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Galleries - Kenneth Baker

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Feher at Meier: New York artist Tony Feher understands courting dismissal as a source of power in art. He has taken that and several other lessons from minimalism and Fluxus. From the modernist lineage of assemblage and found-object sculpture, he borrows the authority to use any material that suits his purposes, though his work consistently suggests that he finds ideas through the stuff in hand.

"Singer of Many" (2008) consists of 31 screw-cap glass bottles aligned on a long shelf supported by five evenly spaced metal brackets. Tinted water fills each bottle and stands at a different level in each successive one so that the whole sequence - repeating red, yellow, blue - describes a low sine wave of primary colors. The unpainted brackets protruding below provide visual punctuation, almost like exclamation marks, encouraging a strictly syntactical reading of the piece.

But with its post-Pop temper, Feher's art does not resist our seeing in "Singer of Many" correspondences to daily fluctuations of mood, well-being or even economic fortune.

In fact, "(Same)" (2008), the work that shares a room with "Singer of Many," encourages such associations. In a Fluxus spirit, it presents detritus of the artist's daily life "to be spread evenly on a painted surface." It makes a kind of material self-portrait through a scrambled narrative of consumption: empty cigarette packs, prescription drug bottles, candy wrappers, airline snack bags and other items perforated with a hole punch, soft-porn playing cards, rolling papers, film cans, lightbulbs, toy busts of composers such as Chopin and Bach and much else. Brand names crop up so frequently in this scatter piece that the self it evokes looks more and more like everyman.

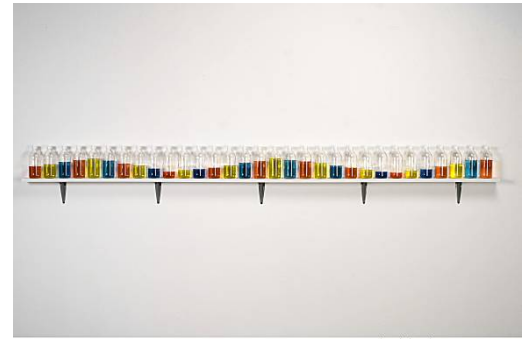
For contrast, think, as Feher surely did, of the "portraits" Felix Gonzalez-Torres (1957-1996) did in the form of evenly spread hard candies in evenly colored, unbranded wrappers.

The simplest, most beguiling things in Feher's show look like blingy remakes of small objects by Richard Tuttle or Joseph Beuys (1921-1986). In each one, Feher has flattened the small cardboard box from a drugstore product and coated it with glitter. One feels an inexplicable stirring of recognition when faced with these objects, as if consumerism runs so deep that even the structures of packaging have infiltrated our collective unconscious.

Tony Feher: Sculpture and collage. Through Nov. 14. By appointment only. Anthony Meier Fine Arts, 1969 California St., San Francisco. (415) 351-1400, www.anthonymeierfinearts.com.

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Ira Schrank / Anthony Meier Fine Arts