

## Benny Andrews, Alice Neel, Bob Thompson

**Michael Rosenfeld**

Benny Andrews, Alice Neel, and Bob Thompson were kindred spirits, figural expressionists when the New York art scene was celebrating everything but. Neel was female; Andrews and Thompson were black. They all had to fight to make their way in the art world. This compelling show brought together works by the three Americans, suggesting that their shared roots lay in European Expressionism.

Andrews often combined oils with collage, gluing fabric to the canvas for gritty effect. In the melancholy portrait *Witness* (1968) and the disconcerting *The Hunters, Study* (1989), where the hunter matter-of-factly totes a rifle and a rabbit, the textures evoke his subjects' hard-scrabble lives. Andrews said he used collage to keep himself off balance. His friends Neel and Thompson took their own paths to the same end.

Thompson, who died at 28, employed jangling colors to reinterpret the compositions of the Old Masters. In *The Golden Ass* (1963)—based on Goya—a pink woman offers her rear to the viewer, while orange and gold females moon purple and yellow demons. Thompson's



Benny Andrews, *Witness*, 1968,  
oil with fabric collage on canvas, 48" x 48" x 2". Michael Rosenfeld.

tableaux suggest post-Fauve orgies where all colors are in play. It's a young man's dream.

Neel began painting in the 1920s but didn't get her due for more than 40 years. The subtly skewed portraits she did of friends and family are among the era's most riveting works. On view here were five of her more conventional paintings, proving that, even when she was playing it almost straight, Neel could easily disarm you. Her wonderful group portrait of three children, *Robert, Helen and Ed* (ca. 1952), telegraphs each figure's personality with characteristic candor, an approach that guided all three artists.

—Mona Molarsky

## Tom Friedman

**Luhning Augustine**

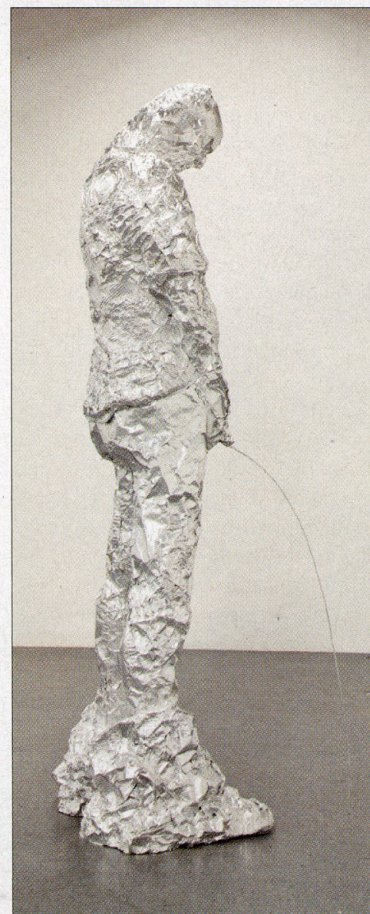
This show was all over the place. Positioned on the floor, on the walls, and up near the ceiling, Tom Friedman's multifarious sculptures and flat works were variously abstract, semiabstract, text based, and figurative. Still, these pieces (all from 2012) had at least one commonality: they came with a smirk and a wink.

A focal point of many of the sculptures was reality versus materiality, or the illusion that a thing is made of certain materials when in fact it's made of something else entirely. To that end, an eight-foot-tall statue of a man urinating seems to comprise crushed aluminum foil and oven trays; however, the shiny metallic figure, his clothes, and his pee stream all consist of a slightly more precious alloy: stainless steel.

In a similarly deceptive manner, carvings of half-eaten apples piled on the floor look real enough to bite into—but, not so fast, they're painted Styrofoam. Another Styrofoam work, portraying tattered New Balance sneakers, droopy socks, and stumps of Cau-

casian legs that stop at mid-calf, is unnerving in its hyperrealism. Unfortunately, it's too reminiscent of Robert Gober's work.

Some of the least conspicuous pieces were also the most thought provoking.



Tom Friedman, *Untitled (peeing figure)*, 2012,  
stainless steel, figure: 96" x 30" x 27";  
urine stream: 56" x 10 x 1/2". Luhning Augustine.

Particularly conceptual was a photograph depicting crinkly paper held up with pushpins that was itself printed on crinkly paper and affixed to the gallery wall with pushpins.

There was also a portrait that consisted of the handwritten words "mouth," "nose," "eye," and "eye," positioned where those body parts might be in a more representational picture. Another text piece messed with the difficult-to-spell term "verisimilitude," changing it to "verrisimilar," "versimilitud," "verisimilitood," "vercimilotude," and so on. The crux of that work pretty much summed up the exhibition as a whole: a series of verisimilitudes gone humorously awry.

—Trent Morse