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ART REVIEW

The Art of the Machine, The Machine as an Art

By **KEN JOHNSON**

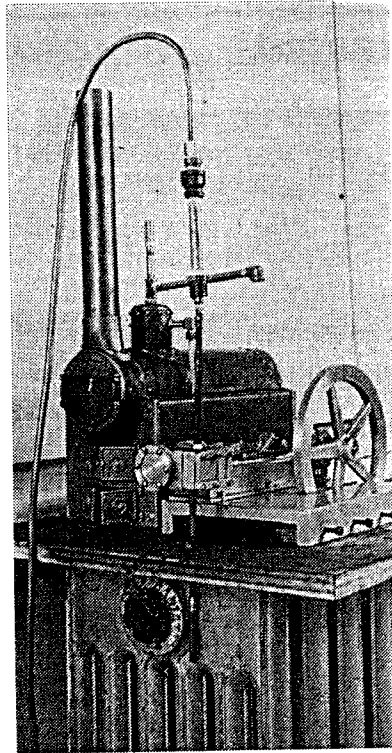
Sculptors often dream of being more down to earth. David Smith, for example, fancied himself a blacksmith. Another favorite fantasy is that of the nutty mechanic, a guy who invents odd things with screwdrivers, pipes and electric motors down in the basement. Three notable examples of this type — Tim Hawkinson, Steven Brower and John Kalymnios — are currently exhibiting their works at different downtown galleries. For each of these artists, eccentric tinkering with everyday hardware gives rise to eye- and mind-opening images, ideas and metaphors.

At Ace Gallery the amazingly industrious Mr. Hawkinson, a Californian, is having his second New York show since his celebrated local debut

Tim Hawkinson's work is at Ace Gallery, 275 Hudson Street, near Spring Street, South Village, through May 22. Steven Brower's work is at Lombard/Freid Fine Arts, 470 Broome Street, SoHo, and John Kalymnios's is at Caren Golden Fine Art, 39 Wooster Street, SoHo, through April 3.

three years ago. His work, including extremely labor-intensive and often huge drawings and collages as well as bizarre mechanical contraptions, is so diverse as to defy generalization. Most of his works share a wonderfully transparent conjunction of concept and procedure (further clarified, in most cases, by amusingly deadpan wall labels that explain exactly how and what the artist did). Mr. Hawkinson lets the esthetic take care of itself, which is why his work looks as though it were produced by a goofy scientist or a hyperactive boy genius.

Among the works included in this sprawling show are an awkwardly cranking machine incorporating toy slide whistles that make a haunting, wailing sound; a tiny bird skeleton made of fingernails; a mobile made of television antennas rigged with sails like an antique four-master schooner; a 33-foot-long abstract doodle representing the history of the world; a giant three-dimensional amputated fingertip, its bloody end represented by red pencils used to make the world history chart, and a radiant, poured-plastic simulation of a large broken window, the spidery web of cracks made of fine, mirrored tape.



Lombard/Freid Fine Arts

"Steam Plant (Boiler and Steam Engine)" by Steven Brower.

The main attraction is a vast, rambling construction called "Pentecost," which looks as if it might have been built by a religiously inspired out-of-work air-conditioning installer. It is a spreading tree made of wood-grain-papered tubes with a dozen robotic figures attached here and there. Equipped with little electronically controlled hammers, the robots rap on the branches, collectively generating marvelous rhythms that reverberate throughout the room. In all its cobbled-together looniness, it offers an inspirational metaphor about language and community.

Like most artists Mr. Hawkinson takes for granted the gallery as a neutral, empty space in which to present his art. But as the work of Mr. Brower makes clear, the gallery is a complex construction, an interweaving of electrical, hydraulic, social and other sorts of systems. In his entertaining installation called "Utility," at Lombard/Freid Fine Arts, this Brooklyn artist reveals and plays off that systematic complexity.

Mr. Brower earns a living as a professional model maker, and his installation combines works of miniature architecture with real, working infrastructural elements. Near the middle of the main gallery stands an actual drinking fountain that's connected by copper tubing through a wall to a model water-filtration plant. This is, in turn, hooked up to a little steam engine sitting on and tapped into the gallery's hot-water radiator. From there the copper tubing leads back to the gallery kitchen and bathroom, connecting art to the mundane, utilitarian functions from which it is usually separated.

Mr. Brower has also provided the gallery with a separate source of electrical energy. From small solar panels attached to a miniature wooden tower near a window, wires supported by little wall-mounted telephone poles run to a miniature observatory, powering a video camera inside that is trained on a suspended

model of the moon. You can see the video image of the moon if you stick your head inside a model of the gallery's interior.

To call attention to the gallery's labor system, Mr. Brower has constructed a time clock with a Polaroid camera that takes employees' pictures when they punch in or out. Finally, several of the artist's modest but well made landscape paintings hang here and there, reminding us that if all the stuff he has brought

into view were out of sight as usual, we might be having a traditional, undistracted esthetic experience.

Try as we might to compartmentalize ourselves, this installation reminds us, we are always caught in a multitude of webs — technological, natural, social — that extend beyond the limits of ordinary vision.

While Mr. Brower works cheerfully to disillusion viewers about the apparently pristine, autonomous nature of the gallery, John Kalymnios works to create illusions at Caren Golden Fine Art. This Manhattan sculptor uses photography, electric

light, plastics and moving mechanical parts in fabricating objects that simulate elemental qualities of the ocean: its fluidity, motion, luminosity and mystery.

Unlike the comparatively funky works of Mr. Hawkinson and Mr. Brower, these have a sleek modern look. One piece has a thick, horizontal square of translucent, green-tinted Lucite, its surface molded to resemble rippled water, mounted to a light box. It is like a kind of decorative art glass, but with the light pouring through it the plastic slab looks uncannily like shallow, sunlit water.

Another piece has long, horizontal photographic transparencies of dark-blue water layered, backlit and mechanized to slide slowly back and forth so that the overlapping waves seem to be in oceanic motion. A charmingly toylike piece features a little wooden boat cradled by four metal rods. Floor level machinery pumps the rods up and down, causing the boat to rock as though it were being gently buffeted by waves. Also simulating waves are two floor-level blue disks molded to look like water. Animated by little machines, they slowly tilt back and forth creating a hypnotic, rolling motion.

In these works the interest is as much in the ingenious, beautifully made, smoothly functioning technology as it is in the illusory, spiritually suggestive qualities of light and water. Mr. Kalymnios orchestrates a gratifying wedding of the practical mechanic and the romantic visionary.