

Martha Friedman

"Martha Friedman in the Studio with Daniel Belasco"

By Daniel Belasco, *Art in America*, February 2012

Art in America

MARTHA FRIEDMAN IN THE STUDIO WITH DANIEL BELASCO

THE SCULPTURE OF Martha Friedman is deceptively whimsical. Recalling oversize mundane objects by Oldenburg, Vija Celmins and Alex Hay, Friedman's work appears to be latter-day Pop, sourced in urban markets and suburban homes. But she has absorbed a variety of other sculptural influences, especially the process-based sculpture of Lynda Benglis and Eva Hesse. Friedman pushes her everyday objects into an uneasy psychological relationship with the viewer.

Born in 1975 in Detroit, Friedman earned a BFA at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago (1998) and an MFA from Yale (2003). After moving to New York, she became known for hyperrealistic sculptures of items like rope and lemons. Many were the sort of mash-ups of sexual puns and minimalist forms that always get a laugh, such as her Brancusian stack of five large cast rubber eggs, titled *Laid* (2006). Perhaps recognizing that sculptural double entendres are a formal dead end, Friedman deepened her exploration of object, material and space. Giant rubber bands, stretching from floor to ceiling, dominated a space in the exhibition "New York Minute" at Rome's Museum of Contemporary Art (MACRO) in 2008. A series of large waffle sculptures were on view, either on plinths or wall-hung,

in her 2009 solo at New York's WallSpace gallery. Rubber tongue sculptures, cast from meat sourced from Katz's Delicatessen on the Lower East Side of Manhattan, took center stage in two solo museum shows, at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Detroit, and de Cordova Sculpture Park and Museum, Lincoln, Mass., in 2010. Friedman has since experimented with concrete, first casting tongues and then moving to a new subject: the wedge, a common tool. Friedman has taught sculpture at Yale and the Cooper Union, and currently teaches at Princeton University.

While artists as varied as Bruce Nauman, Louise Bourgeois, Rachel Whiteread and George Segal have used cast objects and figures to transfer the aura of the real to the gallery space, Friedman's single-minded focus on casting stands out within sculpture's expanded field. Enthralled with the animistic power of the cast object, Friedman seeks to transcend its stubborn literalism.

We talked last fall in her studio in the Greenpoint neighborhood of Brooklyn while she was at work on an ambitious installation that will debut at WallSpace in October 2012. One wall was covered with large drawings of stacks of gray and orange wedges. Various old tongue molds and models protruded from shelves.

DANIEL BELASCO You've written about how your parents, a scientist and a doctor, with their molecular and medical views of imaging, influenced your work. What early art experiences, either making or seeing, impacted you?

MARTHA FRIEDMAN I was always being dragged to museums to look at Renaissance painting—not that much contemporary or modern art. I also went to a music camp called Interlochen, in northern Michigan, for three months every summer.

BELASCO What was your instrument?

FRIEDMAN Oboe. I was never a great talent. I just fell in love with the process of making the double reed. I would not practice, but would pore over the newsprint catalogues of oboe reed-making tools. It's a really methodical sort of fetishy thing to turn cane into a double reed. You're constantly testing it, blowing into it. So immediately there's a connection between this little, made thing and your body. And I think that stuck with me.

At the same time I noticed there were art kids in these little art huts in the back of the camp. They could sleep in;

they didn't have to get up at the crack of dawn and go practice. They were just sort of hanging out. And laughing a lot. And working late. So I switched and took a sculpture course. The teacher, Jamie Watson, changed my life. He showed me how to make a mold of a tree branch and I was hooked.

BELASCO How did your interest in molding and casting develop?

FRIEDMAN For one project, we made a clay blobby thing. Then we made a waste mold around it, dug the clay out of the hole in the negative space in the mold, flipped it over, poured a harder plaster into the cavity, and then broke it away. It was magical. I was captivated by a lot of things but particularly that transformative moment when liquid turns to solid. You remove the mold and there it is. I've never lost that reveal moment. Casting is a language I like. I've always rigidly stuck to this form, this modality of art-making.

BELASCO Your practice is unusual because you're so focused on a specific technique.

FRIEDMAN At Yale, the sculpture department was the catchall for anything

that wasn't strictly photography or strictly painting. I could be really hard on myself and say, "Man, you're just plodding along," like some sort of 19th-century sculptor lost in space. I keep waiting for it to lose its shine, but it just hasn't. All of the ideas that occur to me are in this form.

BELASCO How do you select the specific objects that become a sculpture?

FRIEDMAN A lot of it comes from just paying attention. It doesn't come from memory. I'm not trying to locate a thing that matches a metaphor. I used to look at what was on the table, or falling off it, in still life paintings. Before that, I looked at magicians' tools. My newest body of work comes from looking at the wedges that I use to pry apart molds. And then there's the whole food thing, where I go to the supermarket and see what things are behaving badly, like the big yuccas that look like hairy brown ugly piles, and weird smooth eggplants—they seem slightly surreal in the marketplace.

Martha Friedman in her studio, 2011. Photo Paola Ferrario.

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BELASCO One painting that you've told me interested you was *Quince, Cabbage, Melon and Cucumber* [1602], by the Spanish Baroque painter Juan Sánchez Cotán [1560-1627]. How do you make the leap from flipping through art history books to making sculpture? Were you really mining them for objects that look strange?

FRIEDMAN Yes. It was not academic at all. It was like looking through a Williams-Sonoma catalogue, I'm embarrassed to say. I was shopping! Cotán's paintings are really fascinating because there's a starkness to them. The backgrounds are really dark and there's no space. I admire Cotán's reductive Baroque still life, with the arc of quince, cabbage and cantaloupe sweeping down to a stone tablet, ending with that cucumber, pushing out of the picture plane, sort of pointing at you: it's creepy, it's funny. I made two sculptures—a cantaloupe and a cucumber—about that one painting.

BELASCO Do you imagine the foods having an estranging effect on the viewer of your work, as they have on you when you see them in a painting or in the supermarket?

FRIEDMAN Yes, I actually just want

to steal that. By knowing how to make molds, you can just suction that effect off and bring it into the studio. I'm not particularly interested in carving, adding or subtracting material to get a representation of an eggplant or whatever.

BELASCO Could you tell me about how you go from that initial object to a fully expressed sculpture?

FRIEDMAN The most easily describable activity is a sort of formal play. I ask, "What can this thing do?" A lot of times I get my hands on the thing—the yucca, the eggplant—before I know what I'm going to do with it, and it usually takes me a long time, because I make a lot of different types of molds to cast a couple of different materials. I'm just pushing stuff around at that point to see if something interesting happens. Ideally the work can become anti-gravitational, as if I can release it from physical forces to some degree. I usually want it to be sort of funny, too.

BELASCO As you know, *Ladies' Room* [2010] is my favorite work of yours. With those two overgrown cast rubber tongues tasting that giant pimento olive, the piece lacks the restraint of many of your earlier works—in fact it's outrageous. The tongues



Right, Friedman: *Ladies' Room*, 2010, silicone rubber and fiberglass-reinforced gypsum cement, 18 by 90 by 12 inches.

Left, *Cucumber*, 2011, Plexiglas, polyurethane, paint and steel, 80 by 30 by 70 inches.

All photos this article, unless otherwise noted, courtesy Wallspace, New York.



also form an architectural structure. The references and associations with gender, interiority and sensuality are really layered.

