

# ARTNEWS

## TONY FEHER, SCULPTOR OF SIMPLE OBJECTS WITH FAR-REACHING MEANING, DIES AT 60

BY *Alex Greenberger* POSTED 06/24/16 11:07 PM



Tony Feher, (*Singer of Many*), 2008, 31 glass bottles with screw caps, water, food color, and painted wood shelf.  
COURTESY SIKKEMA JENKINS & CO.

Tony Feher, the American sculptor whose low-key work involving everyday objects captured the transience of life, died today of cancer-related causes. He was 60.

Feher's work involved the careful, deliberate use of everyday materials, which he just barely altered. Often these were things he found on city streets, like bottles, bags, paper, boxes, string, and, in the later years of his life, blue tape. In Feher's hands, these low-cost things took on high-art aspirations. Arranged in rigid patterns, Feher's work had a tongue-in-cheek quality, like Donald Judd's stacked sculptures remade by the class clown.

In a 2013 interview with *ARTnews*, Feher recalled what first drew him to making sculptures out of the everyday. He remembered seeing a bowl of red marbles in an East Village toy store in New York—the way the light hit them caught his eye. “So I bought a handful, went home, and layered them into a bunch of honey jars so they created these different-hued red tones,” he said. “I suddenly thought, ‘I get it now. I’m an artist, and this is sculpture. This is mine.’”



Feher in 2011. COURTESY WICHITA STATE UNIVERSITY

Some of Feher's work looked like trash, and, in an interview from 2013 with *BOMB Magazine*, he said that the artist Robert Gober once called his work "tenement art." And yet, despite its dollar-store aesthetic, Feher's work touched on deep, human themes. Feher began making work during '80s, and his practice matured at the height of the AIDS crisis; the artist himself was HIV positive. Not unlike Felix Gonzalez-Torres's more overtly intellectual work, Feher's sculptures managed to capture the way that his materials, much like human life, couldn't last forever. his sculptures, too, would likely be destroyed one day.

Feher's work has varied in size, from a commission for a courthouse in Illinois, to an installation made of suspended bottles at the Chinati Foundation, to a recent room-size work made of vinyl flagging tape at Sikkema Jenkins & Co. (which represented him in New York), to smaller, more precious sculptures that could be easily broken if accidentally kicked. His work was surveyed in 2012 in a traveling retrospective organized by the Blaffer Art Museum in Houston. The show began at the Des Moines Art Center and later traveled the Bronx Museum of the Arts and the DeCordova Museum and Sculpture Park in Lincoln, Massachusetts.



Tony Feher, *Terminal Stones on Red*, 2004, 5 red plastic soda containers, 20 rocks.  
COURTESY SIKKEMA JENKINS & CO.

Feher was born in Albuquerque, New Mexico, in 1956. Because his father was in the Navy, he moved around the world during his childhood, though he was raised mostly in Corpus Christi, Texas. After attending the University of Texas, he moved to New York, where he lived for most of his career.

Fans and friends mourned Feher on social media. On Twitter, the artist Gary Simmons wrote, “R.I.P. Tony Feher a fantastic artist who showed us so much beauty in the moments...you’ll be missed brother..rest in power.”

Throughout his career, Feher discussed being interested in the possibilities of looking at basic structures—taking the theory out of sculpture, and being able to understand life via simple objects. In his 2013 *ARTnews* interview, Feher

said, “When you strip things bare, you allow them to take on the possibility for broader meaning than if you explained them. Reduction opens the work up.”

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