

ARTFORUM

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Tony Feher

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Five bright pink fan-shaped pieces of polystyrene, each four feet high, a foot deep, and eight feet wide, were laid out on the gallery floor for Tony Feher's recent exhibition. Taking literally the appellation of construction company Owens Corning's Fanfold insulation—plainly printed on the verso of each object—Feher simply partially unfolded the pink sheets around a central pivot to make them appear like fans resting on the ground. Each was titled *Blossom*, 2009, as was the exhibition itself.



View of "Tony Feher," 2009.

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

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

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

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

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

—Alexander Scrimgeour