FRIEDMAN A tongue has an animation that another object like a wedge or a noodle lacks. I thought, "Okay, tongues, what do they do?" I do like when the objects in the pieces behave within a certain logic of how we understand them to function in the world. Tongues taste and tongues touch.

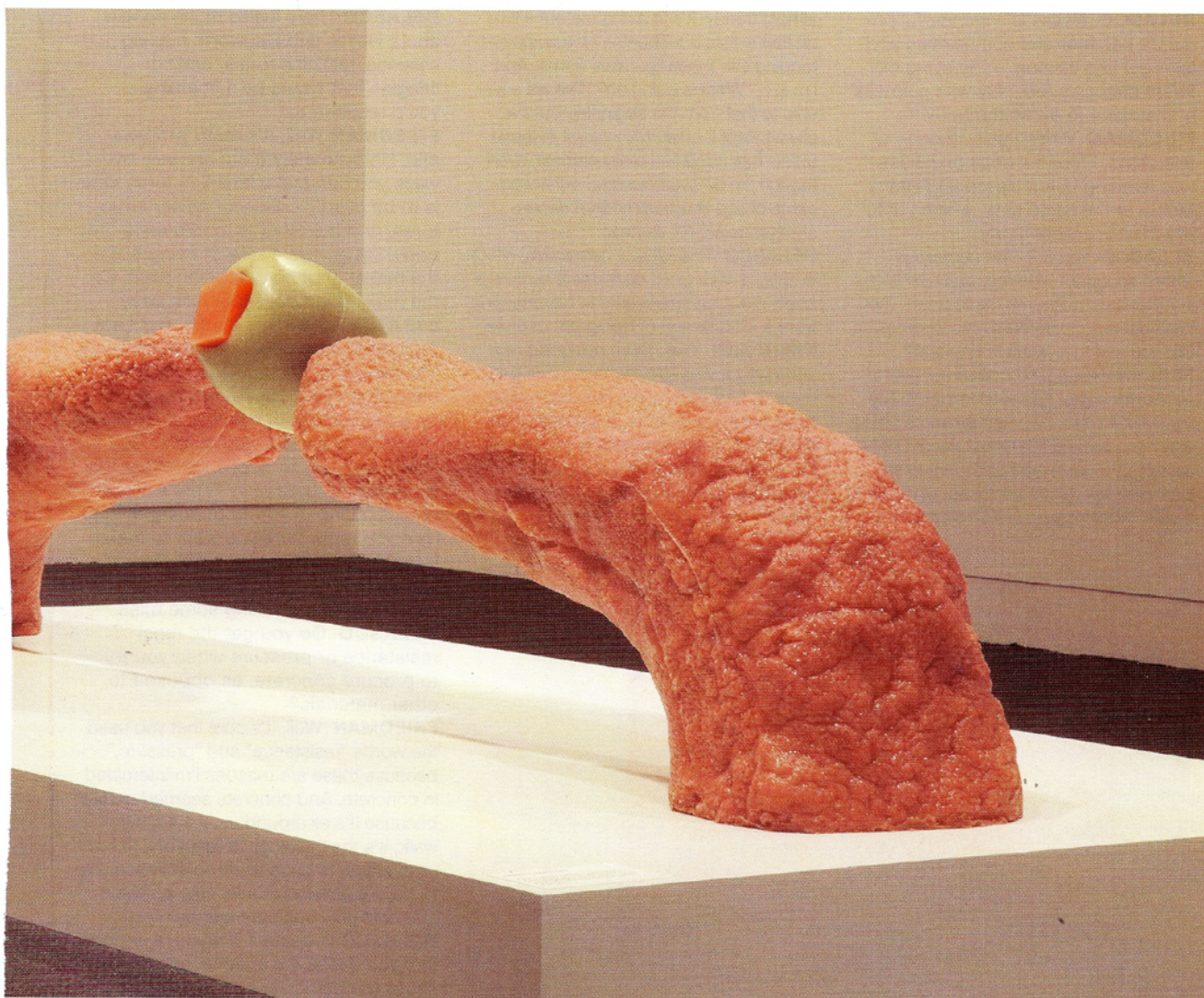
BELASCO Despite the title, it's a great monument to the deli, but I know that wasn't the intention.

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FRIEDMAN It's in there. I eat at delis all the time. I had made a big sausage sculpture some years ago which came from looking inside the glass deli cabinets and thinking about using those materials: sausages and sliced meats.

BELASCO It seems that rubber is the perfect material for you to represent meat.

FRIEDMAN Rubber is such a funny material because it's recognizable and not recognizable, it's industrial and natural; it's in its own weird category. It behaves strangely. And it's so

tactile. You want to put your cheek up to it or you want to pinch it. It's hard to keep your hands off.

BELASCO To switch gears, are there contemporary artists you feel a kinship with?

FRIEDMAN It's much easier for me to think about historical influences than contemporary peers. I have looked a lot at Eva Hesse, Anthony Caro, Naum Gabo. We could talk about any one of them.

BELASCO Gabo rarely comes up as a point of reference for contemporary

artists. But the work is interesting and you don't really see it that often.

FRIEDMAN It's also fragile. It stays where it is because no one can move it—all that Perspex and old fishing line. Some of his pieces are really beautiful puzzles. There's a structure and a fragility that disappear and reappear as you're looking at his sculpture. And they have rhythm. When I cast something over and over I'm interested in modularity. It's a way of making something big. You could just build. You could just add and add and add.

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BELASCO Hesse is a wonderful precursor because she quit painting and later got into casting forms using different materials that play with softness and surface to evoke the body.

FRIEDMAN When I was 13 or 14 at this camp, I found a book on Hesse. I was learning about Hesse and Henry Moore at the same time, which I actually think is sort of funny.

BELASCO You mention numerous British sculptors who are rarely exhibited in American museums these days. They have been supplanted by the Minimalists. Did you see their work in England?

FRIEDMAN I did. I dropped out of art school for a year and lived in Leeds. My uncle lives there. I worked for some artists and hung around the University of Leeds art history department and went to see Barbara Hepworth's enclosed, glassed-in studio. Now modern British sculpture is

almost trendy. It's freaking me out a little bit that artists like Thomas Houseago are tapping into those figurative forms. And I'm like, "What is going on?" I've felt a kinship to that from the beginning but I've always kept it quiet. My interest in these artists has remained really earnest, even though I'm an overeducated artist who came of age in a postmodern deconstructed relational esthetic.

BELASCO That idea of humanism, which is such a nice word because it evokes a noble universalism, seems to be emerging from a long phase of being out of style.

FRIEDMAN Well, there are good reasons why it was problematic. This gets back to *Ladies Room* a little bit. I think because I'm a woman, it shifts my relationship to that modernist form-making. I'm aware of myself as a woman making sculpture, in relationship to early 20th-century men.

BELASCO There's also much debate about Hesse and Hepworth making essential feminine forms, and I'd imagine that would be something you'd respond to.

FRIEDMAN Well, it's really problematic. Unfortunately there are only two ways you can make feminine form. One is to be overtly critical of power structures, and the other is to reference the body. I'm always aware of being both the maker and the one being seen. On the really good days that falls away and it's just me in my studio. But I am reminded of being a woman all the time, like when I buy concrete. It's pretty basic, but when you're making things on a big scale with building materials or industrial materials, you're reminded in subtle and not-so-subtle ways that this is confusing to people. There's a kind of dissuading of you from doing things. "Are you really sure you want to make it that big?" or "Do you really need this material?" On some level I'm constantly aware that I'm breaking some rules.

