

# STEPHEN FRIEDMAN GALLERY

Designboom

Tom Friedman Sculpts A Peeing Figure From Foil

17 December 2013

## **'public'**

'public' features large-scale sculptures and installations by leading and emerging international artists, including sam falls, thomas houseago, alicja kwade, richard long, santiago roose, oscar tuazon, and ursula von rydingsvard. many of the works will remain on view through march 2014. for the third straight year, 'public' is produced in partnership with the bass museum of art. the sector is open to the public and free of charge. this year's selection of artworks from 24 international artists has been curated with the theme 'social animals' by nicholas baume, chief curator for the new york city-based public art fund.

Martin Herbert, "Feature: Tom Friedman", *Art Review*, May 2010, pag. 78-82

Is there anything that can't  
be counterfeited using  
Styrofoam and paint?

**IN HIS STUDIO** – a light-filled workshop and pristine viewing space tucked away in a converted industrial building in Springfield, Massachusetts – Tom Friedman is having a Styrofoam moment. It's not his first: the forty-five-year-old American artist's fascination with extruded polystyrene goes back at least as far as a 12cm-high untitled self-portrait carved from the stuff in 1996, with frequent recidivism since. What's different this time around is that Friedman, in making the body of skewed quotidian counterfeits that's about to go on show at Stephen Friedman (no relation) in London, is *only* using Styrofoam. Oh, and paint. Not that you'd know it. In Friedman's hands, Styrofoam looks nothing like Styrofoam, and paint frequently behaves nothing like paint.

On one wall in the artist's viewing space, for instance, is *Untitled (Paper Towel)* (2010), which replicates the paper-towel dispenser in the studio building. It looks close to real, if a little cartoonish; but the sheet of sanitary paper hanging out of it? That's solidified paint: acrylic painted on plastic and peeled off, just like the clear plastic six-pack holder amid the wild tangle of Styrofoam forgeries – a half-peeled banana, a marshmallow on a stick, a gavel, olives, a beer can, a pizza slice glistening with grease – in *Untitled (Bouquet)* (2010), which sits on a plinth of untreated Styrofoam. (Friedman points out a tiny strip of faked corrugated cardboard in this crackerjack assembly, which bursts out of what looks like a glazed earthenware jar, but isn't. The cardboard took him a week to make, by gluing minuscule sections together, he says; I hadn't noticed it.) Elsewhere, in *Untitled (Bat)* (2010), a 'plant pot' full of 'soil' (and containing one small 'green shoot') rests at an impossibly precipitous angle atop a 'baseball bat', which in turn sits on some 'torn cardboard' (out of which another 'shoot' seems to be growing) dotted with 'toothpicks', a 'pencil', an 'eraser'...

Friedman, who uses the word 'alchemy' repeatedly when discussing his methods, isn't making any secret of what these works are made from. When I spoke to him, he was planning to title his London show *Styrofoam and Paint*, and part of what runs through the mind when looking at its contents is a pleasurable confusion of properties, a complex of refutations based on self-evident gaps between knowledge and appearance. It's a short course in cognitive dissonance: we know how Styrofoam and paint are supposed to perform, how gravity works and that balloons can't be pierced by knives without popping (see *Untitled (Bouquet)* again). We might wonder, additionally, at the mind that would fashion a *trompe l'oeil* rectangle of plywood out of layers of Styrofoam, paint it so that it simulates wood and then obscure *that* dissimulation with a thin coat of whitewash to suggest a tentative Robert Ryman. The materials may be simple; the gaming is involved and fringed with comedy; and the mental associations become pleasurable complex and convoluted. Attached to the white painting is a piece of 'twine', made from plaiting fine, rolled-out lengths of dry paint and hung in an arc from Styrofoam 'nails'. This is, says Friedman, "a wry smile". It figures.

If you're Tom  
Friedman,  
master of  
transforming  
mundane  
materials, the  
answer is a  
resounding 'no'.  
But is there  
more to his  
art than technical  
magic?

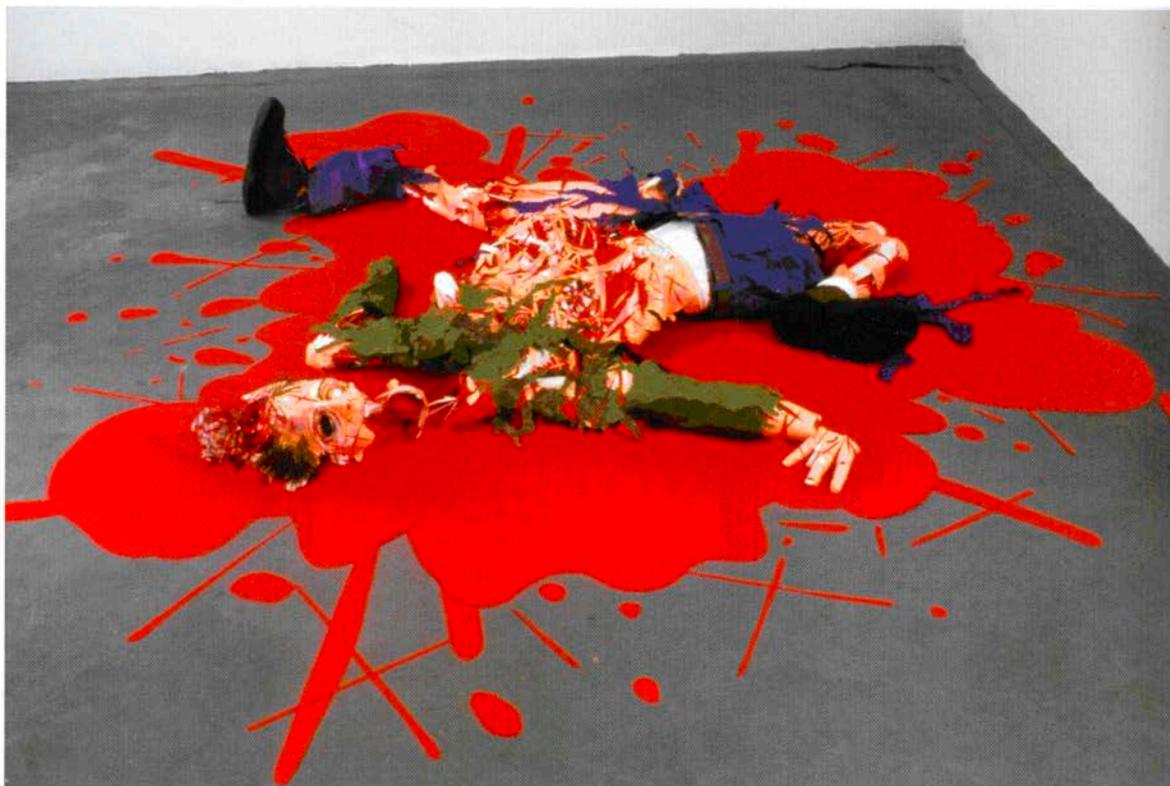
WORDS: MARTIN HERBERT

Herbert, Martin  
"Feature: Tom Friedman"  
Art Review.  
May 2010, p.78-82.  
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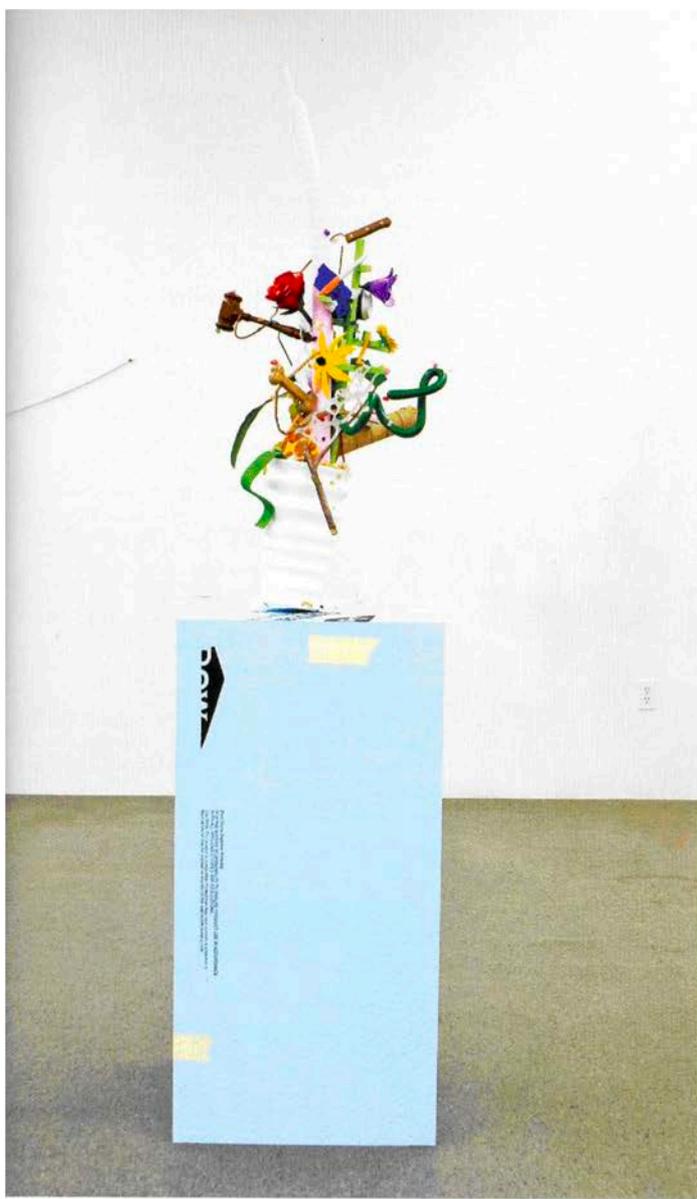
This kind of systemic-but-screwball, creativity-sparking thinking – the greatest limitation of materials, the greatest freedom of subject matter; the most painstaking methods to make the most insignificant objects – is broadly typical of Friedman, as his 20-year-survey show, currently at Stockholm’s Magasin 3, demonstrates. So, too, is the sense of restless progression. Friedman, arriving at the University of Illinois at Chicago as a maker of Thomas Hart Benton-style drawings, had a eureka moment when he emptied his studio, painted it white and rebooted. One of the show’s oldest works, *Untitled* (1990) – a toilet roll unrolled fully, the cardboard removed and the paper rolled back up into an immaculately tight cylinder – reflects the circular logic that animated his first mature work; another piece from the same year, featuring two identically wrinkled sheets of paper (just try it), marked him as an artist capable of running boggling, slow-burning, labour-intensive changes on the simplest materials. (And one influenced, he’d said, as much by Andy Kaufman’s deceptive comedy of ‘downplay’ as by other art.)

