

## **Keith Sonnier at PaceWildenstein**

The most interesting of Keith Sonnier's recent neon wall works include conglomerations of found objects and detritus, with glowing, glitzy tubes of color vying with more quotidian elements for dominance. The largest of these pieces, at over 5 feet high, *Dismantled Weapon* (all works 2004 unless noted) resembles a cross between an enormous trombone and a radio satellite; rods of blue, violet and yellow-orange, and a clover-leaf twirl of peppy green, play off antennalike appendages and a tight tangle of thin, squiggly wire. You feel the

crazy thing might fly around the room if not for the conspicuous black power cables and transformer tethering it to the wall.

*Arabic Fringe* is one of several works in which banged-up wire tomato cages serve as armature, suggesting a conical volume with a minimum of matter. Hanging from the armature, a few inches of red and green fringe dangle before but comically fail to veil a calligraphic figure in red neon; swooping power cables extend the tube's antic gesture. A bit of chicken wire and plastic mesh lend bulk but not mass. There is no missing the militaristic theme of *USA: War of the Worlds*, centered on a wire-and-neon-festooned globe sprouting a pair of tawdry American flags and broken plastic junk. Neon glow qualifies the relation of work to wall; each piece generates its own set of shadow and penumbra. At 30 inches high, *Bundle Pack* is the smallest, and as intimate as a sketch.

Lacking this contrast of forms, the four all-neon pieces from the "Blatt" series resemble slick commercial signage and are much less engaging. But the freestanding *Doc. Dudley J. LeBlanc* (1994) is truly junky; dangling from its wire armature are five crummy plastic and glass bottles, partly filled with variously colored liquids, along with a length of thick, gnarly vine, its ends wrapped in blackened gauze and wire. A hunk of old foam and a shredded tangle of packing material decorate its twin spires.

Two gangly works from 1968, *Step In* and *Lounge*, both around 7 by 7 feet, were reconstituted for the show. Their patchy, provisional lightness, borne of the diffusion of neon and incandescence through scrimlike lengths of sheer fabric or silvery Mylar, remind us

that Sonnier's radically casual practice helped to retool sculpture in the postminimal era. With Bruce Nauman, Richard Tuttle, Barry Le Va and others, he cobbled together a Stateside version of Arte Povera, a materials-based installation art in which the unity of the work is of distinctly less moment than the lively interrelation of components. With this bracing show, Sonnier reasserts his relevance to a strain of loopy assemblage that is to some extent his own invention.

—Stephen Maine

### Philip Pavia at O.K. Harris

Best known for abstract sculpture in a variety of materials, Philip Pavia also helped to run the Club, the legendary gathering of downtown Abstract Expressionists that served as intellectual hothouse and dance party in the late 1940s and '50s. Later, he published and edited *It is*, a short lived but influential journal of writings by artists that included contributions by many Club regulars.

The human head is a form to which Pavia intermittently returns, as he did in the 1980s with a series of "Imaginary Portraits of the Club," presented at Max Protetch, involving bronze casts from wax originals. His recent heads are in terra-cotta, vigorously and directly shaped, and in their lumpy, expressive distortion they combine bluntness and finesse. He describes them as "double-life-size," and though they average about 18 inches high, their scale is monumental. At O.K. Harris, a dozen examples from 2003 and 2004 were arrayed around the perimeter of the space on white pedestals,

is #3, which has a crust like a loaf of bread.

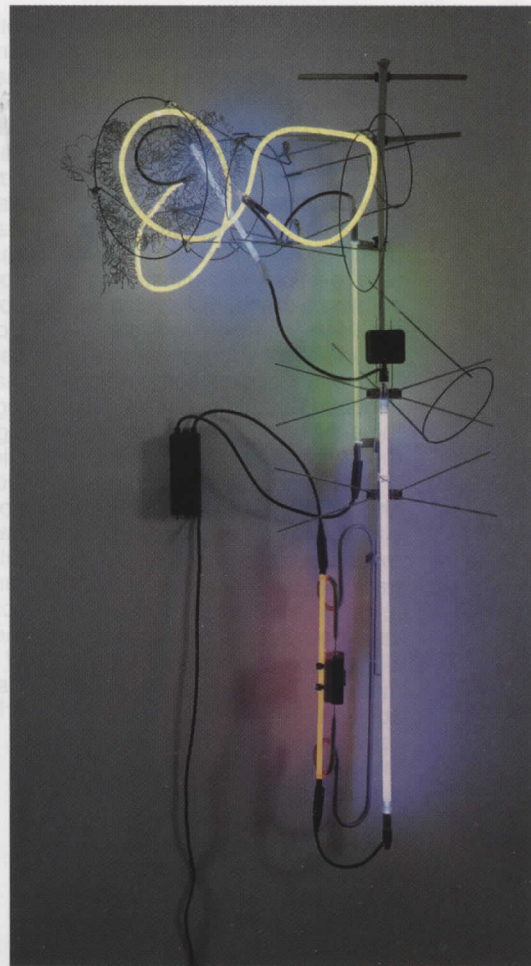
A satiny beeswax patina is augmented by multiple washy layers of acrylic paint in a rich but restrained palette. Among the smallest pieces is #7, in which a flurry of knife marks scars the surface, providing a rugged counterpoint to its surprising, pale-blue blush. Others are enlivened by purples, green-blues and rosy pinks among the more expected earth tones. This coloration is unrelated to facial features; it is in dialogue with the clay, which, as the sculptural material closest to paint, similarly honors impulse.

Though the artist's focus is clearly formal, the viewer may see in these heads-on-blocks a decapitation theme. In their affinity to the early paintings of Lester Johnson, Pavia summons monsters; William Tucker's inchoate, mysterious masses relate, as well. By their means of construction, many also refer to the tradition of the vessel. They are hollow, built up around a volume of space as a pot might be. In some, like the amphibious, shiny-faced #4 and the predominantly ocher #8, the hole at the top remains, touching lightly on the idea of head as container—a poetic notion of experience. The show revealed a tenacious veteran sculptor undaunted by the psychic challenge of an archetypal motif.

—Stephen Maine

### Dawn Clements at Pierogi and Feigen

In her most compelling works, Brooklyn-based, SUNY-Albany-



Keith Sonnier: *Dismantled Weapon*, 2004, neon, transformer and found objects, 63 by 32 by 15 inches; at PaceWildenstein.

yields an array of sub-drawings, most of them abstract at close range. A low ceiling and mismatched chairs frame the compact still life at the heart of the 6-by-10-foot *Sunnyside* (North Truro 2004); a brush-and-ink