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Eric Fertman at Susan Inglett

by Ambereen Karamat



Eric Fertman, installation view, Susan Inglett Gallery, New York, 2010.

In this technologically obsessed world where new art trends are often based on graphically designed images by, or express ideas through combinations of mixed-medium installations like, it is a reprieve to enter the placid world created by Eric Fertman. His show at Susan Inglett Gallery had the serenity of a Japanese garden. Often in his sculptures there are elements of both artificiality and naturalness. The rough bark of a tree is transformed into a smooth, balloonlike form, lightly stained with reds, pinks and yellows.

Changes in texture of a material can bring remarkable changes in the way it is looked at. Fertman has ground, scraped, stained and polished his wooden sculptures to bring out the diaphanous circular grains of the wood; in fact, they become more prominent, having an organic feel to them. In his astute way he changes the quality of woodwork to lose its own identity, forming it into an object that cannot be understood except through his new formed compositions. A Brooklyn-based artist in his mid-30s, Fertman plays with one's imagination through his bulbous sculptures. At times they look like abstract forms of flamingos, sometimes there is a cartoonish image of a turtle, or some stacked-up eggs. Continuous use of phalluses (which he calls wrinkled sausages), drooped together with smashed spheres all supported by rods and balanced by big, rounded feet creates awkwardness for almost everyone.

The titles are endlessly obscure: *Essence of Foot*, *Stems*, *Legs* and *Pooch*. The works allow the imagination to search through the empty voids of the sculptures; abstract images are translated into simpler forms and collected in the back of the memory, appearing in dreams and hallucinations.

Fertman seems to be experimenting with size and shape in his work. In an exhibition last year, the works were much larger, with different elements joined together. The concept persists but the proportions have shrunk. His constructions are reminiscent of Guston's

late figurative style, with club-footed forms that recall Popeye cartoons. The works convey humor but still have an intense darkness and mystery to them.