“I began by limiting myself as much as I could”, Friedman remembers. “To begin as an artist – there’s no canon in this culture, and a million ways of progressing. So where do you start? I began to think about simplicity. You have a material; you transform the material; you present the material. As I started working through that, I noticed I was able to break down those ideas in thinking about simplicity more and more, so that it unfolded into some idea of complexity.” (As the 1990s progressed, works such as *Untitled*, 1995, a frozen starburst constructed of thousands of toothpicks, made this evolution apparent.) “And then”, Friedman continues, “the complexity started to evolve into ideas of systems getting so

complex, like a bug in a computer program” – see, for example, *Cloud* (1998), countless .6cm dowels of powder-blue polystyrene connected at right angles to form a continuous, cumulus-shaped loop – “that the logic got screwed up. And that led into ideas of fantasy, and dream”.

Enter the horror and sci-fi scenarios bracketed by works like *Untitled* (2000), which depicts the artist’s torn-apart body in construction paper, resting on a paper pool of blood, and the comical grotesquerie of *Green Demon* (2008), the towering figure that greets visitors to Friedman’s Stockholm show. Depicting a demon from Tibetan tantric imagery, it’s made from green string, extruded foam, pencils, fluff, painted balls and more. Behind it, on the institution’s wall, is the phrase ‘Humans Suck’ (*Original Sin*, 2008). Friedman originally sketched the phrase rapidly in balloon lettering, then painstakingly copied it in black yarn around black nails. Elsewhere in the show: a tiny figure pursued by a giant fly (*Monster Fly*, 2008); a collage of hideous body parts (*Monster Collage*, 2008); a photocollage of a giant hole in a verdant landscape made by a massive falling man (*Untitled*, 1996); a construction-paper sculpture of Friedman facing the wall entitled *Nobody* (2002); and a figure in aluminium foil, in the same pose, entitled *Hollow Man Offering Nothing to No One* (2008).

First attempt at a theory on Friedman: he’s far more at home in his head than in his body, and there’s a certain amount of anxiety in his art about human corporeality’s flaws and failings. There are lots of hygiene issues in his work, from pieces using toilet roll, soap and toothpicks to the exhibition of a small sphere of his own shit on a plinth in 1992. (At one show, someone sat on



*“A lot of my thinking is about: what can you do with that brief bit of attention the viewer is giving you?”*





the infinitesimal poop-globe; fortunately, Friedman had a spare.) A 1990 photograph features him blowing a spit bubble; the only geometrically perfect form, the artist later commented, the human body can make. Then there's the menacing of the body by monsters. There's *I'm Not Myself* (2008), a collage in which Friedman has screwed up pictures of his own face, distorting them into queasy reliefs. One might start to read things into this, and a physiological basis in his technically immersive artmaking (Friedman didn't hire an assistant until 2002).

Such armchair psychology may be fine as far as it goes, but it's not how Friedman sees or talks about his work, despite his affirmation that, in recent years, he's wanted to privilege poetics in his art over airless closed-system thinking. If his art has a consistent 'subject', it's the process of reception. "Someone wakes up in the morning", he says, "they brush their teeth, they talk with their partner, they go to work, someone invites them to the museum after work, they have a drink and a conversation and go in, and there's, like, a culmination of all their history up to that moment. So a lot of my thinking is about: what can you do with that brief bit of attention the viewer is giving you?" Often this has involved surprise: the degree to which a material can be transformed (sometimes in the most unlikely of ways, as in a couple of Friedman's most famous works: a sheet of paper which the artist claimed to have stared at for a thousand hours, and a plinth wherein a circle of airspace above it had supposedly been cursed by a witch).

Friedman is uncommonly aware of and inspired by the gallery situation: when he switched gallerists to Gagolian a few years ago, he says it was because, to an extent, he makes his work with dealers and venues in mind, and wanted to see how his intimate, mostly small-scale art would evolve in the vast hangars of GoGo's empire. It led to the 'monsters' works and, later, to his leaving Gagolian to return to Stephen Friedman, with whom he'd worked previously. Primarily, you intuit, his art has morphed as a function of keeping himself interested, which may well account for his sensitivity to, and desire to make maximum use of, the viewer's own brief span of attention. (Friedman – Tom, that is – is easily bored, he's the first to admit; he used to meditate but doesn't any more; distractions include watching *Family Guy* and making music.)

So the changes go on. The finale of his Magasin 3 show, a new installation entitled *Up in the Air* (2010), in which countless Styrofoam forgeries of everyday objects hang from the ceiling, heralds Friedman's current one-medium-for-many-subjects shape-shift. Among its contents: a miniature *USS Enterprise*, a dictionary, a dinky Duchamp urinal, a giant screw, an album by Tom Friedman, a giant cigar, a rifle, a cock and balls, a FedEx box, a big burger, everything gravitating towards a similar scale, a similar importance. For Friedman, though, it's all about the form. "It's a systems piece. I had an arena, and anything, within a certain framework, can go in. It started with my wanting to somehow convey *everything*, not limit things to a category. Music, politics, spirituality: you can subdivide those categories, and then figure out how to represent those subdivided categories."

Here's the rub, and perhaps the instruction. Friedman's latest Styrofoam art feels like a vast, tessellated, loosely conflicted portrait of mainstream American culture, the good and bad mixed acceptingly together, fashioned from an emphatically American sculptural material (Styrofoam was synthesised in Dow Chemical's Michigan labs in the 1940s). And it suggests – along with those aforementioned, culturally specific hygiene concerns, a potential subsector of a larger picture – that the ultimate subject of Friedman's poetics may be his country, its bedrock textures and materials and how they might reach some kind of apotheosis. As an artist, to aim consciously for that is most likely to miss by a mile; if Friedman hits it dead-on, it's perhaps because he was thinking about something else all along. ■

*Work by Tom Friedman is on view at Stephen Friedman Gallery, London, as part of a two-person show, Tom Friedman and Steve Wolfe, until 29 May. Friedman's Up in the Air is at Magasin 3 Stockholm Konsthall through 6 June*

WORKS  
(IN ORDER OF APPEARANCE)

*Untitled (Cinder Block)*, 2010, Styrofoam and acrylic paint, 84 x 66 x 36 cm

*Untitled (Mutilated Self-Portrait)*, 2000, construction paper, 30 x 290 x 305 cm

*Untitled (Bouquet)*, 2010, Styrofoam and acrylic paint, 84 x 66 x 36 cm

*Untitled (Paper Towel Dispenser)*, 2010, Styrofoam and acrylic paint, 61 x 28 x 38 cm

*Untitled (Bat)*, 2010, Styrofoam and acrylic paint, 104 x 53 x 53 cm

*Green Demon*, 2008, mixed media, 231 x 109 x 92 cm

*all works* © the artist. Courtesy the artist and Stephen Friedman Gallery, London

## Bric-a-Brac: The Everyday Work of Tom Friedman

Jo Applin

Georges Perec's epic novel *La Vie mode d'emploi* (*Life: A User's Manual*) opens with a preamble about the "art of jigsaw puzzles" in which he documents the peculiarities of the process of assembling a jigsaw puzzle. Instead of keeping in mind the finished image when putting the puzzle together, connecting the parts to the whole, one must negotiate a series of part-to-part relationships in which "the only thing that counts is the ability to link this piece to other pieces." The jigsaw pieces, Perec continues, "are readable, take on a sense, only when assembled; in isolation, a puzzle piece means nothing—just an impossible question, an opaque challenge."<sup>1</sup> The mode of making Perec invokes here, in which the bigger picture makes sense only through careful attention to the piecemeal and fragmented puzzle pieces, is a small, playful entry in his own bigger picture, a novel composed of short vignettes that narrate the story of a Parisian apartment block.

Perec's logic of linking and part-by-part construction is inadvertently echoed in the work of the contemporary American artist Tom Friedman. Friedman's eclectic range of (usually untitled) drawings, photographs, and sculptures take as their base material the bric-a-brac that he finds lying around, the mundane and ordinary stuff of everyday life. From an entire pencil laboriously sharpened into one long, fragile shaving, to a boiled box of spaghetti hardened into a brittle object that sits awkwardly between abstract gestural tangle and rigorous scientific model, Friedman puts ordinary materials and boring activities to exaggerated and absurdly overblown ends. In an early work from 1990 Friedman took the readymade form of a jigsaw puzzle and arranged it on the floor with the individual pieces spaced exactly two centimeters apart, as if to emphasize the straightforward yet painstaking and monotonous process of jigsaw making—a grid of Perec's "opaque challenges" that Friedman describes as "a metaphor for what I was trying to do: to piece something together."<sup>2</sup> Friedman cranks up the intensity of banal activities, of sharpening a pencil, cooking pasta, or assembling a jigsaw puzzle, rendering the ordinary neither extraordinary, nor spectacular, but worthy nonetheless of sustained critical attention.

On graduating in 1990 with an MFA in sculpture from the University of Illinois at Chicago, one of the first decisions Friedman made was to completely empty his windowless studio and to paint it white, leaving himself as the only item in the room. Like Bruce Nauman twenty-five years earlier, Friedman took his own position as artist as the starting point for his investigation into how and from what a work of art might be constituted. After emptying his studio, Friedman began to reintroduce objects back into its sphere: jigsaw puzzles, pillow stuffing, wire, soap, toilet roll, sugar. The first object Friedman brought back into his studio was a metronome, which he placed on the floor and watched as "it just clicked back and forth."<sup>3</sup> Like the ticking of the metronome, in which time is marked not by linear progress but by the interval between back and forth, Friedman's work is related to the past as much as the present. In fact, it is precisely the complex nexus of neo- and post-, past and present, recycling and return, that circumscribes both the structural logic of Friedman's work and the model his work tentatively offers for thinking about contemporary art's relationship to art history. In what follows, I argue that Friedman's process of making, and making do, draws on the twin strategies of *bricolage* ("do-it-yourself") and

1. Georges Perec, "Preamble," *La Vie mode d'emploi* (Paris: Hachette/Collection P.O.L., 1978), pub. in English as *Life: A User's Manual*, trans. David Bellos (London: Harvill Press, 1987); the preamble is unpaginated.

2. Tom Friedman, as quoted in Dennis Cooper, "Dennis Cooper in Conversation with Tom Friedman," in *Tom Friedman* (London: Phaidon, 2001), 10.

3. *Ibid.*, 9.



