

NIKE

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WILLIAM STONE
Tom Cugliani Gallery
New York
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In his recent show at Tom Cugliani Gallery, William Stone exhibited works which function as sculptural metaphors. As is usual for him, the pieces were visually beautiful and impeccably made – almost perfect but not enough so to distract from

the rich analogies offered by the work. There is always an element of editorial in the work, and it often finds form in humor. In the window of the gallery a large gilded fan, approximately 7–8 feet in diameter, was situated. It rotated slowly via wind created by four small antique industrial fans placed behind it. The allusion is to a large corporate elite fueled by and dependent upon cheap and (often foreign) individual labor. The issue of the interdependence extant between white collar and blue collar workers is especially appropriate, as the gallery is located in a section of New York City that has been historically an area for the printing industry – commercial printers and presses, but which is fast being overrun by graphic designers, large advertising agencies and elegant restaurants.

Another sculpture consisted of a length of copper piping carefully and elegantly soldered into a continuous »u« shaped circle which was held to the wall by a wooden enclosure, forming an opulent but closed viaduct. This copper viaduct seemed a concrete symbol of the many invisible »closed systems« which exist within a supposedly free society.

The most intriguing and richly metaphorical pieces were *Wind Case*, 1988, and *In Dreams Begin Responsibilities*, 1988. The former is a small wooden glass-front case in which an American flag is hung vertically. Two industrial fan/blowers situated on top of the case make the flag ripple and wave. In the piece the flag, that icon of the American dream, is encased, untouchable, unattainable, and waves to an invisible wind, the source of which is a mechanism that can be turned on and off as necessity dictates. Stone reveals, by way of analogy, the mechanisms which create and sustain the nostalgic and sentimental illusion of American Democracy, and touches upon the »ravenous consumption of the present and the constant past-izing process carried out by American civilization in its alternate process of futuristic planning and nostalgic remorse«.¹

It seems an appropriate piece to be shown one month after the national election. Both the piece and the election illustrate that the imitation of life will always be preferred to the reality of it, in America's cultural »conviction that imitation has reached its apex and afterwards reality will always be inferior to it«.²

In another piece, *in dreams begin responsibilities*, Stone replaced the mattress of a brass bed with carefully carpeted stairs so that the foot of the bed is on the floor and the steps ascend toward the wall, where the brass headboard is fastened 3–4 feet of the floor. By alluding to the specific responsibilities incurred by the act of procreation, Stone touches upon the issue of the general and difficult responsibility we have to the future, both individually and as a nation. In some sense it is the role ethics and morality have in all decisions and acts that Stone's work ultimately brings to the surface.

GRETCHEN FAUST

References:

¹ Umberto Eco, *Travels In Hyperreality*, pp. 9–10. Harcourt, Brace Javanovich, 1983. New York.

² *Ibid.*, pp. 46.



WILLIAM STONE: *Wind case*, 1988, Tom Cugliani Gallery, New York