

ARTFORUM

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TONY FEHER

A C M E

Like the Minimalists to whom his work nods, Tony Feher uses industrially produced materials (glass, plastic, metal, nylon, polystyrene, rubber) and manipulates them in ways not generally associated with a human touch (stacking, hanging, laying components out in a line or grid). Unlike the Minimalists, however, Feher gravitates toward objects whose first lives were spent in industry and consumer culture (bottles, lightbulbs, plastic bags), and his works betray an openness to human error, randomness, and whim that a good Minimalist would try to suppress. Feher considers the potential of things, the poetic possibilities contained within a limited material/visual vocabulary, the power of chance, and, in unexpected ways, the subtlety of gesture.

Despite the ordinariness of their components, each of the ten pieces in his recent show was engaging. *Pole One*, 2000, a vertical galvanized pipe dotted with variously colored plastic magnets, stands as a late-modern, post-Sputnik, hardware-and-dime-store totem. *Hand Drawn Line on a Wall*, 1999, among the most reductive works on view, consisted of multicolored pushpins stuck into the wall a few inches apart in a row that ran roughly parallel to the floor at about belly-button height. The line was reasonably straight, obviously generated by eyeballing rather than with the aid of a straightedge or chalk line, and it becomes an endearing exercise of gesture, the occasional tiny holes where pushpins were moved showing like erased lines in a drawing. *Adam's Light*, 1999, a scrapping together of overlapping translucent blue plastic bags taped to a gallery window, created

a luminous, monochrome plaid—a lovely example of Feher's predilection for approximate geometry. The diverse is interspersed with the homogeneous in *Untitled (Unify)*, 2000, a triangular floor arrangement of twenty-five identical clear bottles, each stoppered with a black marble, alternating with thirty variously shaped glass jars bearing lids of different colors. And *Untitled*, 2000, consists of a power strip connected to six others that radiate out on the floor like a fan; each bears three flashing red, yellow, and blue bulbs. The blinking composition functions as an homage to everything from creative home-wiring solutions and carnival displays to sunsets and rainbows to low-culture signage and high-culture abstraction.

Feher's work inevitably leads one's thoughts toward the issue of what can be art, but the pieces seem to offer less a quandary or provocation than an affirmation, or even a bit of an education, passed from artist to viewer. One walked away from this show not questioning whether to accept what one had just seen but rather feeling a little relieved that the artist didn't urge too strongly and instead simply tried to see how much elegance he could generate out of what to the rest of us would be just a bunch of stuff.

—CM