**Tom Friedman, *Untitled, 1991***, laundry detergent, 10 ft. diam. (305 cm) (artwork © Tom Friedman; photograph provided by Gagolian Gallery)

braconnage ("poaching"), terms which I, in turn, poach respectively from Claude Lévi-Strauss's 1962 work *La Pensée sauvage* (*The Savage Mind*) and Michel de Certeau's 1980 book *L'Invention du quotidien* (*The Practice of Everyday Life*).<sup>4</sup>

The significance of Friedman's work lies in the conceptual strategies of assemblage and *bricolage* that he employs.<sup>5</sup> For all their playfulness and apparent slickness of execution and conception, Friedman's works and the stock of art-historical motifs he frequently (if obliquely) exploits through various strategies of recycling and appropriation or borrowing articulate a model for thinking about art's relationship with its past. While Friedman does not use junk or throwaway materials, his works do address the impoverished conditions under which the object qua object now operates.

A continual procedure of recycling lies at the core of many of Friedman's works, a circuit of exchange in which the leftover remnant of one work provides the building blocks to generate another, suggesting a process less of renewal than of making do. In a work from 1990, for example, he made a monochrome from a *Playboy* centerfold by erasing the ink to leave a fine, worn-down sheet of paper. For another work the artist collected these eraser rubbings and placed them in a circular pile on the floor, the photographed centerfold's body reduced to the abstract and dispersed fragment in a gesture redolent of Robert Rauschenberg's iconoclastic gesture *Erased de Kooning Drawing* (1953). Rather than an exploration of the binaries of presence and absence, removal or loss, which works such as the spaghetti tangle or *Playboy* centerfold at first seem to suggest, these works instead redefine the parameters of the object as something less akin to a finished sculpture or monument and more like what Briony Fer has recently described as the contemporary condition of "sculpture as leftover."<sup>6</sup>

When asked in 1966 what he thought the "sensibility of the sixties" had been, the artist Robert Smithson responded that it was one of "momentary paralysis," a "sensibility of inauthentic boredom," of "habit" and a "dynamics of banality."<sup>7</sup> Although Smithson is pointing here to the entropic and its drive toward obsolescence and the undoing of form, his comment, like the logic of entropy, is also about the present—and how the future might be imagined, based as it is on an irreversible backward spiral. Entropy, Smithson points out, is the future in reverse.<sup>8</sup> Smithson's dystopic excavation and archaeology provide a telling model for thinking about time and the relationship of contemporary art practice to the past and also to the possibilities of the future.<sup>9</sup>

Although Friedman's body of work is not about the neo-avant-garde, Pop, or Minimalism, his work does address practices of recycling and repetition that first began to carry critical currency during the 1960s. (Perhaps these practices reflect Smithson's characterization of the 1960s sensibility as one of habit and inauthenticity.) The notion of *bricolage* may seem an anachronistic trope to invoke in relation to a decade when time itself, as Pamela Lee has demonstrated, seemed so pressing, so contemporary, and so endless. Nonetheless, the retrospective aspect of *bricolage*, its processes of looking backward and forward, like the clicking back and forth of Friedman's metronome, as well as the formal strategies it entails, persists today in much contemporary work.<sup>10</sup>

In 2000 Friedman participated in the group exhibition *American Bricolage* at Sperone Westwater, New York, a show curated by David Leiber and Tom Sachs which explicitly acknowledged the contemporary art scene's engagement with

4. Claude Lévi-Strauss, *La Pensée sauvage*, (Paris: Plon, 1962); and Michel de Certeau, *L'Invention du quotidien*, vol. 1: *Arts de faire* (Paris: Gallimard, 1990). All subsequent quotations are taken from the English translations, although I retain use of the (somewhat untranslatable) terms *bricolage* and *braconnage*. See Claude Lévi-Strauss, *The Savage Mind*, trans. John and Doreen Weightman (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1966), and Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. Stephen F. Rendall (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984).

5. Other writers have also paid attention to Friedman's working strategy as a conceptual project, although to rather different ends than my own. In particular, the interviews with Friedman by Dennis Cooper and John Waters attend to the conceptual as well as material process of recycling and repetition in his work, and Bruce Hainley's essay "Self Portrait as *Untitled* (without *Armature*)" also touches on the references to the history of art identifiable in Friedman's work. See Tom Friedman (2001) for the Cooper interview and Hainley piece, as well as an interview with Friedman by Robert Storr. For the Waters interview, see Tom Friedman, exh. cat. (Milan: Fondazione Prada, 2002), a two-volume work that also contains a survey essay by Germano Celant, "The Anatomy of Things," and an essay by Mario Pernicola, "The Ecstasy of Everyday Existence."

6. Briony Fer, "The Scatter: Sculpture as Leftover," in *Part Object Part Sculpture*, ed. Helen Molesworth (University Park, PA: Penn State Press, 2005).

7. Robert Smithson "Response to a Questionnaire from Irving Sandler" (1966), in *Collected Writings*, ed. Jack Flam (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 329.

8. See Smithson, "Entropy and the New Monuments" (1966), in *Collected Writings*, 10–24.

9. Smithson writes, "If the future is 'out of date' and 'old-fashioned,' then I had been in the future." Smithson, "A Tour of the Monuments of Passaic, New Jersey," in *Collected Writings*, 73–74. See also Smithson's statement that "The isolated time of the avant-garde has produced its own unavailable history or entropy." "Quasi-Infinities and the Waning of Space" (1966), in *Collected Writings*, 37.

10. See Pamela Lee, *Chronophobia: On Time in the Art of the 1960s* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2004).

previous modes of art making. *American Bricolage* highlighted a strand of artistic practice that operated within a sphere of knowledge-gathering and material construction which the gallery's promotional materials claimed eschewed "traditional artistic materials (but not an awareness of the history of art)" in order to create a "new cultural syntax out of the debris of the already-given."<sup>11</sup> Drawing together a number of contemporary artists working in makeshift, precarious ways and using everyday materials, the show also included works by two of the show's declared forebears, with one of H. C. Westermann's wooden carpentered houses from 1971 and a 1938 work by the "granddaddy" of American *bricolage*, Alexander Calder.<sup>12</sup> (Marcel Duchamp is also named in the catalogue as one of the earliest proponents of amateurish *bricolage*.) Contemporary artists in the show included Friedman, Tim Hawkinson, Hope Atherton, Richard Wentworth, and Sachs, each of whom rejects traditional techniques of modeling and casting in order to make objects that are variously "re-tooled, repaired, and re-invented."<sup>13</sup> In fact, Sachs's work explicitly pays homage to an earlier moment and the work of Bruce Nauman, one of the show's unmentioned predecessors, by re-creating in foam the infamous "slant step," discovered by Nauman and his then-tutor William T. Wiley in 1965, of which Nauman made several copies. The catalogue for the show was a taped, bound, board-covered volume, its design and layout resembling a do-it-yourself manual more than a fine-art publication; its cover notes that it was made from "left-over exhibition announcements, Dymo tape, stencils, etc." Todd Alden's accompanying essay, "Small Tasks: A User's Manual," identifies the strategies of *bricolage* at play in a number of twentieth-century works. Alden describes the show and the activity of *bricolage* as "a contradiction, a hodgepodge, a stitching together of distinct cultural forms."<sup>14</sup>

The interest of contemporary artists in *bricolage* finds its roots in the work of artists who in the late 1950s began to investigate the excesses of capitalist culture in the temporary value of a range of objects, such as Arman's "accumulations" of old shoes or forks, Lee Bontecou's burlap-and-metal reliefs, Claes Oldenburg's cardboard cut-outs, plaster cakes, and shoes, and the combine assemblages of Rauschenberg. The legacies of these earlier practices are tangible in contemporary work both formally and conceptually, with artists such as Friedman and Sachs clearly referencing and incorporating that tradition of assemblage art within their own work, although, in contemporary hands, its materials have expanded to include not only the recycled object but also art history. The question remains, however: what precisely does that legacy entail?

Although Friedman rarely titles his work, when they are exhibited or reproduced in a book, following the list of materials or technique (for example "spider legs," or "etching"), he includes a brief text detailing the processes, materials, and time that went into their production. The deadpan literalism of his works and their accompanying description of nontraditional materials brought together to make a single object share as much with Donald Judd's category of the "specific object" as they do with the Surrealist *objet trouvé* or postwar assemblage.<sup>15</sup> For example, *Untitled* (1998) lists "pencils" as its medium, and a Judd-like wall text accompanies it: "A long pencil made by connecting pencil sections of various lengths. It hangs from the ceiling by monofilament; the point of the pencil just touches the floor."

Friedman's work is often understood as engaging directly with those earlier Dada, Minimal, and protoconceptual practices, and my point is not to dismiss

11. Press release, available online at [www.speronewestwater.com/cgi-bin/iowa/articles/record.html?record=84](http://www.speronewestwater.com/cgi-bin/iowa/articles/record.html?record=84).

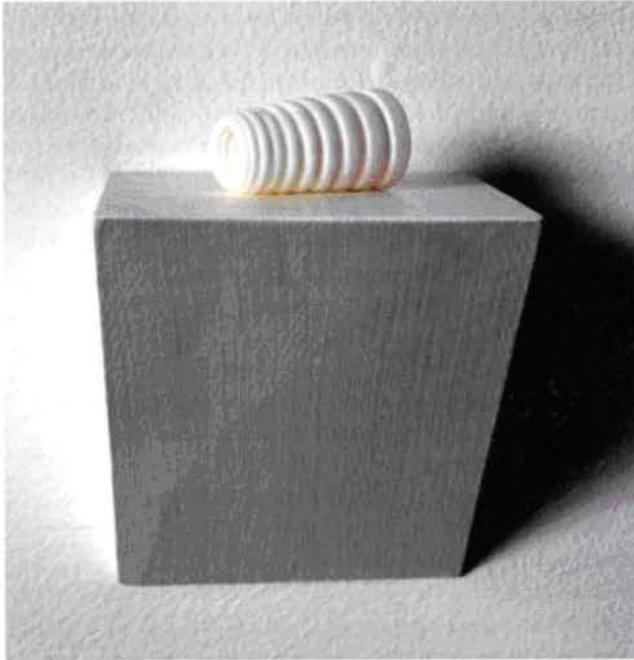
12. See Julia Caniglia, "American Bricolage Sperone Westwater," *Artforum*, February 2001, 152.

13. See press release cited in n. 11.

14. Todd Alden, "Small Tasks: A User's Manual," in *American Bricolage*, exh. cat., ed. Todd Alden (New York: Sperone Westwater, 2000), n. p. The catalogue was an artist's publication assembled in collaboration with the artists and published in a limited edition.