BELASCO Do you get the most resistance or pressure when you try to procure concrete, as opposed to other materials?

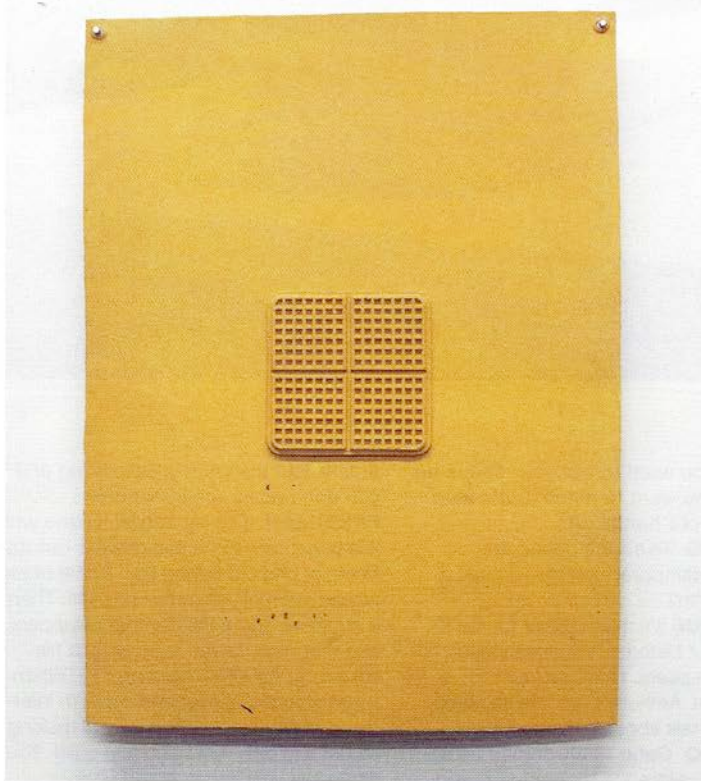
FRIEDMAN Well, it's cool that you used the words "resistance" and "pressure," because these are reasons I'm interested in concrete. And concrete seemed perfect because it's all around us: it's the sidewalk, it's the buildings. It functions to hold us in place, to push us through space. We all have a physical relationship between that cool gray concrete and our flesh.

BELASCO It sounds like you're saying that you chose the material before you chose the particular form that you're working on now, which is the wedge.

FRIEDMAN I kind of did. I'm a little obsessed with rubber but I knew it needed a counterpoint. There needed to be something happening to the rubber in the sculpture, almost like squeezing the rubber of its juices. I layer the concrete and the rubber casts so there's a flaccid quality versus a rigidity.

BELASCO Had you worked with concrete before?

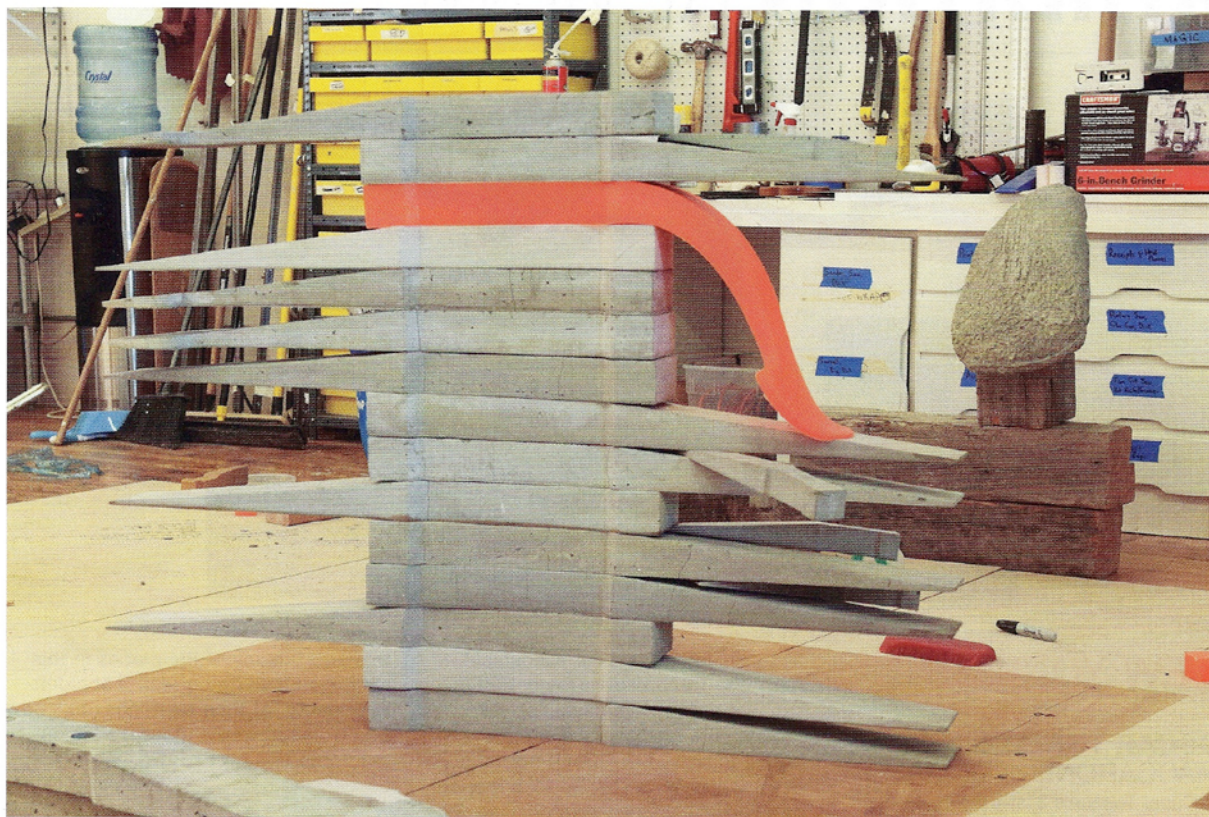
FRIEDMAN I knew how to mix concrete. But it's really fussy. Which is surprising considering how much of it we need. It has to cure at a certain rate and lose moisture at a certain rate, and it takes



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Above, studio view of *Stack of Concrete and Rubber Wedges*, in progress. Photo Paola Ferrario.

Opposite, *Waffle Paper*, 2008, handmade paper, 40 by 30 inches.

three weeks before it reaches its full strength, and during that time you have to keep it moist. It's not what you'd expect.

BELASCO You have to nurture it.

FRIEDMAN You do! This big strong rough material—you actually have to be like, "Are you okay?" Spread it, check it, spray it.

BELASCO Can you tell me what you're doing with the concrete now?

FRIEDMAN I'm working on a show for WallSpace that's going to be called "Caught." It is about a young Yale science student, Michele Dufault, who accidentally got killed on a lathe machine last year. I didn't start the body of work thinking about that, but I was really affected. And I knew I wanted my installation to feel more dangerous than my work has in the past.

BELASCO Do you mean a Richard Serra-esque illusion of danger, or a sculpture that poses an actual threat?

