



Alan Belcher
Felix 1996
Acrylic plush with polyester stuffing
121.9 x 63.5 x 33 cm
Photo: Jack Shainman Gallery
Courtesy: Jack Shainman Gallery

No dust

Alan Belcher's exhibition *Friends*, at the Jack Shainman Gallery in New York, consisted of fourteen soft sculptures, four Cibachrome photographs of bubblegum bubbles and *Dust Bunnies*, from 1990, made from rabbit fur and black and white photos showing dust found in the corners of Belcher's home. It was an odd but deeply entertaining show by a man who claims that he'd like his work in general to be user-friendly, so accessible, in fact, that collectors might want to display it in the rear windows of their cars.

Named after various friends, Belcher's huggable plush sculptures are collages sewn by the artist himself, using random items that he has taken from everyday life: a roll of toilet paper, a soccer ball, bruised bananas, ginger, stuffed olives. Some of the other components he uses are slightly odder—aspirin, the plastic close-tab from a bread bag, a computer mouse, and assorted Asian medicinals, primarily aphrodisiacs. These disparate objects are rendered in acrylic plush and then stuffed with polyester fibrefill. The artist describes the works as "pat images...when the shapes are combined they negate themselves."

It's not exactly Zen emptiness that Belcher is after. He's interested in making an object with no meaning—at least in a historical sense. Back in Toronto, after several years in Germany, he wanted to create work that, as he puts it, "is *not* redolent of dust, history, tradition." So what you see is what you get—or, as Belcher says, "a very friendly object without baggage."

The artist's intentional meaninglessness is an acute account of the triumph of pop culture in the visual arts. Belcher considers his "friendly objects" as mascots of the art world—meant as emblems of nothing but themselves. *Felix*, the only wall-piece in the show, has as its central element a large chunk of ginger. Hanging from the ginger are a cap from a Bic pen, a pink brain, and a bear's gall bladder. A black-and-white cube is on top. The piece defies any highbrow meaning, which is its charm.

In conversation, Belcher speaks of a twenty-year obsession with Japan. He sees the show's "mascot vision" as a version of Asian pop culture. And he claims that the New York show apes a fictitious one held in Kuala Lumpur. Who said art wasn't fun? ■

by JONATHAN GOODMAN