

Günther Uecker

L & M Arts

Günther Uecker can express as much with carpenter's nails as most painters can using pigment and brush. He creates form and shadow by controlling and shaping ambient illumination; he simulates the effect of motion through the angles at which he hammers the nails into a ground; and he allows for the viewer's movement and perspective to create patterns and chiaroscuro. He establishes depth, texture, volume, and softness where they are least expected.

Uecker's acts are not simply things-you-can-do-with-nails exercises; rather, the 80-year-old East German-born artist has chosen a medium with which he finds himself comfortable—physically, esthetically, and metaphorically.

A member of the Zero group of European artists—among them, Yves Klein, Jan Schoonhoven, Piero Manzoni, and Lucio Fontana—who shared an interest in the nonpictorial and the nonemotional in artistic production, he carved out his own signature style while engaging in their conversation. Among his most fascinating pieces here was the sensitive and eloquent *Homage to Fontana II* (1962). Fontana also marked his canvases by penetrating them, mostly with slits, sometimes with punctures. For his homage, Uecker made what resembles a small drawing of a fetuslike form nestled inside a large, empty uterus, suggesting the birth of an idea, or of creativity itself.

The works here dated from the late '50s through the '70s, and included Uecker's impastoed, pre-nail monochromatic paintings, as well as his spinning nails-in-sand mill, his large kinetic nail sculptures, and his chair with a mane of rope "growing" out of it. Ultimately the nonkinetic works, filled with ambiguity and the illusion of motion, were most effective.

He uses his materials defensively rather than aggressively—at the end of World War II he nailed his house closed in a symbolic act of self-protection. In fact, Uecker falls somewhere between the scary Lucas Samaras and the elegant



Günther Uecker, *Homage to Fontana II*, 1962, nails and graphite on canvas on wood, 39 3/4" x 31 1/2". L & M Arts.

and esthetic Tara Donovan, but he is not as compulsive as either. And he can play on the cumulative in brilliant poetic fashion.

—Barbara A. MacAdam

Tara Donovan

Pace 22nd Street
Pace 25th Street

An acknowledged master of oddball materials (drinking straws, Scotch tape, pencils, plastic cups), imaginative arrangements, and googolplexian repeti-

tion, Tara Donovan transforms the plain into the visually stunning. In her recent work, she has turned to Donovan-izing nickel-headed pins and shiny Mylar.

Her "Drawings (Pins)," at Pace 25th Street, consists of 12 "drawings": thousands and thousands of pins pushed into Gatorboard panels, their heads clustered to create fluctuating areas of light and dark, depending upon their density and angle. From a distance, they suggest luminous abstract paintings with wavering Op art circles and radiating wedges or all-over molecule-like compositions. Such "mark-making" on a flat surface was not evident in her past work, but, at the same time, it is not so different from earlier techniques, as it, too, insists on sheer quantity and a material *trompe l'oeil*.

The tour de force was at Pace 22nd Street, where the vast space served as host to Donovan's massive *Untitled (Mylar)*, 2011. Its reflective material is rolled into tight, interconnected conical curls, at once evoking a sparkling, multi-branched aquatic plant and a dislodged coral reef. The sprawling pile-up of globular nodes rises upward, and appears as though its growth has been temporarily interrupted. Donovan is always a crowd-pleaser and the "wow" factor in this beautiful work remains intact. The caveat is that this makeover is not quite as magical as others have been, since the Mylar, already an art material, undermines the wondrous simplicity and giddy inspiration of, for instance, her two million white straws stacked on top of one another to create the illusion of a cloud or snowbank.

—Lilly Wei



Tara Donovan, *Untitled (Mylar)*, 2011, Mylar and hot glue, site-specific installation, dimensions variable. Pace.