

ARTFORUM

Eric Fertman

SUSAN INGLETT GALLERY

Suggesting a joint venture between Philip Guston and R. Crumb (or, to choose a name less feted in the art world, *MAD* magazine's Don Martin), Eric Fertman's clubfooted sculptures combine craft with comedy in a style that, while aesthetically endearing, so far lacks the bite of his influences. Wielding slender brass and steel rods, Fertman joins together smoothly rounded bulbs of stained wood into anthropomorphic abstractions that, in his second show at Susan Inglett Gallery,



Eric Fertman, *Stems*, 2010, stained oak, steel, horsehair, 50 x 18 x 12 1/2".

filled a compact room to bursting. On display were also a number of other works—some sculptural, others graphic—that in certain cases helped situate the Brooklyn-based artist's practice and in others were entertaining but tangential.

Of the pieces that diverged from Fertman's cast without further defining it were *Fluorescent* (all works cited, 2010) and *Black Light*, both of which hung in the gallery's narrow, sloping entranceway. While accurately shaped and sized—and even equipped with on-off pull chains—these solid oak replicas of strip lights, one stained bright pink, the other an inky black, are of course nonfunctional in the grand tradition of Jeff Koons's *Aqualung*, 1985, and (more to the point) Ceal Floyer's *Light*, 1994. In the gallery proper, Fertman continued to exploit every inch of available space by installing *Vase*, a vessel containing one flower and one disembodied boot-clad leg, on the front desk, while seven iterations of

Head, an abstracted Easter Island-style bust, glowered from a shelf behind the receptionist's shoulders.

More typical of Fertman's oeuvre are *Legs* and *Twinkle Toe*, both tall, dark, gangly forms punctuated by bulges that might be exaggerations of corporeal features or simply fanciful interruptions of a non-representational base. There are echoes of a litany of formal vocabularies in these precarious but expertly made works, whose quasi-organic logic owes a debt not only to Guston and to the cartoonists already mentioned, but also to sculptors from Henry Moore to Charles Long. Variations such as the yellow-stained *Walking and Pissing* and the smaller *Cherry Blossom* and *Cherry Bomb* employ the same set of components and references. Again, it's an appealing formula, but a formula nonetheless, and one so closely adhered to that the introduction of something different, such as the hank of horsehair that sprouts from *Stems*, comes almost as a shock.

Enveloping a portion of the space in which these sculptures were installed was *Room*, a deconstructed, open-ended, pink-stained hutch. Assembled from flat oak planks that end abruptly in jagged splinters, the structure is a Fertmanian twist on altogether cleaner equivalents by the likes of Dan Graham and Liam Gillick. But though it made an already crowded space even trickier to negotiate, *Room* still achieved a pleasing balance between the slickness of *Legs*, etc., and the more rough-hewn "Head" series. The "broken" motif crops up again, in less immersive form, in *Exit*, a ragged wall of blue-tinted planks propped up in one corner.

Finally, Fertman also displayed a series of woodblock prints (an appropriate two-dimensional medium for this artist if ever there was one) and a trio of primary-colored ink-and-watercolor "Test Patterns."

The prints, also collectively titled "Head," represent their sculptural namesakes as simple silhouettes that fade from dark fuchsia through white to black, while the latter see their maker riff—in a casual, doodling hand—on more or less related icons and images, from stripes to sunglasses to skulls, filling each large sheet of paper edge to edge. Neither set of works occupied center stage here, but both hint at possible ways forward for a deft practitioner yet to realize his full potential.

—Michael Wilson