FRIEDMAN I just went to Richard Serra's show at Gagosian and I actually got a little nauseous, just lost, like vertigo. I want my installation to feel a little scary, though it is still static sculpture that has its place. This girl, as I understand the story, was working alone in the chemistry shop at midnight or 1 A.M.

and her hair got caught in the lathe and it pulled her in, and she asphyxiated somehow. She had real agency over this tool and was making something physical, and it killed her. It killed her by her hair, an iconically feminine thing. And she's a student, and I teach. For all of these reasons I was obsessed with this story. I found myself making a body of work that seemed to be in direct conversation with the notion of tools and danger. There are two types of wedges that I've used at the studio to open molds: one's a hammerhead and one's a straight. I enlarged them and cast them in concrete and rubber. Then I stacked them to make static machines that are compressing rubber wedges. And so there's verticality, but there's also implied rotation.

BELASCO Of the lathe, you mean. What I see now in the studio is a stack of 12 or so gray concrete wedges with a fluorescent orange rubber wedge stuck in the middle. Does that one represent this girl?

FRIEDMAN Yes and no. The orange one represents the body being caught or compressed. But I hate to say "that's

the girl"—that kind of freaks me out. The stacks are going to be 9 or 10 feet tall. As a viewer you'll move through these stacks. So also you're the girl. I want it to feel like you're inside a stopped turbine or something. I think about the way a lock works, which reminds me of the form of a lathe. So the tool quality of the wedge is really important.

BELASCO But the wedge is not dangerous.

FRIEDMAN No, it's not in itself. A wedge opens things up, and holds things together. The whole show revolves around things being held together or pushed apart. My work is made to seem poised or balanced at that threshold between something released and something stored. o

DANIEL BELASCO is associate curator at the Jewish Museum, where he organized, most recently, "Shifting the Gaze: Painting and Feminism" (2010).

Martha Friedman

“From the Pictorial to the Abstract: The Recent Sculpture of Martha Friedman”

By John Yau, *Hyperallergic.com*, September 16, 2012

HYPERALLERGIC

Sensitive to Art & its Discontents

From the Pictorial to the Abstract: The Recent Sculpture of Martha Friedman

by John Yau on September 16, 2012



Installation view, Martha Friedman at Wallspace, 2012 (all images courtesy Wallspace)

Martha Friedman's recent work marks a significant shift away from the sculptures that first gained her attention. Working within a territory that includes Rene Magritte, Claes Oldenburg and Vija Celmins, Friedman became known for casting enlarged versions of commonplace items; nails, cantaloupes, waffles, yucca plants, blue eggs, olives, rubber bands and cow tongues. Until this exhibition, her sculptures tended to be pictorial and irreverent, their wit something we associate with Pop art and the domesticated Surrealism of Roy Lichtenstein.

Did it occur to Friedman — who is in her mid-thirties — that if she continued going down the same track, her work could end up becoming purely theatrical and a tad superficial, as in “Ladies Room” (2010), where two large cast rubber tongues form an arch, with an olive held between

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them? Did she realize that her oddball humor threatened to overshadow the visceral, its suggestion of vulnerability and transformation?

* * *



Martha Friedman, “Mechanical Disadvantage I” (detail) (2012), steel, concrete, silicone rubber, pigment, 118.5 x 60 x 60 inches

That Friedman has moved into new territory is all the more interesting because her adherence to the technique of casting shows no sign of becoming a constraint. In the front room of Wallspace, she showed four sculptures, three of which were made of carefully stacked, oversized cast-concrete wedges, like the kind used to pry open a mold or a can of paint. On a larger scale, the tapered wedges protrude, like a row of fangs, from both ends of the stack. Sandwiched in the gray concrete stack was a wedge-like shape cast out of red rubber, droopy and ineffective — an abstract version of Charlie Chaplin draped over a huge gear wheel in his film masterpiece, *Modern Times* (1936).

Each concrete stack felt like it might topple over if another wedge was piled onto it. Friedman further underscored the stack’s precarious, seemingly temporary nature by inserting smaller concrete shims in various seams, suggesting that sculpture is a balancing act doomed at some point to fail. She also emphasized their sense of threat and danger by the arranging them at different angles to each other, suggesting the beginnings of a maze.

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By John Yau, *Hyperallergic.com*, September 16, 2012

Even as wedges rose into the air, one could not help feeling crushed. Friedman’s repeated cast concrete units do not overcome materiality, as they do in Brancusi’s *Endless Column* or Donald Judd’s shiny, lacquered stacks. For in all three of her stacks, the concrete wedges also compressed the red rubber form. This interruption — at once visual and physical— introduced a note of vulnerability into the pile. The rubber form was a caught and helpless thing.

* * *



Martha Friedman, “Hairball” (2012), synthetic hair, wood, plaster, paint, 63 x 34 x 34 inches

In contrast to her earlier work, in which visual jokes were made by shifts in scale, Friedman has moved into a more complex domain, manifest with feelings of danger and entrapment. By moving beyond a realm of experience, where “what you see is what you see” (as the old adage goes), Friedman has deepened the emotional tenor of her work in ways that cannot be reduced to the anecdotal.

At the same time, her stacks comment on Brancusi’s *The Endless Column* (1938), that paean to transcendence and spiritual yearning. Brancusi’s modular units rise straight up, as if unimpeded by gravity. Friedman’s wedges are horizontal; they lie on top of each other, like planks or corpses. The cast shims and the red rubber form underscore the inescapability of gravity.

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By John Yau, *Hyperallergic.com*, September 16, 2012

Friedman’s interest in stacking and columns places her in proximity to other sculptors interested in dislodging certain forms from their modernist context (I am thinking of Pam Lins and Isa Genzken, for example). This seems to me one of the interesting areas of exploration going on in contemporary sculpture’s expanded field.

* * *

The other sculpture in the front room was a large sphere — made of brown wig hair — resting on a bright, glossy pink, box-like base. I was reminded of monuments to the Civil War in which a cannonball is mounted on a base. The hairy sphere also reminded me of a coconut, but its placement on a pink base sent it into a weirder zone.



Installation view, Martha Friedman at Wallspace, 2012

It seems to me that Friedman is still learning how to trust herself. In the back room, on the back wall, she mounted a row of what appeared to be historical black-and-white photographs of shims being used in the supporting columns in mineshafts, all contained in pink frames. As documentary examples of the unavoidable danger of being a miner working in unsafe conditions, the photographs felt as if they were a key to the stacked wedges. Friedman doesn’t need to connect the dots. This is small beer compared to the work in the front room, where the informing temperament is quirky, disquieting, and, most of all, original.

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*

Martha Friedman

“Martha’s Tongue or Our Pseudo-Sexual Relationship with Food”

By Colin Darke, *Hyperallergic.com*, November 24, 2011

HYPERALLERGIC

Sensitive to Art & its Discontents

Martha’s Tongue or Our Pseudo-Sexual Relationship With Food

by **Colin Darke** on November 24, 2011

DETROIT — This Thanksgiving you should pay attention to the texture of your food, how you use your tongue to lash out and taste your food, and how you digest your food. Why? Isn’t that kind of creepy? Um, yes, it is kind of creepy, and lusting over your food may upset your family members’ stomachs. But Brooklyn-based sculptor Martha Friedman is preoccupied with food and digestion, and she creates awesome food art, proving there is some real artistic value in food lust. Maybe you should leave it to the experts though.