15. Donald Judd, "Specific Objects" (April 1965), repr. in *Donald Judd: The Complete Writings 1959-1975* (Halifax and New York: Nova Scotia School of Art and Design, 1975), 181-89. See also Benjamin H. D. Buchloh, "Readymade, *Objet Trouvé*, *Ideé Reçue*," in *Dissent: The Issue of Modern Art in Boston* (Boston: Institute of Contemporary Arts, 1985).

the points at which his work clearly converges with the interests of, say, Nauman, Piero Manzoni, or even Carl Andre—far from it. Rather, it is the sense in which those connections tend to be considered a neat lineage linking his work and that of his predecessors in a straightforward and obvious trajectory to which I want to attend. Friedman's mediation of the past is, I suggest, somewhat more oblique. It complicates the received models of influence and artistic debt that



**Tom Friedman, *Untitled*, 1991**, Life Savers,  $\frac{1}{2} \times 2\frac{1}{2} \times \frac{1}{2}$  in. (1.3 x 6.3 x 1.3 cm), collection of Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, gift of Lannan Foundation (artwork © Tom Friedman; photograph provided by Gagosian Gallery)

it so seamlessly appears to inherit. For Friedman, poaching on art's earlier forms and aspirations functions as a generative practice, one with conceptual roots in Lévi-Strauss's description of *bricolage* as a temporary, do-it-yourself form of collecting, reordering, and recycling—a borrowing from other spheres and practices in order to generate if not something new then at least something else. De Certeau compares and integrates Lévi-Strauss's model of *bricolage* with the practice of *braconnage*, or "poaching." *Braconnage* relies not on established modes of reading, in which readers passively absorb the text before them, but is, rather, a dynamic process in which the readers as *braconniers* establish their own routes through the given material with what de Certeau calls an "artisan-like inventiveness."<sup>16</sup> For de Certeau, the two practices are commonplace, banal activities in which we all engage; yet both potentially enable us to produce distinct, oppositional ways of engaging with the world.

The forms of knowledge that structure *bricolage* are neither fixed nor expansive—due to the pre-constrained set of tools or elements with which the *bricoleur* works, she or he is locked in a series of finite

options. Lévi-Strauss describes *bricolage* as a practical process distinct from the model of construction and "concrete" knowledge-building that he calls "scientific thought," in that it progresses as an intuitive, day-to-day compilation and recycling of materials, objects, tools, ideas—whatever is at hand. In Lévi-Strauss's terms, this practical mode of assembly and building finds its intellectual analogue in "magical" or "mythical" thought, a process of building, learning, developing, and thinking that he claims characterizes "primitive" societies. Lévi-Strauss opposes the work of the *bricoleur* to that of the "engineer." A crucial difference between the *bricoleur* and the engineer is that "the engineer is always trying to make his way out of and go beyond the constraints imposed by a particular state of civilization while the 'bricoleur' by inclination or necessity always remains within them."<sup>17</sup> The work of the *bricoleur*, as Lévi-Strauss tells us, is never finished, although the objects and tools which she or he uses are. They are then put to new and alternative uses that in turn generate new or different results.

Similarly, the "artisan-like" activity of poaching is identified by Certeau as a kind of everyday magic, a "tactical" form of "making do" that points to acts of trickery or sleights of hand, rather than the marvelous or transformative.<sup>18</sup> This kind of magic is akin to Duchamp's concept of "canned chance," the term he used to describe the precise planning of a work of apparent spontaneity, and also

16. De Certeau, xxviii.

17. Lévi-Strauss, 19.

18. De Certeau, "Making Do' Uses and Tactics," 29–43.



**Tom Friedman, *Untitled*, 1994**, masking tape,  
1/4 x 72 in. diam. (2 x 183 cm) (artwork © Tom  
Friedman; photograph provided by Gagosian  
Gallery)

to Perec's description of the designer of the jigsaw puzzle who replaces chance with "cunning, trickery and subterfuge" in order to fool and puzzle the player at every turn.<sup>19</sup> De Certeau claims that while *bricolage* comprises a unified, fixed set of components, systematically recycled, poaching is less schematic. It is a model of reception as much as a model of construction and knowledge building. It requires a selective, piecemeal kind of attention—one which is disjointed, occasional, and individual, flitting in and out of the text. Poaching is, he claims, "dispersed in time; a sequence of temporal fragments not joined together but disseminated through repetitions and different modes of enjoyment, in memories and successive knowledges."<sup>20</sup>

These practices of everyday life, as de Certeau terms them, are important precisely because of their commonplace nature. They point to underlying structures that inform and govern the ways we live. Both *bricolage* and *braconnage* are tactical rather than strategic methods of making and thinking; that is, they rely on a day-to-day form of piecing together and making sense of the world, not pre-planned, but made up as you go along. These two models—of recycling and borrowing—articulate a mobile practice of assemblage in which Friedman points both to and away from the legacies on which he draws. As Friedman has recently stated: "I am interested in touching upon ways of thinking, bringing them together and relating them in different ways."<sup>21</sup>

Friedman sets out to draw attention to the edges of experience, the things we do to kill or fill time when bored. His actions exaggerate the banal activities that structure both a wide range of contemporary sculptural practice and also the practices of our daily life—of ordering, rearranging, sorting, putting things right and getting things wrong; ways, that is, of learning about and making sense of the world. Friedman describes his process accordingly: "It's more that I begin with what's on hand, or what I know. I think everyone looks at things based on what they know. Even things that are unfamiliar, they translate them into something they can understand. I like to have a foundation of the familiar to depart from and build onto, which is why I start with the ordinary."<sup>22</sup>

In two monochrome works from 1991, for example, Friedman starts with the ordinary—soap powder, from which he has made a snow angel, and a packet of hard candy sucked to diminishing sizes and stuck together with their own wet sugariness. Both obvious and unusual, each of these works recalls earlier strategies, with the minimal and monochrome here returned in everyday form, the anthropometry of Yves Klein reimagined as childhood play, and the serial structure revisited as bodily residue or affect. Friedman stages a lurch of both scale and expectation in these works, so that a snowfall of washing powder appears as though on a celestial scale (Friedman calls it a "galaxy").<sup>23</sup> Color is drained from these works, a nod toward those claims to nothingness to which the monochrome has historically aspired. In fact, these works behave more like the neo-avant-garde "achromes" of Manzoni.<sup>24</sup> They are deflationary, funny, even, with one foot rooted firmly on the ground even as they point to the infinite, utopian "degree zero" of the historical avant-garde monochrome.

For an untitled piece from 1989, Friedman made a series of loops from masking tape, which he arranged into a "rug" on the floor. Poaching on the placement and forms of the earlier works of art, it registers as cheap craft object and as a pseudominimalist or postminimalist floor piece by, say, Andre or Eva

19. Marcel Duchamp, *Salt-Seller: The Writings of Marcel Duchamp* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1973), 33; Perec, n. p.

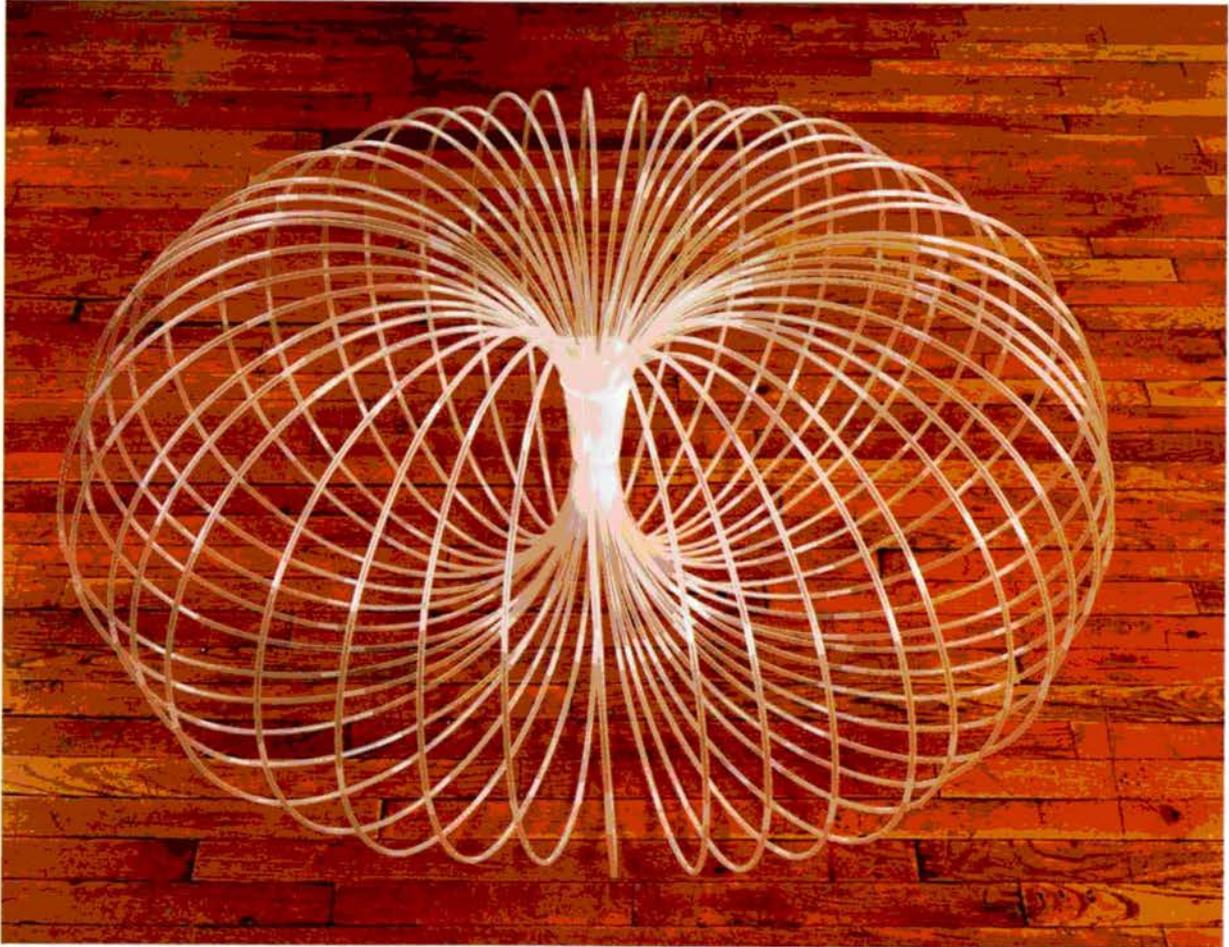
20. De Certeau, 174–75.

21. Tom Friedman, interview with Michael Byron, in *Pure Invention: Tom Friedman* (St. Louis: Kemper Art Museum, Washington University, 2006), as cited in Thyrsa Nichols Goodeve, "What Is Called Tom Friedman?" in *Tom Friedman*, exh. cat. (Los Angeles: Gagosian Gallery, 2006), 7.

