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"Thomas Kiesewetter at Roberts & Tilton"

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Thomas Kiesewetter at Roberts & Tilton

Poised, sturdy little legs supporting a wacky mash-up of matte black slabs, rods, cylinders and cones make the most anthropomorphic of Thomas Kiesewetter's sculptures look like a pint-sized, neo-constructivist warrior ready to defend the honor of ideal form. Of the eight pieces, all 2 to 3 feet tall, on view in this midcareer Berlin-based artist's fourth U.S. solo show, six are cast bronze (in editions of three) from constructed-cardboard originals. The process immortalizes the cardboard's fatigued crinkle, its subtle ridged corrugations and the method of flaps and tabs by which planes are joined to form volumes. The other two works are cobbled together of quotidian materials such as sheet metal, Styrofoam, flattened tin cans, wire and rubber tubing. The sculptures rested on suavely designed if rough-hewn plywood pedestals—each a bit different—that echoed the apparently ad hoc nature of the sculptures' shaping and nodded to Brancusi's well-known preoccupation with the integrity of supports.

Three cast sculptures are black,

one is lichen green, one ocher and one a bland, sandy tan. One black piece is dominated by a thick, squarish slab with a circular bite taken out of it; angled downward from a clavicle-like horizontal element that rests on elbowed verticals, this sagging head seems to shriek as if in pain or despair. It is a caricature of overheated emotion derived through efficient formal means. These works archly allude to the kind of corny, "humanistic" postwar sculpture that straddled constructivist abstraction and expressive figuration. Know-

ingly inelegant protrusions that suggest flapping wings, lolling tongues, chunky heels and comb-overs soften the visual cling-clang. The pieces are endearingly gawky, like teenagers still getting used to how their parts fit together. The monochrome coloration, of course, visually unifies these disparate elements in both cast and assembled pieces. The mildly surprising cerulean blue of one of the latter is as chromatically adventurous as Kiesewetter gets here, so the viewer's attention turns to nuances of surface and the relation of form to void. Grounding this slickly scrappy work in the quotidian is a repertoire of components resembling hoses, funnels and oil cans, evoking the contents of a backyard toolshed.

Ten fast-and-loose drawings, in graphite, crayon, marker and pastel on small sheets of (mostly) brown- and blue-toned paper, match the sculptures for bundled, tumbling energy, with the added blast of improvisational exuberance that mark-making affords.

Thomas Kiesewetter: *Untitled (Blue)*, 2007, mixed mediums, 31 by 24 by 17 inches; at Roberts & Tilton.



Vigorous and wonderfully ungainly, quickly noted and usually incomplete volumetric shapes crop up here and there among fat hatching in black marker and smearing that suggests contours without really describing form. Overlays of pasted paper allow for spontaneous revision. The drawings don't appear to relate to specific sculptures but might be rough sketches of compositional ideas or might be done "after" one or more three-dimensional works. In any case, they share the sculptures' antic spirit, historically aware sense of play and gentle satire of formalist abstraction's inflated self-regard. —Stephen Maine