Martha’s tongues.

Friedman creates sculptures that are jovial, yet with her sculptures she is still able to explore a deeper subtext that challenges and delights the viewer. She explores her personal narrative of everyday objects and everyday perceptions having a different, sometimes surprising and alternative meaning.

Here’s a good example — she may create a large half eaten waffle to start a dialogue about the viewer’s relationship with the food. She highlights the viewer’s internal digestive process by making the viewer come face to face with it. She also adds a sexual element to some of her work. We all eat, and at times people have a strange pseudo-sexual relationship with their food — pay attention to the groans and sweat during Thanksgiving dinner followed by the post-coital triumphant nap.

Martha’s imagery captivates viewers because of its size and its novel context and arrangement. Her most successful works (and probably most disquieting) employ an enlarged cow tongue. You see all of the details of a protruding tongue as it delicately balances an olive or as it peeks under a black tarp. With this work she escapes criticism that her work merely pays homage to Claes Oldenburg. There is nothing pop about

So here is a selection of her sculptures for you to enjoy – this is your foreplay before you attack that sexy Turkey.

Martha Friedman

"Future Greats: Martha Friedman by Shamim M. Momin"

Art Review, Issue 30, March 2009

Art Review:

FUTURE GREATS:



(Curator, Whitney)

MARTHA FRIEDMAN

Rubber bands scaled to monumental size, stretching from floor to ceiling in a precise grid, turn an inconsequential object into an experience that is humorous, beautiful and somewhat intimidating. Wending your way between them, your body brushes their rubbery, almost fleshy surfaces, causing them to wiggle and tremor like living things long after you've walked through. The huge bands are playfully coloured, while the twisted knots that join them are almost vaginal, certainly sexual. This recent project, *Rubbers* (2008), her most ambitiously scaled yet, is characteristic of Martha Friedman's work, a thoughtfully witty (rather than merely clever) material play with minimalist and modernist forms – not so much an insertion of the 'feminine' into the 'masculine' form, as did some earlier feminist precedents, but rather sexualising the inert material, adding the body back to the equation.

In another project, *Melons* (2005), a pyramid of stacked cast spheres recall cannonballs; upon inspection, they are perfectly replicated cantaloupe melons. Friedman's work simultaneously maintains an ongoing experimentation with issues of balance, form, space and gravity that keep her subtle, witty commentary from sliding into a singular critique. In *Link* (2006), a delicate, precariously balanced arc slices through the gallery space, an exercise in spatial control and tension, formed of enlarged replicas of sausage links. The sausages recur in a Brancusi-like endless column made awkward and modest, where his use of the found material as pedestal – a rough-hewn block of wood, for example – now becomes a chopping block, deflating a certain 'down with the people' material pretension.

Two public projects, both shown in New York, riff on corporatised, so-called pop art – one turns the blank cubic sculpture into a melting waffle, the other stacked spheres into enormous cast eggs (bluntly and hilariously titled *Waffle*, 2008, and *Laid*, 2006, respectively). In Friedman's work, historical precedents don't make for idols to kill, but rather elders whose innovation and strength are foundational influences – even as the artist gently mocks their blustery didactic failures.

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“Martha Friedman: The Organization of Batter at Wallspace”

By Eric Gelber, *Artcritical.com*, May 14, 2009

artcritical

the online magazine of art and ideas

Martha Friedman: The Organization of Batter at Wallspace

by Eric Gelber

Thursday, May 14th, 2009



Martha Friedman, *Petrified Waffle I* 2009. Wood, formica, marble, 39 1/2 x 15 1/2 x 15 1/2 inches. Courtesy of WALLSPACE

Martha Friedman’s exhibition “The Organization of Batter”, represents a celebration of, but also an intense meditation on mass produced objects, in this case waffle irons/waffles, rubber bands, and slabs of butter, through the lens of minimalist and modernist sculptural forms. The gridded waffle form, the focus of all but one sculpture in this exhibition, is an anonymous artefact, hardly thought about for any great length of time outside of its practical value as a factory made consumable, that becomes in this exhibition a humorous counterpoint to the universal geometries of minimalist sculpture and the psychological archetypes of modernism. Friedman’s art brings together different concepts of matter, soft and hard, organic and fabricated, and all of the physical sensations and memories we associate with them, and generates contradictions with straightforward gestalts.

The organization of batter, the act of forming a waffle using an amorphous liquid batter and the metal or plastic template stored in the heart of the waffle iron represents a creative act or a controlled act of composition, albeit one done within the confines of domestic life. The waffle grid forms in this exhibition are ambiguous because it is never clear if we are seeing traces of the waffle iron, the machine, or the consumable it produces. Friedman’s focus on a relatively old fashioned food preparation process has a romantic element to it.

Throughout her oeuvre Friedman transforms single units of something into an overall form like a pyramid, a wavy line, or totemic horizontals. Her inclusion of the simulacra or replicas of organic matter we ingest such as cantaloupes, yucca, cucumbers, and eggs, along with human made edibles like bangers (sausages), macaroni, and waffles, and other common objects such as chairs, nails, rubber bands, and rope, add a humanist element to her formalist sculptures. She references objects we are familiar with in our daily life, that we have had tactile experiences with, and that appear within our living spaces.

The odd juxtaposition of these common objects with an abstract formal language gives the work social dimensions and sensual qualities. At the very least they introduce a tactile element to the work that lures the viewer into the experience of the work.

Martha Friedman

"Martha Friedman: The Organization of Batter at Wallspace"

By Eric Gelber, *Artcritical.com*, May 14, 2009

The inclusion of these forms also adds a layer of vulnerability in that real food stuffs and organic matter decompose fairly quickly and are not considered as permanent as objects made from industrial materials. But of course her faux food stuffs and organic matter are made from industrial materials.



Column Waffle 2009. Rubber, 28 x 16 ½ x 4 inches. Courtesy of WALLSPACE

With this exhibition Friedman is less interested in recreating the surfaces of organic matter as we saw in her previous sculptures that included carefully rendered models of yuccas and cantaloupes and cucumbers. The waffle forms that appear in the marble, paper pulp, and rubber sculptures in this exhibition are either carefully trimmed so that only the outline of the waffle or outline of the interior of the waffle iron is included, as in the *Petrified Waffle* series, the waffle form is surrounded by a rubbery flat substrate that is trimmed in an asymmetrical way and hung from the wall directly or using a metal rod, as in the *Flap* series, or the waffle form is reproduced with paper pulp in actual-size and sits in the middle of a rectangular flat slab of paper pulp that is colored the same color as the waffle form in the middle of it, as in the *Waffle Paper* series. In the *Waffle Paper* series the isolation of the waffle form transforms it into an emblem or herald, and also suggests a drain. This series forces us to ask the question, "Why do certain shapes and textures become part of our everyday domestic life and others do not?" Like everything Friedman does it provides a valuable lesson in the malleability of reality.