22. Tom Friedman, quoted in "Interview with Hudson" (1997), in *Tom Friedman* (2001), 134.

23. Tom Friedman, quoted in Cooper, 12. See also the fine essay by Briony Fer, "Spirograph: The Circular Ruins of Drawing," in *Gabriel Orozco*, exh. cat. (London: Serpentine Gallery, 2004), 22.

24. See Jaleh Mansoor, "We Want to Organicize Disintegration," *October* 95 (Winter 2001): 28–53.



**Tom Friedman, *Untitled*, 1997**, plastic drinking cup, plastic drinking straws, 19 x 44 in. (48.5 x 111.5 cm) (artwork © Tom Friedman; photograph provided by Gagosian Gallery)



**Tom Friedman, *Untitled*, 1992**, approx. 3,000 garbage bags, steel pole in wooden pedestal, 61¼ x 25¼ x 25¼ in. (157 x 65.5 x 65.5 cm), collection of Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, gift of Lannan Foundation (artwork © Tom Friedman; photograph provided by Gagosian Gallery)



Hesse. The type of engagement we might imagine this work having with its predecessors is exactly the kind of dispersed and fragmented model of knowledge de Certeau claims defines the piecemeal, precarious means through which “everyday life invents itself,” by “poaching in countless ways on the property of others.”<sup>25</sup> In 1993 Friedman tightly slotted together stacks of plastic coffee cups to form a circle one meter in diameter, a simple reconfiguration of an everyday object which belies the trickiness of finding just the right number of cups to fit perfectly together, touching rim to rim in a perfect circle. In a similar work from 1997, a series of clear drinking straws have been inserted into one another to create a quasi-futuristic object that rests on the floor, lightweight, liable to rock over or maybe blow away. These two works are both slight and surprising, revealing, under inspection, a throwaway materiality obscured by the beguiling perfection of their construction. As Frank Stella famously claimed of his minimalist geometric paintings, “What you see is what you see,” yet aside from the literalism of their form they also resonate with other objects, experiences, and spheres of production.<sup>26</sup> This work by Friedman repeats the deflating aspect of the minimalist floor piece but also echoes the objects of the historic avant-garde, for example Aleksandr Rodchenko’s famous hanging construction from 1920, one of his so-called laboratory experiments, which were displayed as if they were the works of an engineer or scientist. For Rodchenko the twinning of art and life was utopian, and works such as his *Oval Hanging Construction* look forward, hung high in an elevated stance as if they were flying or weightless objects. In the hands of Friedman, the scientific utopia of the Constructivists returns in the guise of the found and the readymade, retaining a haunting residue of those earlier practices.

But Friedman’s art rejects the utopian vision of the earlier avant-garde while simultaneously poaching on its forms, suggesting an alternative ontology in which the obsolete and thrown-away might signal something else, whether it be a stack of toothpicks assembled into a less-than-dazzling starburst, or hundreds of plastic bin bags, stuffed one inside another to form a self-supporting, ironic monument to the obsolete and redundant. This kind of knowledge is what Molly Nesbit has described, in discussing Gabriel Orozco’s work, as something less accessible and absolute, and more like “a progress, as something to touch and leave”<sup>27</sup>—in other words, a kind of makeshift knowledge, to drop in and out of, to be mined and borrowed, touched upon or left alone. When pressed about his working practice, Friedman has said:

I like the connection to everyday materials, things just sitting around the house . . . you don’t have to go outside to know more; you already have everything you need. I don’t think of learning as an additive process. Instead your mind rearranges itself in certain ways. It’s interesting to think that all the potential knowledge is already there.<sup>28</sup>

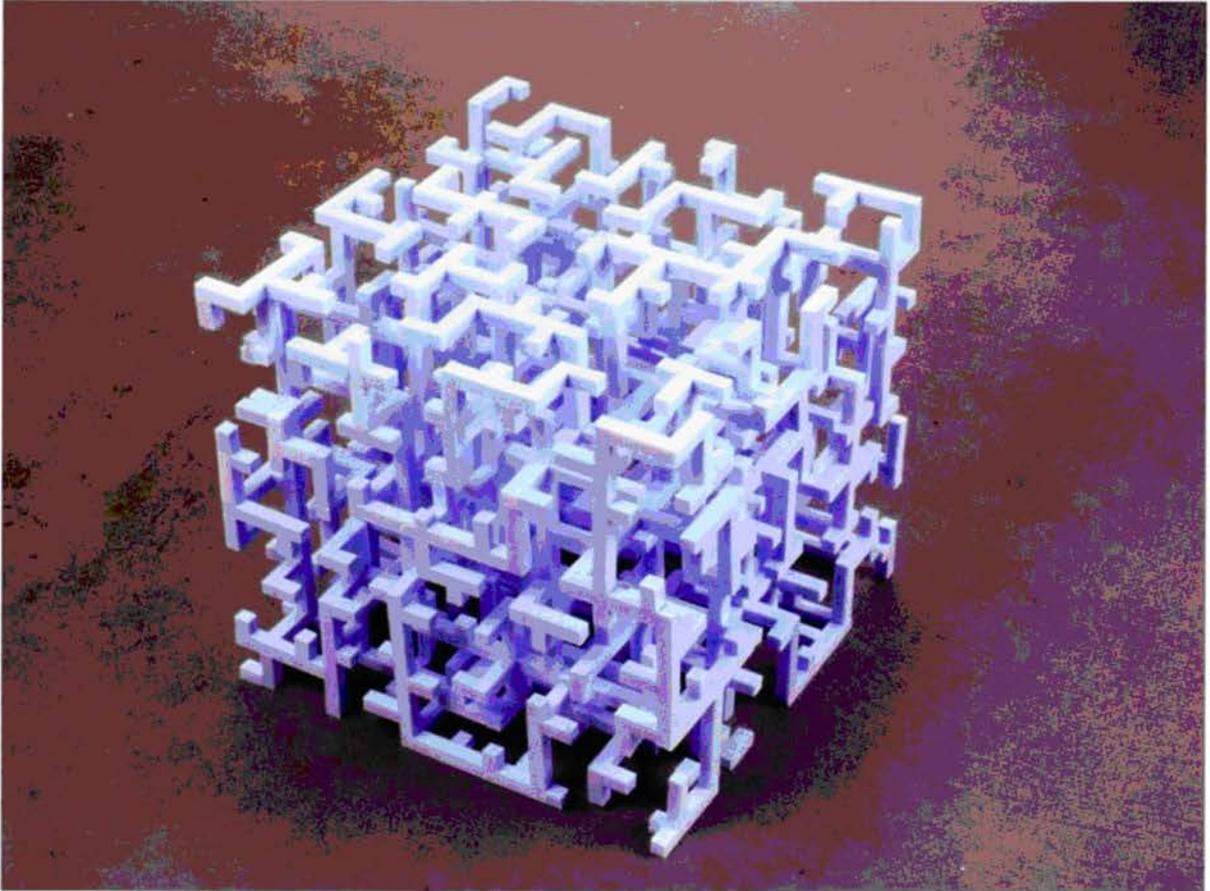
Friedman here outlines in all but name the practice of *bricolage*. Just as knowledge, for Orozco, is provisional and passing, so too in Friedman’s hands the practice of rearrangement is partial, temporary, and banal. Between 1992 and 1997 Friedman made a work consisting of a single, plain sheet of paper tacked to the wall that bears nothing, he claims, but the weight of one thousand hours of staring. The kind of staring the work involved, Friedman tells us, varied from a

25. De Certeau, xii (italics in orig.).

26. Frank Stella, quoted in Bruce Glaser, “Questions to Stella and Judd” (1966), repr. in *Minimal Art: A Critical Anthology*, ed. Gregory Battcock (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 159.

27. Molly Nesbit, “The Tempest,” in *Gabriel Orozco*, exh. cat. (Los Angeles: Museum of Contemporary Art, and Mexico City: Consejo Nacional para la Cultura y las Artes, Instituto Nacional de Bellas Artes, Museo Internacional Rufino Tamayo, 2000), 145.

28. Tom Friedman, quoted in “Interview with John Miller,” in *Tom Friedman* (2002), 288.



**Tom Friedman, *Untitled*, 2000**, polystyrene insulation, 15 $\frac{3}{4}$  x 15 $\frac{3}{4}$  x 15 $\frac{3}{4}$  in. (40.5 x 40.5 x 40.5 cm) (artwork © Tom Friedman; photograph provided by Gagosian Gallery)

focused, meditative and Zen-like trance to a distracted and absent-minded staring into space. Friedman seems to here reframe the modernist model of opticality and aesthetic attention as one of boredom and vacancy. When pressed about the potentially boring aspect of his working practice—the repetitive processes of stacking, placing, sticking, staring, and cutting, Friedman responded, “Who says I don’t get bored?”<sup>29</sup>

While the formal similarities between Friedman’s raids on the visual language of Constructivism, Dada, and Minimalism are often remarked on, the implications of that strategy of poaching are not.<sup>30</sup> In a work from 2000 Friedman pieced together strips of polystyrene packaging material into a cubic structure that figures a return of Sol LeWitt’s modular systems, but now made from the thrown away and peripheral. Here Friedman literally deploys a mode of assembly that asserts the minimal and conceptual, opening his work onto a web of (dis)connections that at once returns to and spirals away from what that earlier practice signaled. At the core of Friedman’s works are embedded key modernist tropes of the twentieth century, but the question is, how much, if any, critical agency should we accord this repetition?

Another sheet of paper, again pinned to the wall, constitutes an untitled work from 1991, in this instance pierced hundreds of times with a pin. It is hard to tell what this work is when viewing it from a slight distance—it looks like a sheet of fabric, a square of lace, or fine paper dotted with graphite spots. It hangs from the wall exhausted and limp—a world away from the declarative assertion of the monochrome as transcendent and opaque, as it had functioned in the hands of Kazimir Malevich or Rodchenko. Just as Manzoni’s achromes pointed to the historical, avant-garde monochrome while negating its utopian assertions, so Friedman too quickly pulls back from the brink of the metaphoric or allusive.<sup>31</sup> To make this work Friedman had to pierce the sheet of paper over and over again, damaging its status as extant object and sheer monochrome surface—a process that functions as a kind of literal *punctum*.<sup>32</sup> It both deflates and surprises, like so many pinpricks in the fabric of the object’s signifying potential in its claims to historical reference or quotation.

