

Time Out

New York

May 28–June 3, 2009

Tony Feher, "Wall Show"

★★★★★

D'Amelio Terras, through June 20
(see Chelsea)

A tight selection of five new sculptures "specifically intended for the wall," Tony Feher's unassuming installation in D'Amelio Terras's diminutive Front Room gallery is a simple delight. An established master of contemporary found materials and salvaged objects, Feher continues to exercise a magpie-like attraction to the bright and shiny, feathering his expansive nest with whatever industrial remnants and nonbiodegradable bits and bobs come to hand. Occasionally succumbing to the impulse to saddle his otherwise resolutely abstract assemblages with associative subtitles (here *3 Girls on Beverly* and *Jackie's Sorrow*), the artist more

often lets his sparkly, fluorescent, translucent, laminated stuff do the talking. Relying on intuition and improvisation, he makes the utterly synthetic and the plainly contrived appear almost natural.

Though he could never be called a Minimalist, Feher often does as little as possible to transform a salvaged object into a finished work; one piece from 2007 consists of nothing more than a crumpled bit of silver foil—sorry, an "aluminized non-stretch polyester rescue blanket"—attached to the wall with a binder clip and a thumbtack. And the aforementioned *Untitled (Jackie's Sorrow)* makes judicious use of a sheet of polymer netting, gathering it into a small black bundle that evokes an angry storm cloud or a funeral veil. But the best works of the bunch are those in which two or more elements are

combined through a sort of dumpster-diving alchemy. Who else but Feher would think to repurpose an irregular sheet of Bubble Wrap as a home for his collection of colored-glass marbles?

—Michael Wilson



Untitled (3 Girls on Beverly)

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D'Amelio Terras

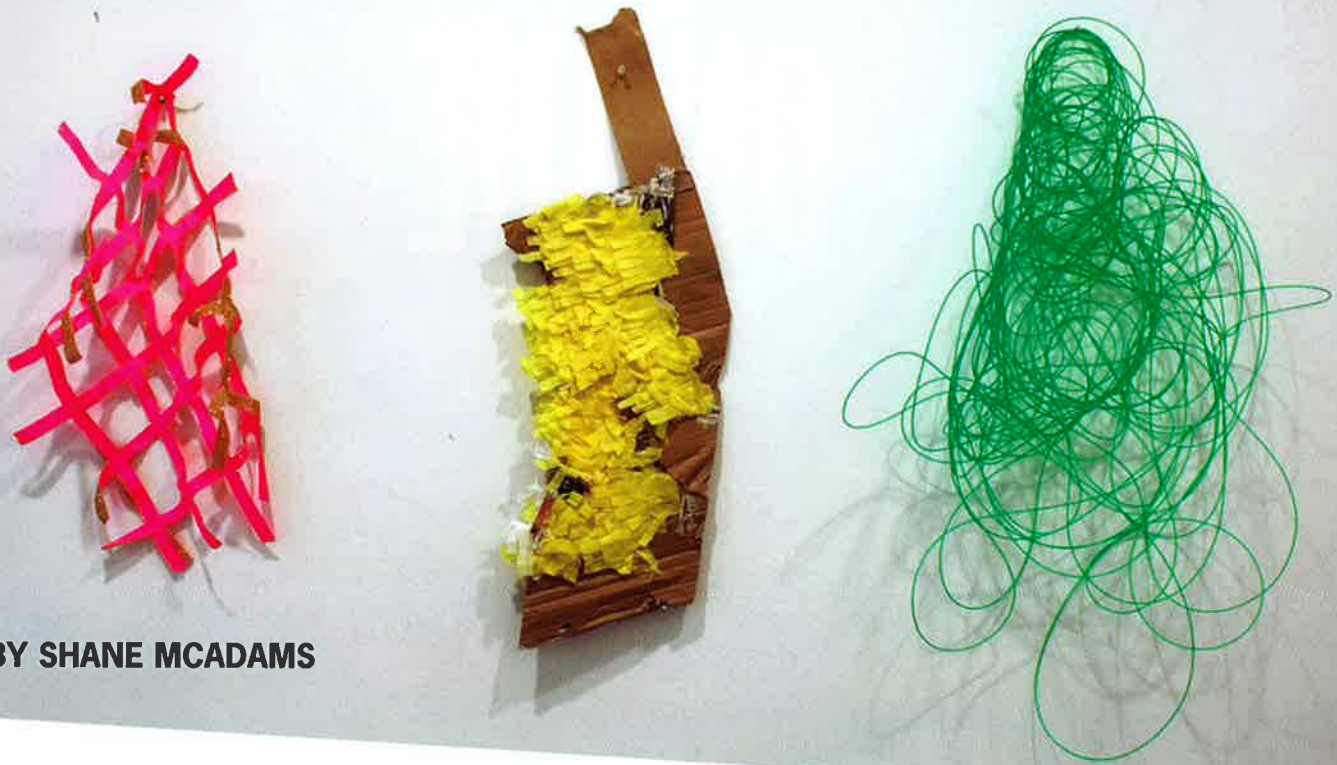
525 W 22nd St between Tenth and Eleventh Aves (212-352-9460). Tue–Sat 10am–6pm.