In the series of marble sculptures in this exhibition entitled *Petrified Waffle*, Friedman uses different colored pieces of marble, which vary in coloration and vein patterning, and places them on formica covered plinths. The formica obviously suggests a kitchen counter, or the environment we commonly associate the waffle making process with, but the art historical associations we have with marble, transforms the whole through odd juxtaposition. If the artist had placed an actual waffle iron on the plinth, offer it up as some strange religious artifact or perhaps luxury item on display in a department store, the series would stand as a sort of ironic testament to consumerism. Instead Friedman creates a carved marble rendition of a mold of a waffle iron interior rendered with the help of a software program. This can be seen as a tribute to the basic skill set required for the manual labor involved in daily domestic life, but we can also see this as the artist's search for a new vernacular, a new way to make abstract art that uses as a launching pad, traces of the real.

In *Column Waffle*, 2009 Friedman enlarges and fragments the waffle form, uses the reference point as a launching pad for a material transformation. It is fascinating to see how much an artist can manipulate a referent before it becomes something else. The large white rubber mold of an enlarged waffle grid goes perfectly with the white column it is hung on. So Friedman recontextualizes the manual process of making waffles. A machine made to do one thing only can be used for completely other purposes, and common objects can take on meanings that go beyond their practical value. In Friedman's world, no values are universal and the naming of things, the rigid associations that exist between mental constructs and real world shapes or patterns or objects, can take on new layers of meaning.

Martha Friedman
"Summer in the City: Group Shows"
By Sarah Douglas, *Artinfo.com*, July 24, 2009

ARTINFO

Summer in the City: Group Shows

By Sarah Douglas

Published: July 24, 2009

"Time-Life Part II" at Taxter & Spengemann, through July 30

If, by Levine's logic, group shows twist the truth, then this show is, well, pretty twisted. A full four group shows commingle in Taxter & Spengemann's cavernous space, formerly Frank Stella's studio, on East 12th Street, the gallery having given itself over to presentations previously put on in three other galleries (**Galerie Christine Mayer** of Munich, **Ritter-Zamet** of London, and New York's **Wallspace**) and a university (**Bard Center for Curatorial Studies**), as well as a one-artwork contribution from Basel gallery **New Jersey**, in the form of Nathan Carter's *Kuchen Kart*, a friendly-looking apparatus that was used to serve pastries during Taxter & Spengemann's opening. It's a freewheeling installation, and it's sometimes difficult to tell who's who, or what comes from where, but two standout artworks in **Wallspace's** section, "Obscene Soft Sounds II," hold their own. Martha Friedman's sculpture of an arrangement of cantaloupes made from painted, cast urethane foam and placed on a low wooden plinth, manages, despite its ultra-realistic style, to transcend the workaday supermarket stack and achieve an improbable hieratic elegance. Nearby, Kate Costello's paper and cement sculpture *Leg* gives the unsettling impression that the floor has sprouted a limb.

GOTHAM

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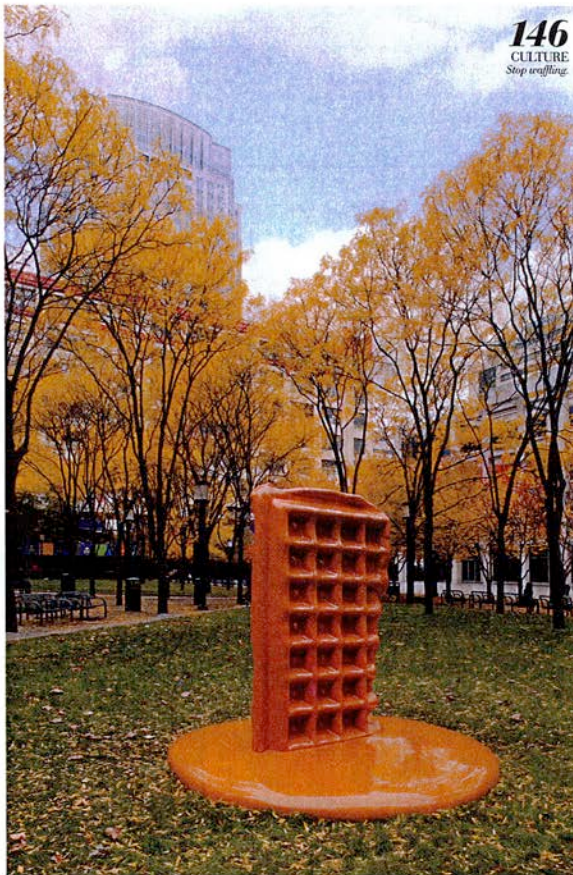
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On The Cover

SIENNA MILLER

Photograph by Jan Welters/Trunkarchive.com

Styling by Sasa Thomann

Hair by Jonathan Connolly

Makeup by Ashley Ward at CLM using Lancôme

Manicure by Nichola Joss at Premier Beauty Workshop

Top, **Graham and Spencer**. Jeans, **Louis Vuitton**.

PHOTOGRAPH BY SIENNA MILLER

GUILTY PLEASURES CULTURE WATCH

The NEWEST in NEW

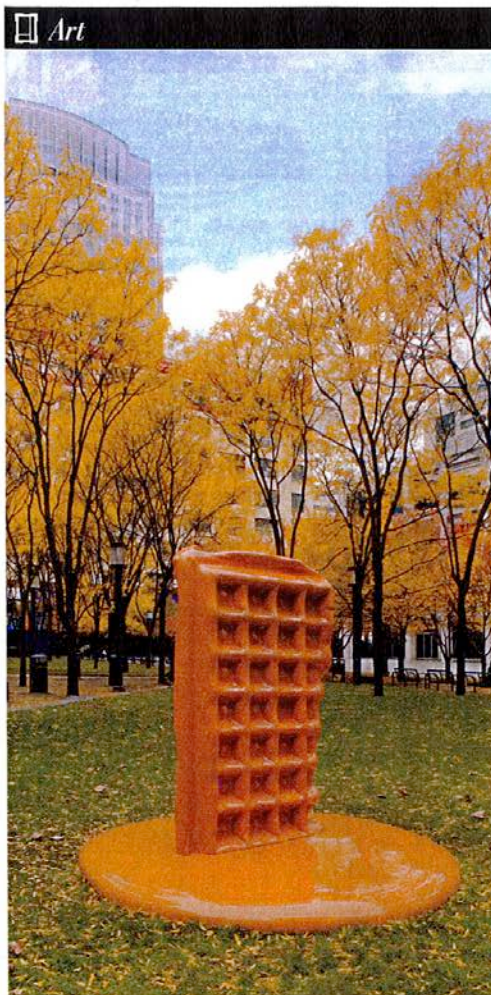
September promises something special for the fashionista, art lover, sports fan and bookworm.

Film

WRITER-DIRECTOR ROBERT SIEGEL follows up his spectacular debut *The Wrestler* with *Big Fan*, the dark, gripping tale of Paul, a 35-year-old Staten Island parking-garage attendant and self-proclaimed number-one Giants fan. Played to perfection by character actor and stand-up comedian Patton Oswalt against the gritty backdrop of NYC, Paul, who lives with his parents, leads a contained existence, tending to his booth and arguing with his Eagles fan nemesis Philadelphia Phil (Michael Rapaport) on his local sports radio station. When a run-in with the Giants' hero linebacker (Jonathan Hamm) goes very wrong, Paul's fate becomes intertwined with his team's, and his love for the Big Blue Wrecking Crew gets put to the ultimate test.