In relation to the neo-avant-garde work of Manzoni and Klein, Benjamin Buchloh has argued that the kinds of return their work staged signaled a paradigm repetition, but also a draining of the historical avant-garde’s original and revolutionary gesture.<sup>33</sup> Instead of casting these repetitions as instances of willful theft or naive copying on the part of the later artist, Buchloh suggests that it may be more fruitful to understand the neo-avant-garde as instead staging a dialectical relationship—albeit problematic and fractured—with those past motifs and their attendant aspirations. That is, repetition itself may well be what Hal Foster termed the “authentic meaning” of the neo-avant-garde.<sup>34</sup> It is through this mode of fractured return that Friedman’s work also operates. Just as returning to previous models in order to make something new is the “first practical” step of the *bricoleur*, what Lévi-Strauss calls the “retrospective” activity of gathering and collecting, so Friedman’s engagement with art’s recent past should be understood, albeit in a rather different context, as “retrospective.”<sup>35</sup> Unlike the neo-avant-garde’s draining of the original meaning of the historical avant-garde, the point in Friedman’s system of working is not simply to become something other, but to retain that previous state of being within its new incarnation.

29. Tom Friedman, quoted in “Serious Playboys,” interview with John Waters, *Parkett* 64 (2002): 81.

30. See, for example, the essays in *Tom Friedman* (2001), and also the collection of reviews of Friedman’s exhibitions reprinted in *Tom Friedman* (2002).

31. See Briony Fer, *The Infinite Line: Re-making Art after Modernism* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2004), 27–47.

32. The *punctum* is of course a term I poach from Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida* (1980; London: Vintage Books, 1993).

33. Benjamin H. D. Buchloh, “The Primary Colors for the Second Time: A Paradigm Repetition of the Neo-Avant-Garde,” *October* 37 (Summer 1986): 41–52.

34. Hal Foster, “What’s Neo about the Neo-Avant-Garde?” *October* 70, “The Duchamp Effect” (Fall 1994): 16, n. 24.

35. Lévi-Strauss, 18.

The literary critic Harold Bloom famously understood the repetition and subsequent misreading of one's precursors as a necessary stage of artistic creation. For Bloom this poetic strategy of misreading is tied up with an "anxiety of influence," an Oedipal struggle that earlier poets must endure in order to come out the other side fully fledged and unique.<sup>36</sup> The anxiety or Oedipal drama that may be involved in Friedman's engagement with the legacies of his objects' pasts is of less issue than the practical processes through which those misreadings take place: Friedman's fractured, piecemeal, and nonlinear processes of return and borrowing. Indeed, Friedman could be understood in these terms—the post-modern, heterogeneous artist par excellence who slyly poaches on art's history with a wry and knowing nod, as for instance in his desublimatory 1992 homage to Manzoni's *Merda de l'artista*, in which Friedman displayed a minuscule ball of his own feces on a white base.<sup>37</sup> Far from being a simple Oedipal rejection via incorporation or pastiche of prior modernist sculpture, or a traumatic repetition of earlier avant-garde aspirations, it is through the paired concepts of *bricolage* and *braconnage* that Friedman's productive yet fractured engagement with the past is staged. Friedman's work disrupts perceptually, historically, temporally, humorously—and he, like the *bricoleur*, does not seek the wholly new and unique as the aim of his work.

The aim of piecemeal poaching upon the past is that it "accumulates, stocks up" and "resists time," although, as de Certeau points out, it "does not keep what it acquires," and if it does, "it does so poorly."<sup>38</sup> Rather than resisting time, that which has been poached retains a sense of mobility and openness to future misreadings. With each successive recycling, the past slowly comes undone, an "erosion of time," de Certeau calls it. Unlike Smithson's melancholic diagnosis, however, for de Certeau the erosion of time is liberating. It allows *braconneurs* to flit from text to text, "like nomads poaching their way across fields they did not write," as producers of meaning, rather than passive consumers.

*Braconnage*, then, has its own peculiar temporality. As de Certeau points out, poaching is an everyday form of theft—of working with what is "not mine." Just as the worker might pilfer from the workplace as an economic "scam" (*la perruque*), so too the *braconnneur* "borrows" not only materials, equipment, and tools, but also time.<sup>39</sup> Friedman's use of *bricolage* and *braconnage* brings about a situation whereby the end product cannot be unique but is already familiar through appropriation and accumulation. Acknowledging Friedman's various debts and borrowings, however, is not the point. Nor do I want to suggest that there is something entropic about his work. Rather, I want to salvage the productive, generative sensibility his work offers. At issue here is how those returns help us imagine sculpture at this moment. We should not dismiss Friedman's borrowings as postmodern, ahistorical irony. On the contrary, it is important to acknowledge that *bricolage* and *braconnage* articulate a disconnective relationship with the past, a rummaging through the leftovers that carries within it the promise to provide potentially critical, productive results.

In a short essay on toys published in 1957, Roland Barthes offers a concrete realization of Lévi-Strauss's conceptual definition of *bricolage*, privileging the "invented forms" of wooden, handcrafted toys over the new molded plastic ones: "a few sets of blocks, which appeal to the spirit of do-it-yourself," he writes, "are the only ones which offer dynamic forms."<sup>40</sup> It is tempting to read

36. Harold Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry* (New York and Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1997).

37. "I presented it on this pristine white cube/pedestal, because I wanted to draw a relationship between this minimalist icon and the shit." Tom Friedman, quoted in Cooper, 22.

38. De Certeau, 174; subsequent quotations in this paragraph of my text are from the same page.

39. *Ibid.*, 24–28.

40. Roland Barthes, "Toys," in *Mythologies*, trans. Annette Lavers (London: Vintage, 1993), 53.

this short essay as a contemporary commentary on the art of assemblage, but I am more interested in how, for Barthes and, later, de Certeau in his writing on the practices of everyday life, the importance of *bricolage* and *braconnage*, of do-it-yourself, hinges on the level of agency afforded the consumer. Faced with the mass-produced, easily breakable plastic toy, the child is denied any active role in the production of meaning. The child "can only identify himself as owner, as user, never as creator; he does not invent the world, he uses it."<sup>41</sup>

For de Certeau, Lévi-Strauss, Barthes, and Friedman, using "the merest set of blocks" to do it yourself, "implies a very different learning of the world," one that is tied not to the passive and readymade form of the plastic toy or consumer good, but to a process of generating individual, active modes of engaging with the world.<sup>42</sup> *Bricolage* and *braconnage*, far from offering outmoded approaches to making and making do, might yet provide the most productive modes of explaining and encountering one's lived environment. The playful aspects of Friedman's work and his formal strategies of bric-a-brac, far from diminishing his works' critical force, are the key to his strategy of artistic misreading and recycling. The condition of "sculpture as leftover," then, seems less an inevitable description of the state of sculpture today than a radical and promising new possibility for the way in which objects, now, might come to mean.

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Jeffrey Kastner, "Tom Friedman: Feature Inc.," *Artforum*, January 2006, pag. 220

# ARTFORUM

IN PRINT

## Tom Friedman

FEATURE INC.

Though no doubt initially conceived primarily as a practical measure, the decision to make Tom Friedman's recent exhibition accessible "by appointment only" also had a certain conceptual logic. The extreme fragility of Friedman's work clearly demands some form of crowd control. The scrupulous agglomerations of paper, cardboard, Styrofoam, string, wire, and other assorted craft materials that made up this new suite of works operate, as usual, at the very limits of technical feasibility, seeming always just one inadvertently swung backpack away from annihilation. At its most successful, Friedman's work has an intellectual subtlety that is nicely in line with its structural delicacy, encouraging a solitary and focused mode of interaction, so the payoff for the minor inconvenience of having to call the gallery for permission to visit was an unusually contemplative environment.

Friedman has developed a reputation for being able to coax extraordinary things from mundane materials, and his unequalled talent for improbable feats of small-scale engineering was again on display here. From a lacy knee-high cone of punched paper (all works are from 2005 and, as is the artist's habit, are mostly untitled save for brief explanatory descriptions), to a clump of white polyester thread hung from the ceiling so that its nearly twelve-foot long tendrils arranged themselves into a tiny silken comet, to a bizarre little constellation of pencils, wire, pillow stuffing, and Styrofoam pellets that squatted in the corner of the south gallery like some localized atmospheric disturbance from a parallel universe, the show was vintage Friedman. Quirky and industrious, it was suffused with all the "howdjadodthat?" charm that has characterized the artist's output over the past decade and a half.

But for all Friedman's celebrated prestidigitations, there has always been another, rather cartoonish aspect to his practice. And in fact it was this mode of address—unapologetically broad, with a taste for slapstick as much as for the wry conceptual bon mot—that dominated the show. The entrance to the gallery proper was guarded by a sky blue Styrofoam bumblebee hovering over a matching cube, an animation-style recapitulation of his creepily lifelike model insects from the 1990s. The sense that Friedman may have conceived the show at least partly as an opportunity to perform tongue-in-cheek revisitations of earlier gestures was confirmed elsewhere. In the center of the room, a little musclemán made of painted Styrofoam spheres and standing on a cardboard box evoked both the long list of self-portraits produced by the artist over the years (in materials as various as sugar cubes, drinking straws, and aspirin) and the array of shoplifted balls in his hilariously subversive *Hot Balls*, 1992. Nearby, *10,000 Thoughts*, a large piece of strategically crumpled paper on which the artist had printed the individual letters of the word "thoughts" 9,999 times, suggested his *Everything*, 1992–95, in which he inscribed a similarly sized sheet of paper with, he claimed, every word in the English language. And the pair of painted Styrofoam "leaping legs" that hung in the middle of the main room were a sort of deadpan version of the artist's many fantastical, often spectacularly dismembered life-size figures. Here the kineticism of the artificial body (probably, like its predecessors, a self-portrait) was more joyful than macabre, an appropriate metaphor for a show that generally depicted the lighter side of Friedmaniana—emphasizing the artist's sense of humor without diminishing his bravura technical facility.

—Jeffrey Kastner

Roberta Smith, "Tom Friedman", *The New York Times*, 25 April 2003, E49

# The New York Times

## Tom Friedman

Feature

530 West 25th Street

Chelsea

Through May 3

Despite their ostensible diversity of forms and materials, most of the 28 pieces in Tom Friedman's sixth solo show in New York circle back to one theme: drawing and its infinitely flexible fundamentals. Nearly everything on view refers to or incorporates paper, line or pencils — sometimes in extreme applications. (Extreme, for example, is the life-size aluminum-foil demon, studded with candy and pierced with dozens of pencils, a sugar monster as St. Sebastian.)

Not everyone will see the hairy eyeball on the floor in the second gallery as a mass of line, but it is, in fact, made of wound, embroidered and loose thread. But by then clues have been dropped: a pencil elongated, in perfect proportion, to over five feet; an enormous scribble on the wall that has actually been carefully cut from the paper on which it was originally drawn; and a small block with a doorway that could be solid iron but is paper densely penciled with graphite.

