

MARCH 2010

EXHIBITION REVIEWS

R.M. FISCHER

KS ART

Warm and cuddly they are not, but R. M. Fischer's new, riotously biomorphic sculptures—soft, stitched, stuffed—are unexpectedly bonkers given the artist's early work. Back in the 1980s, Fischer distinguished himself with sleek, chilly, science fiction-tinged works in steel, brass and aluminum, which often doubled as lighting. In that decade's art-making spectrum, the work was quite at home among the hardheaded, anti-expressionist products of the Pictures Generation artists, or Haim Steinbach. It is quite a leap, then, to these bouncy, baroque forms contrived of striped and floral upholstery fabric, colored and textured vinyl, felt and heavy thread. (According to gallery information, Fischer himself does all the sewing.) Yet amid the patchwork hullabaloo one detects a frantic whisper, or squelched yelp, cautioning the viewer against a quick scan.

The artist's imagistic wit embraces Claes Oldenburg, teddy bears, lap quilts, inflatable sex toys and the antic bar scene in the original *Star Wars* movie. Among the most anthropomorphic works in the exhibition, the 64-inch-high *RMF 2515* (all works completed 2009) squats on twin aluminum spheres—boots or feet—beneath googly-eyed kneecaps; its bagel-bodied thorax sprouts puffy Life Savers, and a T-shaped, steel-rod armature assumes a facial aspect. Vestiges of functionality remain in the three-foot-high *RMF 2525*, in which an infrastructure of threaded rod, stock molding and brass thumbscrews props up a jazzy facade made of stuffed fabric and vinyl. The play of plush, organic forms and rigid fittings is to be savored, and the range of associations broadens the deeper one digs.

These include the decorative potential of brutality and carnage. *RMF 5218* channels



R.M. Fischer: *RMF 5218*, 2008-09, vinyl, fabric, felt, thread and mixed mediums, 50 by 53 by 32 inches; at KS Art.

the writhing internal dynamics of the ancient Laocoön group, in which bone-crushing serpents suffocate the Trojan-horse whistleblower and his sons. A central, predominantly silver mass sprouts (or attracts) bulging eyes, gaping mouths and lolling tongues, and is crowned mock-heroically by a golden, mutant pretzel. A 4-foot-wide entanglement of hoops and tubers atop an 11-foot-high upright of perforated steel, the work has the regal presence of tribal headgear in an ethnographic collection at the same time as it evokes barbaric practices featuring cautionary public display: pillory, crucifixion, lynching.

Smaller works, such as the 21-inch-high *RMF 4327*, resemble a marriage of woofer, tweeter and parking meter. Defanged by their smaller scale, they are happily harmless-looking. But in his human-scale works, Fischer touches a nerve, and reminds us, should any reminder be necessary post-Bush, to beware the dark and stinking underbelly behind the goofy grin.

—Stephen Maine