

Martha Friedman
"Martha Friedman"

By Merrily Kerr, *Time Out New York*, October 11-17, 2012



Martha Friedman



Wallspace, through Oct 20
(see Chelsea)

Martha Friedman's new sculptures deftly perform an unlikely transformation of a simple machine—the inclined plane—into artworks that amusingly remind us of the body's frailty. Layers of cast concrete wedges stacked into impersonal towers are interrupted by flaccid, pizza-paddle-shaped strips of bright-orange silicone, while a giant hair ball on a huge pink pedestal is both monumental and gross.

Wedges bring to mind high-heeled shoes and doorstops, but the ones used

to create the show's three main sculptures appear more like the sort that forces something open, summoning a subtle violence that is reinforced by the presence of shims stuck into the pieces like knives. Each work is titled *Mechanical Disadvantage*, though the wedges themselves appear quite serviceable. Rather, the disadvantage arises from phallic or tongue-like sections of rubber that droop as if spent, suggesting the cold functionality of the machine thwarted by human limitations à la Duchamp's *Large Glass*.

Friedman has explained that the work was sparked by the story of a Yale student killed when her hair got caught in a lathe, but this show is no

memorial. Instead of tragedy, the full roundness of *Hairball*, a sphere of teased-up synthetic hair nearly three feet in diameter, evokes fecundity, in spite of its repulsive, apelike pilosity.

A sense of failure or danger is evident, however, in the back gallery, where a pile of wedges, toppled like dominoes, plays antimonument to the front room's sculptures. Four nearby photos depict wedges helping to hold up the ceiling of a mine—momentary stopgap measures, perhaps, to avert a disaster. Whether as a tool, a phallus, a life-saving device or an aesthetic object, Friedman makes sure we no longer look at the wedge in the usual way again.—*Merrily Kerr*