Art



NOW IN ITS FINAL WEEKS, *Trapdoor*, the Public Art Fund's current exhibition in downtown Brooklyn, features five installations created with or representing everyday objects. Two favorites: Ethan Breckenridge's *I'm OK-You're OK*, a 16-foot-tall tower made of moving dollies—those gray, carpet-covered wheeled annoyances that in Breckenridge's hands look positively sculptural. And Martha Friedman's *Waffle*, a realistic but larger-than-life approximation of, yes, a waffle, surrounded invitingly by a pool of syrup. For fans of the classic children's book *Cloudy with a Chance of Meatballs*, a breakfast item that has seemingly fallen from the sky will be a wondrous sight. Through September 25. Publicartfund.org

PHOTOGRAPH BY JESSICA KNOX (Waffle)

Martha Friedman
"Inside Art"

by Carol Vogel, *The New York Times*, November 7, 2008

The New York Times

THE NEW YORK TIMES, FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 7, 2008

Inside Art

Carol Vogel

Familiar Voice, Different Home

After Philippe de Montebello retires at year's end as director of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, his sonorous voice will no longer be a signature presence on the Met's audio guides. But in his new life he will be more than a disembodied voice to the public.

WNET, Channel 13 in New York, has hired him as a co-host of its weekly "SundayArts" program. Starting Sunday he and the former CNN host Paula Zahn will present material about arts news and events. Broadcast weekly at noon, the program was initiated in March by WNET's president and chief executive, Neal Shapiro, who acted as host.

"I couldn't wait to fire me, and when I heard Philippe was retiring, I thought, this guy should be great," Mr. Shapiro said. He decided to team him with Ms. Zahn because he knew of her passion for the performing arts.

Mr. de Montebello said that when WNET broached the possibility, he thought: "Why not? It keeps me plugged in and is something completely different from everything else I am doing."

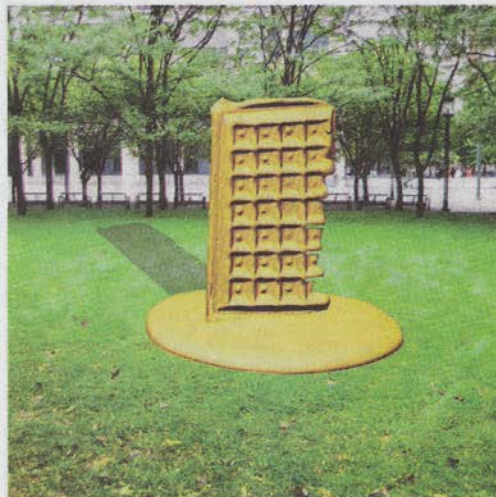
(Among other projects, Mr. de Montebello plans to teach courses on the history and culture of museums for the Institute of Fine Arts at New York University and to advise the university on its planned overseas campus in Abu Dhabi in the United Arab Emirates.)

At the outset Mr. de Montebello will introduce "SundayArts" content "à la 'Masterpiece Theater,'" as he put it, by offering a bit of an overview. But eventually he hopes to develop programming and offer his own opinions.

"For the moment I'm a pretty voice," he said wryly. "After that, we'll see."

Watching Visions Unfold

The Art Production Fund, a nonprofit organization that presents public art around New



Martha Friedman's "Waffle" is in a show at MetroTech Center.

York, has set up shop in a SoHo storefront that can be likened to an experimental laboratory.

The organization will invite artists to create installations and performances in the space, the APF Lab, at 15 Wooster Street. "Some projects can last for a day, others for a month or longer," said Yvonne Force Villareal, who runs the Art Production Fund with Doreen Remen. "It's all about the artists' visions."

Reflecting tight economic times, Ms. Villareal said, "everything has been done on the cheap."

Rather than send out costly exhibition invitations, the lab will rely on e-mail messages and its Web site, artproductionfund.org. There will be no lavish catalogs; instead the Art Production Fund's facade will post a phone number — (646) 775-2789 — at which people can hear artists discuss their projects.

The space has been donated to the fund for five years by the Laboz family, owners of United American Land, the developers behind the SoHo Mews, two residential condominium buildings designed by Gwathmey Siegel &

Associates Architects. The APF Lab is on the Wooster Street side of one of the buildings.

Ms. Villareal and Ms. Remen said that they settled on the idea for the space after helping organize art installations in the Park Avenue Armory as part of this year's Whitney Biennial. "Each of those projects were in rooms," Ms. Villareal said. "We took that feeling. Artists come to us all the time with projects, so we wanted to create a space that we could turn over to them."

The glass-fronted gallery's inaugural project, "Blue Balls," conceived of by the painter Jackie Saccoccio, is already underway. She invited 15 artists to paint on the walls: each week two or three artists will arrive to paint around and over what is already there, giving the project an archaeological feel. While viewers can watch the artists' progress from the street, the space will open for viewing on Dec. 6 and 7. The next project will be "Cathedral," a multilayered video by Marco Brambilla, running through January. Mr. Brambilla photographed people window shopping around Christmas in a Toronto mall and then

created a video in which he superimposes these images, one on top of another, to create a kaleidoscopic effect.

"It looks like a stained-glass window," Ms. Villareal said, "but it's really about conspicuous consumption."

Appetite for Sculpture

A waffle that rises seven feet and appears to be enveloped in a thick pool of syrup has appeared on the grassy area of the commons at the MetroTech Center corporate complex in downtown Brooklyn. Fashioned from foam, resin and metal by the sculptor Martha Friedman, it is part of "Trapdoor," a group sculpture exhibition that opens on Friday on the commons and in the lobby of 1 MetroTech.

The sculpture show, which runs through Sept. 25, is the 16th annual exhibition at MetroTech organized by the nonprofit Public Art Fund.

Three of this show's works — by the young artists Ethan Breckenridge, Ms. Friedman and Sara Greenberger Rafferty — were commissioned specifically for the exhibition. "All of these artists are not making things that are ephemeral," said Rochelle Steiner, director of the Public Art Fund. "They all feel solid. And you can see glimpses of Brancusi, Judd, Beuys and Duchamp."

Ms. Friedman's "Waffle" — a play on the grid pattern — is not the only work that summons a familiar reference. Mr. Breckenridge's "I'm OK-You're OK," a sculpture near the seating area in the center of the commons, is made up of 100 furniture-moving dollies. Piled on top of one another to a height of 16 feet, they give the impression that they could be toppled with the slightest push.

Two recent sculptures by Francis Cape in the lobby of 1 MetroTech are more architectural, suggesting elements of a building's interior that have magically landed in the space. "They're like fragments or sections," Ms. Steiner said. "As if a cabinet has morphed into a piece of architectural paneling."

