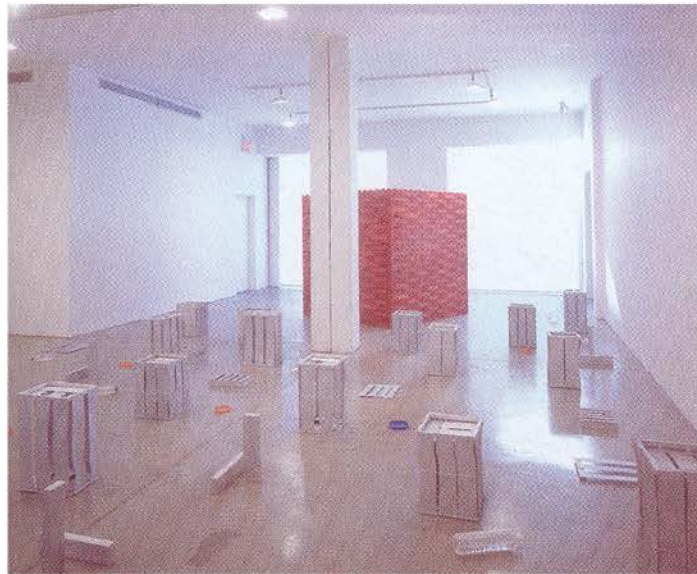


## Art in America April 2002



### Tony Feher at D'Amelio Terras

Tony Feher has the most supple sculptural intelligence of his generation. He is both tender and caustic, a critical postformalist and a cosmos builder. He's also light on his feet. Rather than spending money on traditional art supplies or at the fabricator, Feher assembles much of his work from consumer detritus or the hardware store and only borrows from the most poetic aspects (presentation, sequence, light quality) of Minimalism and installation art.

Last summer, Feher's show at Bard's Center for Curatorial Studies in Annandale-on-Hudson, N.Y., occupied a series of rooms installed with partially filled water bottles strung from the light fixtures near the high ceilings. The bottles were arranged in rows and suspended at different levels: a few inches above the floor, chest-height or overhead. There were sequential variations in the colors of the bottle caps from one dimmed room to the next that marked off the space abstractly. The glass entrance walls had been covered by Feher in a geometric pattern

of blue plastic bags. The museum felt quietly subterranean, like a kind of pantheistic cloister. I thought of the liquid levels in the bottles as metaphors for the underground water table and the strings as the extended roots of plants finding water.

In his new show, this aspect of natural growth also seemed present, but unlike at Bard, where the entire gestalt of the space was transformed, in New York Feher treated the viewing space with casual disregard, shoehorning two ungainly sculptures into the gallery's front room. *Maybe* (2001), which has a variable overall size depending on site, took up half the gallery space and a little more, leaking toward the doorway and the front half of the gallery. Positioned at intervals in a loosely regimented pattern were wooden fruit crates and their lids, painted silver, and short two-by-fours, also painted silver, in units of two (one standing and

one lying). Within this layout were other components: recycled plastic bottles lying on their sides with labels removed, containing water. The bottles had caps of black, white or green and were accompanied on the floor by red, orange and blue plastic caps from plumbing pipe.

The accumulation of water droplets on the insides of Feher's bottles educed an interiority that bonded with the other elements in an overall organic wholeness. The ensemble collected like a galaxy or an amoeba. Here, it ended near the walls, but one was left with the feeling that it could have gone on and on. The other large sculpture on view, *Enjoy* (2001), was made up of 350 red plastic soda cases forming a roughly 6½-foot cube that seemed to be pressing uncomfortably against the confines of the gallery. Rather than being problematic, the apparent mismatch between the art and the exhibition space was exhilarating. In spite of the insubstantiality of the materials that Feher uses, his work reveals an underlying muscularity; it's getting pumped up and starting to shoulder itself around.

—Joe Fyfe



December 13-27, 2001

**Tony Feher, "Maybe"**  
D'Amelio Terras, through Sat 22  
(see Chelsea).

**T**ony Feher's modus operandi of assembling appealing bits and pieces of detritus has flourished over the course of his career, showing up variously in collages and sculptures of material scattered around the floor; his work can sometimes seem like a history of contemporary art as it might be found in a homeless person's shopping cart.

Lately, Feher's approach has become more formal and ordered—even somewhat minimalistic—and that's certainly the case in this show. (Which is fine; it's amusing to see evocations of Carl Andre in the form of plastic-bottle ephemera.) One piece, titled *Maybe*, is a group of fruit or vegetable cartons—made out of flimsy wood and wire—spray-painted silver and arranged in a grid across the gallery floor. The effect suggests a sprawling American city on an overcast day. *Enjoy*, a big stack of red plastic soda-bottle cases, dominates

the front of the gallery. All forms of logos or advertising trademarks have been scraped off the cartons, leaving them with a bulky, fortresslike presence while still managing to seem light and playful, like brick-patterned children's blocks. One wants either to see the structure scaled up like King Kong, or else to knock it down—such are the strong responses Feher elicits with a simple stack.

The timeliest work is also the most innocuous: an untitled string of translucent blue plastic bags, looped together and hung from the ceiling. This isn't exactly a new idea; B. Wurtz, Gabriel Orozco and Phillipe Parreno (not to mention that camera-toting boy-played by Wes Bentley in *American Beauty*), have all

considered plastic bags that become stuck in trees or are blown about as symbols of the transience of life. Still, as in all his best art (which is always nearly nonart), Feher presses home the unbearable truth that life's fabric, continually reweoven by destiny, is as delicate as wisps in the wind. And he makes the observation with such a light and utterly unpretentious touch that an otherwise melancholic notion actually inspires joy.—*Robert Mahoney*