* Tony Feher, "Wall Show." See Reviews.

Noguchi Rika, "The Sun." The artist made a simple pinhole camera to capture these hazy images of our star. Both, through June 20.

Art

TONY FEHER



BY SHANE MCADAMS

New York-based artist Tony Feher has made a name for himself by transforming the mundane, the discarded and the post-consumer byproducts of industrial culture into eccentric and inventive works of art. To Feher, heaps of trash are mountains of ore to refine into precious found-object jewels. In his hands, soft drink bottles, produce cartons, wire, plastic strapping, used bubble wrap and discarded shipping pallets are all candidates for an artistic transformation from the trash bin to the gallery.

Feher's material sensibility nods to post-minimalists like Robert Morris, whose "search for the motivated" in the late 1960s sought to take the arbitrary out of process-driven art and allow the materials dictate form. This motivation was exemplified in Morris' "felt" pieces, which slumped and swayed under the forces of gravity and their own weight — a naked presentation of matter that challenged the illusionistic and pictorial impulses that had driven art until that point. This search for "anti-form" informed a generation of artists from Eva Hesse to Richard Serra, who celebrated the fundamental properties of non-traditional materials and made the world their art supply store.

While indebted to these anti-form pioneers, Feher's work also expands on them. Looking back, Morris and Serra's work seems more and more pivotal, but also more and more austere and cut off from the world outside the studio. Seeing a Jan Dibbets floor piece now is a bit like watching Antonioni after you've grown up on Martin Scorsese flicks; artistic kudos go out to the professor, but it's hard to deny the aesthetic punch of what the student did with his lessons. Feher's work, too, has taken lessons from the past and expanded on them to fit a contemporary worldview. Where Minimalists remained enamored by the aesthetic of industrial production that enveloped America after World War II, Feher's sensibility is less heroic, less endgame, and somewhat more recuperative, as if to try to make sense and find redemption in the excess and waste brought on by industrial efficiency.

Feher has mounted five solo exhibitions with D'amelio Terras, including his current "Wall Show," (on view until June 20), and recently teamed up with PaceWildenstein, which currently co-represents his work. His debut show with Pace last year featured a selection of sculptures subtly distributed across the floor, dangled from the ceiling, and rested on the windowsills of the museum-like space. Though Feher has said that one of the principles guiding his work is to present materials "as they are," it was only partially true of the show at Pace. True, no viewer left the gallery without gaining an inventory of Feher's actual materials, but it took some time. The impress of Feher's show at Pace was the liminal transformation from a viewer's appreciation of a work in universal, abstract terms to their eventual

recognition of it in local and familiar terms. For example, from something being red and geometric, to it being the red geometry of something they have taken for granted as banal. For instance, an elegant, viridian, and apparently abstract column only slowly resolved into a stack of common produce baskets, the kind that would hold cherry tomatoes, and that you probably throw away twice a week without ever appreciating its formal potential. Or the curious spray of yellow thatch that sat on the sill that materialized into a mason jar stuffed with fluorescent Weed Eater cord as one approached it.

Part of the joy of this first show at PaceWildenstein was the relationship created between the viewer, the work, and the space. The sporadic placement of the pieces in the gallery gave the viewer a stake in the show; viewers eased in, and the works played coy. By contrast, his current show in D'amelio Terras' project space isn't afforded the luxury of sneaking up on anyone. The work in "Wall Show," as the title implies, is all fixed to the walls of the modest space. And with this in mind, Feher wisely works with the current rather than against it. The work in the show mostly relies on folding, bunching or otherwise nakedly embellishing flat, plastic wrapping materials. An untitled work takes an aluminumized rescue blanket, gathering it at its center and bunching it into a binder clip to create a large, reflective, cockeyed bowl-like form. In another, Feher simply inserts glass marbles into the cavities of a sheet of discarded bubble wrap, transforming both materials and creating an improbably beautiful object en route. While the pieces in the show lack the "wow" factor of much of his prior work, the work in "Wall Show" has a graceful and sophisticated restraint that serves it well. And, whatever dearth of "wow" that does exist is made up by the surplus he has left viewers from past work. Anyone familiar with Feher's finessed and cerebral brand of the sensational in art will appreciate "Wall Show's" poetic clarity. The press release compared Feher's work to William Carlos Williams's poetry, which is apropos to this exhibition. Like Williams, Feher finds a way to get a lot of mileage out of very little, and both artists, by narrowing their parameters somehow expand the limits of what is possible within them.

The legacy of the emancipation of materials has recently gone from a regulated freedom to something closer to wanton lawlessness. Much of the poetry of restraint and appreciation of form witnessed in Minimalist and post-Minimal art has been pushed aside in favor of an inclusive, desultory sprawl designed to speak as much about the lifestyle of the artist as the nature of the media. While that do-it-yourself camp does it themselves towards creating accumulations of trash, savvy eyes will continue to appreciate how Tony Feher manages to spin trash into formal gold.