Martha Friedman

"EAF06: 2006 Emerging Artist Fellowship Exhibition"

By Naomi Fry, *Artforum*, 2006

ARTFORUM

"EAF06: 2006 Emerging Artist Fellowship Exhibition"

SOCRATES SCULPTURE PARK

32-01 Vernon Boulevard

September 10–March 4

This refreshing exhibition is further proof that there is more to the New York art scene than the proverbial pounding of the Chelsea pavement. A sizable number of the twenty artworks created especially for the show are impressive; the freedom afforded by Socrates Sculpture Park's relatively experimental setting has allowed for sculptural efforts that are simultaneously playful and ambitious. *Last Man Standing* (all works 2006), William Bryan Purcell's bubblegum-pink sculpture, reminiscent of a gnawed tree stump, slyly recalls the guilty pleasures of vernacular roadside art, while the architectural rigor of *Returning Videos*, Ethan Breckenridge's large wooden sculpture, is tempered by the rickety amusement-park-ride feel of its materiality. Modernist somberness is punctured in Martha Friedman's hilarious *Laid*, an endless column of outsize, cast-rubber eggs, and paid loving tribute to in Mamiko Otsubo's elegant, miniaturized version of a Mies-like pavilion. The most memorable works in the show, though, are Ian Cooper's *Doctor Is Out* and Fabienne Lasserre's *Hair Tree*. In his piece, Cooper employs Lucy van Pelt's cartoon psychiatrist booth as a point of departure for a formally complex three-dimensional pentagonal sculpture. With its mirrored interior, both flat and profound, the piece provides a touching, funny comment on the aesthetic object's necessarily frustrated efforts to reflect psychic depth. And by covering one of the park's trees with synthetic hair extensions, Lasserre's practice is equal parts dada and *Fraggle Rock*—an example of the potential of sculpture to truly engage the outdoors in wild and woolly ways.

—Naomi Fry

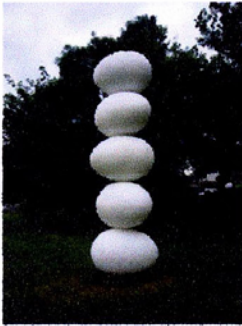


Ian Cooper, *Doctor Is Out*, 2006.

Martha Friedman
"The Undead of Art History"
by Jerry Saltz, *Artnet*, 2006

artnet®

Reviews



Martha Friedman's *Laid* (2006) in the "2006 Emerging Artist Fellowship Exhibition" at Socrates Sculpture Park



Ian Cooper's *Doctor Is Out* (2006) in the "2006 Emerging Artist Fellowship Exhibition" at Socrates Sculpture Park



Fabienne Lasserre's *Hair Tree* (2006) in the "2006 Emerging Artist Fellowship Exhibition" at Socrates Sculpture Park

THE UNDEAD OF ART HISTORY by Jerry Saltz

Yurts and Stalagmites

The great sculptor Mark Di Suvero should be given some sort of presidential medal for his amazing generosity. Twenty years ago this maverick broke ground on a breathtaking triangular piece of Long Island City waterfront across from East Harlem, on what had been an abandoned landfill and an illegal dumpsite. On this plot, he established the four and a half utopian acres known as Socrates Sculpture Park. Since 1986, over 500 artists have been featured in more than 50 exhibitions there.

The current show of 20 emerging artists is more than good enough to prove that my own personal truism, "99 percent of all public sculpture is crap," may no longer be accurate. Almost all of the art here is coming from artists who are interested in outdoor sculpture as more than a decorative object or tedious propaganda tool. This auspicious trend has been amplified of late by organizations like Public Art Fund, the Sculpture Center, Art in General and Creative Time, all of whom have been getting public sculpture into the world in exciting, innovative ways.

At Socrates, nearly every piece provides a jolt: the totem sculpture by Martha Friedman; the dumpsters by Cal Lane; the crotched park bench by Heather Hart; the miniature shanties by Rachel Champion; the Pepto-Bismol-colored yurt by William Bryan Purcell; the obdurate stalagmite by Rudy Shepherd; and the Peanuts cartoon crashed to earth by Ian Cooper. Also outstanding is Ethan Breckenridge's M.C. Escher-like labyrinthal sculpture, Mamiko Otsubo's beautiful teeny modernist homes on stilts, and Nicholas Herman's modular meteorite.

Snoop around and you'll bump into other excellent pieces. In one of these, Fabienne Lasserre manages to riff on one of modernism's most revisited objects, Meret Oppenheim's surrealist fur-lined teacup. Lasserre, narrowly avoiding cliché, combines Magritte and Freud, and covers an entire tree trunk and sundry branches in fur. It's wild, witty, and subtle. . . like a lot of work here.

"2006 Emerging Artist Fellowship Exhibition," Sept. 10, 2006-Mar. 4, 2007, at Socrates Sculpture Park, 32-01 Vernon Blvd., Long Island City, N.Y. 11106

JERRY SALTZ is art critic for the *Village Voice*, where this article first appeared. He can be reached at Jsaltz@VillageVoice.com

Martha Friedman

"ART IN REVIEW; 'The Reality of Things'"

By Ken Johnson, *The New York Times*, June 18, 2004

The New York Times

ART IN REVIEW; 'The Reality of Things'

By KEN JOHNSON

Published: June 18, 2004

Triple Candie

461 West 126th Street, Harlem

Through July 11

Some things in "The Reality of Things" are just what they seem, some are not. Real-looking cantaloupes in a pyramidal stack by Martha Friedman turn out to be made of cast and painted urethane foam, while Tony Feher's stacks of black and brown milk crates involve no deception. A wall of concrete blocks by Akiko Ichikawa is also just what it is. So you may assume that Hans Accola's plastic jug of yellow carpenter's glue is simply a found object. Then you realize that the jug is a gallon-size milk bottle, which Mr. Accola slyly filled with glue, labeled and capped.

With Tara Donovan's four-foot cube composed of straight pins, you immediately wonder if there is some trick, like an interior magnet holding the pins in place. But no, something about the structure of pins enables them to hang together all by themselves.

Sol Sax's contribution looks like an uprooted fence post with a clod of cement attached to one end. Look again and you see that the clod is the head of an American Indian, making it a metaphor for buried guilt. By using a silver marker to add the pinstripes of a business executive's power suit to a thrift-store coat, Shinique Smith comments on economic inequity. Also sociologically evocative are Daniel Guzman's homage to Hank Williams, composed of spent beer cans and words illuminated in neon, and Robert Gober's fake advertising fliers.

Eric Brown, Adriana Farmiga and Sherrie Levine each do things with wood, confounding the natural and the artificial and -- as this whole, nicely understated exhibition does -- compounding our sense of the existential slipperiness of things. KEN JOHNSON

Martha Friedman
"Art in the Office"
By Domenick Ammirati, *Artforum*, 2004

ARTFORUM

PICKS

"Art in the Office"

Author: Domenick Ammirati
04.13.04

03.25.04-05.21.04 The Global Consulting Group, New York

With a view toward a beneficent yet up-to-the-minute public image, the corporate communications firm Global Consulting Group is hosting a contemporary art show in its Financial District digs. New York artist/curator Matt Keegan rounded up the thirty-odd contributors, most near the beginning of their careers. Some take gentle nips at the hand that feeds them; others inject playfulness into the buttoned-down environment. Martha Friedman has installed a pyramid of hyperrealist polyurethane-foam cantaloupes on a conference-room table; across the hall, artist-in-residence Pia Lindman meets with staff members to construct a gestural vocabulary of the workplace, from "boo-yeahs" to the finger-pointings that mean "I'm on the phone." A video captures her end of the exchanges, and minimal drawings of the gestures line the walls. Employees love Rachel Foullon's redecoration of the break room for its warm brown color scheme and mellow lighting (and are unfazed by her oblique allusions to the Donner Party). Other works include a melancholic digital piece by Paul Ramirez Jonas and a similarly keyed video by Alex Villar; online projects; and an "art resource cubicle." Daniel Bozhkov's stained-glass citrus tree on a southerly window casts gorgeous yellow, green, and orange glows in the afternoons: In an office context, such sensual appeal practically constitutes a critique.