Several works are not what they appear to be. In the front gallery, one of the artist's trompe l'oeil replicas of a fly (materials include plastic, hair, wire and paint) is smashed to the wall, as if just swatted. In the back gallery, we see the same fly again, now made of pencil on paper. First the model, then the drawing.

In establishing the all-pervasiveness of his idea of drawing, Mr. Friedman seems to parody more complicated efforts. The hairy eyeball, for example, could be a low-tech version of one of Tony Qursier's video pieces; the graphite cube, a lightweight Joel Shapiro house. Whatever he may be thinking, Mr. Friedman's show has an unusual clarity in the interaction of materials and thought. In fact, he connects the two in such a lean, linear fashion as to be called narrow-minded (in a good way, of course). Because of the fragility of these works and the number of visitors, the gallery has set up an appointment system for admittance: (212) 675-7772.

ROBERTA SMITH

Adam McEwen, "Some assembly required", *Frieze*, September 2002, N. 69



Tom Friedman's studio is a sensory deprivation chamber. A small shed about 50 feet from his home in the western Massachusetts countryside, it is windowless and featureless, immaculately tidy, completely empty and painted white. He has compared it to the blindingly white prison cell in the science fiction film *THX 1138* (1970).

Friedman works in this environment to get a better view of the shape of his own thoughts. Knotted, looping, self-generating, endlessly expanding and dissipating, these are the raw materials with which he makes his sculptures and drawings. The end result, the object, whether it's a frail thread of chewing gum stretched between ceiling and floor or a hyper-real dragonfly assembled from hair and clay, is just a diagram and a trace of the stuff he's scraped from the inside of his head.

Friedman's works operate as closed, repetitive systems which run until they break down; at this point an eerie sense of the unreal begins to seep from the split gaskets. 'The idea of pulling things further and further apart is

interesting', he has said. 'Stretching a piece of gum is an analogy for this idea: as you stretch the gum the connecting thread becomes thinner and thinner. I reached a point where the idea of fantasy started to filter in, because when the connection between things becomes so slight, they are not read as a cohesive whole.'

1

One sculpture consists of a clear plastic monofilament repeatedly knotted and then hung from the ceiling. Delicate, beautiful and profoundly unfamiliar, it looks like the ghost of a snake's intestine. The plastic has been transformed by intense, repetitive labour into something mute and elusive, an organic residue that remains, paradoxically, the definition of a 'man-made' object. The finished work, though comprehensible, confounds.

Most of Friedman's objects are named 'Untitled', and almost all are accompanied by clear descriptions: Untitled, 'a self-portrait carved from an aspirin' (1994); Untitled, 'a gelatin pill capsule filled with tiny spheres of Play-Doh' (1995); Untitled, 'a continuous ring of plastic drinking cups one inside the other' (1993); Untitled, 'all the words in the English language written on a large sheet of paper which sits on the floor' (1992-5). But the declarative simplicity belies an uncanny sculptural presence. A cardboard box covered with tiny polystyrene balls, Untitled (box balls) (2002), seems to lay bare some secret of its physical make-up, but in a language that, though strangely familiar, we cannot translate. Other pieces, such as a partially used bar of soap which Friedman has painstakingly inlaid with a perfect spiral of his own pubic hair, or a large white plinth displaying a half-millimetre sphere of his own shit, are the result of a collision between deadpan humour and an obscure and irrefutable logic.

Sometimes Friedman's work seems to share something with that of Martin Creed: a gravely hilarious literallness that challenges the viewer to take it literally - Creed's blob of Blu-Tak, say, as a way of sticking art and life together, or Friedman's strand of gum in terms of stretching a thought to breaking point. If Creed is concerned with nothing as it tends to everything, Friedman is concerned with everything as it tends to nothing. Perhaps, eventually, they get to a similar place, where the object manages to be both dumb and mysterious, and the nature of physical reality becomes deeply ambiguous.

Friedman yearns for entry into a communal space, beyond the purely physical, beyond the now clumsy-seeming fiction of cyberspace, where thought alone connotes existence. In a piece of writing entitled *Future* (1999) he describes a society that, through a fusion of technology and consciousness, has outgrown the need for the physical body. He is interested in the work of Timothy Leary, the acid guru whose early 1970s vision of a technology-based neural network now seems soberingly prophetic. 'I imagine a collective mental space', Friedman says, 'where all potential lies in the ability to construct a thought.' 2

Friedman's work argues that everything is endlessly connected, and therefore endlessly mutable. Like some autistics who see the world as a landscape of numbers, and for whom the solution to a mathematical problem is found simply by walking out into the landscape and picking up the answer, he proposes a universe in which the atoms, like meaning, continuously verge on collapse and rearrangement. Referring to a sculpture entitled *Dustball*; a three-quarter inch diameter ball made of house dust which sits on a ground of sifted dust (1994), Friedman once said that he was interested in 'the idea that much of us is falling apart and we are tending towards this different kind of unity'. 3

If everything is constantly falling apart, then, conversely, everything is also constantly being remade, in new forms. Friedman's tiny, bewilderingly precise fabrications of insects are not so much decoys as stopping points on a path of ceaseless and fantastic transformation: from minuscule ball of shit to fly to dragonfly to caterpillar to spider, they mutate freely and endlessly. For him art offers an entropic mental landscape in which all elements are in constant flux. In this he is close to Robert Smithson, the quintessential avatar of entropy and spirals, psycho-archaeology and science fiction. (Smithson's *Spiral Jetty*, 1972, can be seen as a time machine, designed to provide access to an infinite archive of thought.) For both, thinking is a synonym for the cosmos.

There are echoes of Friedman's preoccupation with quanta and multitudes in the visions produced by the human brain when in an unstable state. In *Crowds and Power* (1960), his exhaustive compendium of cultural and mythic symbols, Elias Canetti gives various accounts of the notion of 'multitudes' found in the hallucinations experienced by alcoholics and drug addicts. 'In delirium due to cocaine poisoning', he writes, 'the visual hallucinations often become 'microscopic'; innumerable tiny details are registered - animalcules, holes in the wall, dots.' He notes 'the frequency of diminution' in the visions: 'Not only is everything perceived and felt which actually is small; not only is a world formed in which things known to be small predominate, but also large things are diminished in order to be able to enter this world [...] Everything is multiplied and everything is reduced in size [...] In every possible way there is more life around him, but it affects him as though he were a giant.'

Forming his Lilliputian elements from Play-Doh, scalpelting tiny pieces of cardboard, knotting filament, kneading galaxies of pills and furballs, Friedman uses repetition and extreme distortion of scale as a way of gaining more information. They allow, he says, 'a closer and closer investigation of something, like looking into its molecular make-up'.<sup>4</sup> In fact, his work mimics the shape of thought in more specific and literal ways. Friedman's drawings and sculptures abound with spirals, lattices, constellations, images of tunnels and patterns that explode from a central point. These constantly reappearing templates coincide closely with the visual experiences of those hallucinating on LSD or mescaline. These were first classified in the 1920s by Heinrich Klüver, a neuroscientist at the University of Chicago, who discovered that the images commonly reported by subjects in the early stages of drug-induced trips fall into distinct categories. 'The typical mescaline or lysergic acid experiment begins with perceptions of coloured, moving, living geometrical forms', wrote Aldous Huxley in 1954 in *Heaven and Hell*. 'In time, pure geometry becomes concrete, and the visionary perceives, not patterns, but patterned things, such as carpets, coverings, mosaics.' Klüver, after interviewing dozens of subjects, classified these patterns into four 'form-constants': tunnels, spirals, cobwebs and honeycombs.

More than 70 years later research has found a neurological basis for the phenomenon. The primary visual cortex is a credit card-sized section of the brain about two millimetres thick that serves as the first layer of processing for images gathered by the retina. It consists of about 100 million neurons, each of which is wired to thousands of others. In a paper published last year Jack Cowan, a neuroscientist at the University of Chicago, presented a mathematical model of the visual cortex which, when given a virtual trip, produces patterns that match with uncanny accuracy the categories described by Klüver.<sup>5</sup> 'We calculated that given the kinds of anatomy in the visual cortex', said Cowan, 'there are only four kinds of patterns it will make when it goes unstable. It turns out that those four kinds of patterns we get from the math correspond exactly to the four classes of patterns that Klüver ended up with, based on his looking at the drawings.'<sup>6</sup>

In essence, Cowan and his colleagues demonstrated that the images produced under hallucination are a direct representation of the brain's circuitry. The tunnel leading to a bright white light reported in many near-death experiences, for example, is simply a reflection of the physical arrangements of strip-like columns of neurons in the visual cortex. Hallucinating is, as Cowan puts it, 'almost like seeing your own brain through a mirror'.<sup>7</sup> Timothy Leary speculated in *The Psychedelic Experience* (1964) that 'these visions might be described as pure sensations of cellular or sub-cellular processes'. As he correctly guessed, the spaced-out braintunes into and visualizes its own architecture.

I don't know whether Friedman has ever hallucinated, and I have no idea if he has any experience with LSD, mescaline, alcohol, cocaine or any other trance-inducing mechanism - save, arguably, the making of his work. But when he says that 'for some reason, when I think about an idea I think about it as a physical thing [...] It's not so much what the ideas are, but what they look like, and where they are in relation to each other', he is precisely, and literally, as good as his word.<sup>8</sup> His work invites the analogy of hallucinatory images because these images are just the products of a system working under abnormal conditions. And 'sometimes you learn a lot about a complex system from the conditions which occur when it breaks down.'<sup>9</sup> Which is also Friedman's methodology.

There's a compelling argument which holds that for most of us schizophrenia is only as far away as a scratch on the surface of the skin. As we shed our skin, daily, hourly, by the moment, in an endlessly swirling blizzard of dead and dying cells, perhaps some 'other state' - Friedman's 'different sort of unity' - is more available, and more recognizable, than we might imagine. The phrase 'natural high' comes to mind; so does the intensified condition of mania - sensibly deadened by doses of lithium for better interaction with the 'normal' world - experienced by manic depressives. Such a state might be a useful one for an artist (and also a familiar one: current research on ancient cave drawings concludes that whoever made these dots, spirals, tunnels and zigzags - forms that appear in the art of almost all cultures and go back more than 30,000 years - was, by whatever means, hallucinating).

Where we live, in the real world, and where we live in our minds, and the conceptual relationship between these two equally fictive places, are the subjects of Friedman's work. The ultimate aim of his artistic endeavour might be to reconcile these two realms through thought. It sounds utopian; it seems to involve notions of an afterlife, or a Platonic or Borgesian other-life. It is an ambitious undertaking. But, in the last words of Timothy Leary, spoken, perhaps hopefully, on his deathbed: 'Why not? Why not? Why not?'

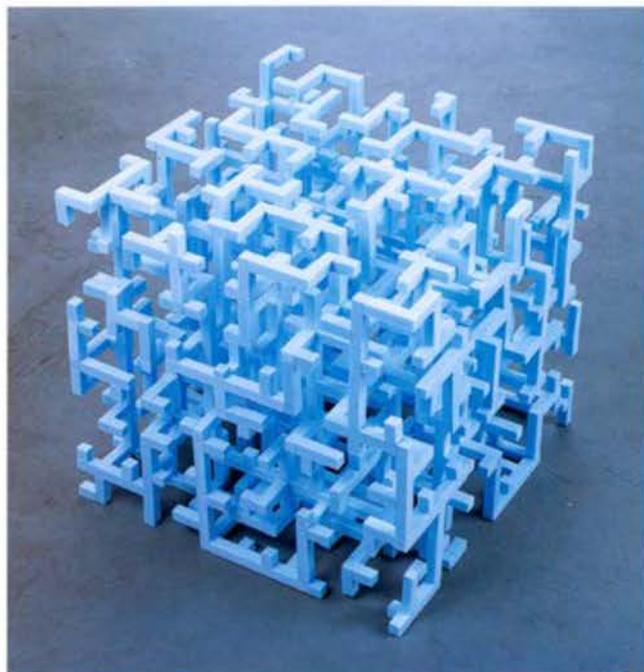
1. Dennis Cooper in conversation with Tom Friedman, Tom Friedman, Phaidon Press, London, 2001, p. 38.
2. Interview with Hudson, *ibid.*, p. 138.
3. Interview with Robert Storr (extract) 1995, *ibid.*, p. 120.
4. Interview with Hudson, *ibid.*, p. 137.
5. *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society*, vol. 356, 2001, p. 1.
6. Quoted in Ronald Kotulak, 'Seeing more than meets eye', *Chicago Tribune*, January 1, 2002.
7. *Ibid.*
8. Dennis Cooper in conversation with Tom Friedman, Tom Friedman, *op. cit.*, p. 25.
9. Interview: Terry Sejnowski, Director, Computational Neurobiology Laboratory, Salk Institute, La Jolla, California.

David Frankel, "X-Acto Science", *Artforum*, Summer 2000, pag. 138-41

# ARTFORUM



There's an element of the science nerd in Tom Friedman, or so I would guess—the oversolemn teenager who pauses in the middle of Stephen Hawking's *Brief History of Time*, puts aside his cobblestone glasses, and says, Oh wow. This is the Friedman whose language, in his writings and interviews, is sprinkled with a vocabulary of diagrams and rules and methodologies and logics, the Friedman who sees his studio as a “laboratory” in which he plays “both the scientist and the experimental subject,” and who can say, “When I make something . . . I want to build it from the atom up.” In art, this side of Friedman has ancestors in figures like Sol LeWitt, whose rational rationale has been to fix on a procedure and follow it until the work is done—to discover its empirical result. But there is another, weirder side to Friedman's art, and it seems to be getting more blatant as time goes by.

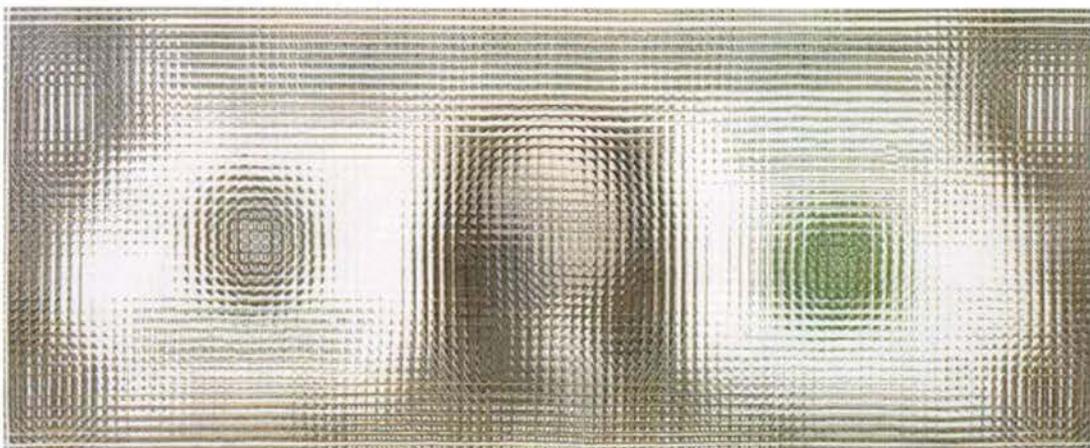


Some of Friedman's works actually look like some of LeWitt's—for example, a sixteen-inch openwork cube built up from straight-edged different-length sticks of blue polystyrene realized this year. LeWitt has based many works on the cube, but you can often figure out the system that generates them, and if you can't, you will usually find it written down somewhere nearby. Friedman's cube is another story: It is systematic, yes, but in the way of a maze, an intricate three-dimensional jigsaw with somewhere inside it an unreachable center. An earlier, similarly constructed work, *Cloud*, 1998, had a biomorphic outline and hung in midair; Friedman once described it as “a physical remnant—a diagram, actually—of a mind-scape.” I don't think LeWitt has ever been that metaphorical. The vague outer edge of *Cloud*—it seemed to just stop, though also to be infinitely extensible—is bounded in the new piece; every time a length of polystyrene reaches one of the cube's imaginary defining walls, it turns ninety degrees or just ends, drawing the form in the

air. If each of these works is to be imagined as the physical shape of a thought, the new one is the more incongruous of the two when you picture it inside your head.

Friedman's work has often had a sharp-edged humorous mordancy, which, however, is usually quite subtle. But the first piece the visitor saw in his show this spring at the Feature gallery, in New York, was a kind of three-dimensional drawing made out of severed spiders' legs rising off a sheet of paper like imperfectly flush staples. (Imagine the LeWitt instructions for this: First, catch spiders . . .) The pocket protector of our hypothetical Friedman-as-science-buff must save his shirt not from an inky ballpoint but from an X-acto knife. The idea of the surgical cut became explicit in the show's most spectacular piece, a gutted and partially dismembered corpse that looks like a victim of Jack the Ripper but is made entirely out of thin unreinforced paper. Red paper in flat layers, cut in ripple-edged blots and whiplike lashes, draws the lake of blood in which

Opposite page: Tom Friedman, *Untitled* (detail), 2000, construction paper, 12 x 114 x 120". Installation view.  
This page: Tom Friedman, *Untitled*, 2000, polystyrene, 16 x 16 x 16". Installation view.  
Photo: Oren Stor.



the figure lies; and paper builds the body itself, a tortured array of multitudinous large sheets and tiny shreds, here rolled into a bruised cylinder to form an arm or leg, there seemingly just crumpled in the artist's hands to suggest some battered fragment of viscera. An extraordinary combination of high representational calculation and the appearance of brutal accident, this fragile volume

**THE IDEA OF THE SURGICAL CUT BECOMES EXPLICIT IN THE GUTTED AND PARTIALLY DISMEMBERED CORPSE THAT LOOKS LIKE A VICTIM OF JACK THE RIPPER BUT IS MADE ENTIRELY OUT OF THIN, UNREINFORCED PAPER.**

provokes a convoluted reaction, not the smallest question being, How the hell will they ship it? The precision and ingenuity of the work are a bizarre contradiction of its Grand Guignol gruesomeness. Its peculiar incitement of pity and terror, awe and giggles, is only strengthened by the fact that the figure is a self-portrait.

Setting this scenario in a room alongside a movie projector (also made of paper) and a work based on the dollar bill, Friedman may have been insinuating a thesis about connections among violence, the media, and money. Although the wry puzzles and paradoxes in which he specializes don't always lend themselves to obvious social critique, he is not uninterested in the modern world; the gallery literature accompanying the show included a long speculative statement he had written about the effects of computer technology on the psyche, and the two other human figures he included here were both explicitly robotic. One of these is particularly wonderful: A complicated scaffolding of gray-brown cardboard that reminds me simultaneously of George Lucas and of Vladimir Tatlin, it reveals the detail with which it has been imagined only from close range. Every structural element seems to differ from its neighbor, every joint and digit to be separately designed and engineered, and the whole eight-foot-high apparatus is evenly scattered with minuscule beads of Styrofoam, as if the thing were sweating. The second sculpture, this one half the other's height, resembles an earlier figure from 1998, made entirely of wooden cubes; now the cubes are sugar. The modular surface of the work suggests a three-dimensional

translation of the gridded forms seen in crude computer graphics. The figure stands in a little circle of sugar, as if its substance were gradually sifting to the ground; while suggesting a slow corporeal collapse, this dusted ring also evokes some kind of magical transubstantiation into sweetness. You might be seeing a saint who had won himself a halo, which, however, he wears around his feet.

Looking at Friedman's work, which will be shown in depth in a retrospective opening July 8 at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago (organized by the Southeastern Center for Contemporary Art, Winston-Salem, NC), you are often made aware of the time it has taken him to make it. In one piece at Feature, he seems to have drawn a Pollock-like skein of thick abstract line, then to have cut along each side of the line (the X-acto knife again) and removed the blank paper, so that the drawing's negative space is literally empty. As Roy Lichtenstein did in his various diligent renderings of an Expressionist brushstroke, Friedman is exploiting a tension between contrary artistic principles, one of spontaneity, the other of painstaking care. An installation in the show played out a similar contradiction. Another knife drawing, it was carved into the plaster wallboard, and was visible only close up; each line being just the width of the blade, it disappeared from any distance. Yet the shape itself was a large jagged sunburst, or perhaps one of those cartoon speech bubbles that should frame an exclamation like Zap! or Pow!, but that Friedman instead left empty. He often seems to arrive at these self-canceling oppositions, here between presence and absence, positive and negative, between on the one hand a dramatic form and gesture and on the other something approaching invisibility. Yet the result is highly productive. Like those artists a century back who were fascinated by advanced abstract ideas about a fourth dimension, Friedman is translating a virtual reality into visual reward. □

This page: **Tom Friedman, *Untitled*, 1999**, dollar bills, 14 x 35 1/2". Photo: Oren Star. Opposite page, clockwise from top left: **Tom Friedman, *Untitled*, 1999**, spider legs on paper, 6 x 12 x 9". Photo: Oren Star. **Tom Friedman, *Untitled*, 1999**, card board and Styrofoam balls, 100 x 30 x 22". Installation view. **Tom Friedman, *Untitled*, 1999**, sugar cubes, 48 x 17 x 10". Installation view. Photo: Oren Star.

