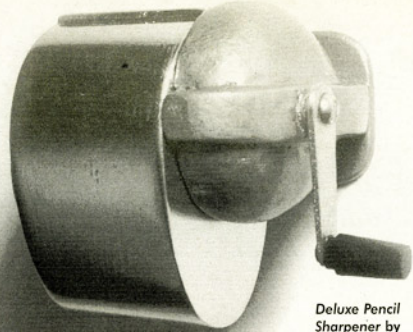
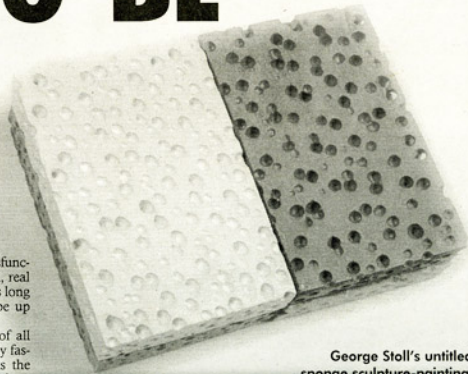


Ghost — For
Larry Bennett by
Forrest Myers.



Deluxe Pencil
Sharpener by
Robert Levine.

THINGS AIN'T WHAT THEY USED TO BE



George Stoll's untitled
sponge sculpture-painting.

From Center Galleries, a breath of dysfunctional air.

BY GEORGE TYSH

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Take, for example, Joe Avedisian's welded steel, machined aluminum, unridable *Bicycle* — dysfunctional because it's as long as a Manhattan street is wide. No one could sit on its seat to work the pedals *and* reach the handlebars some 12 feet away.

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And when is sculpture a tool? If it's an oversized model of Mr. Happy Tooth, it helps the dentist show us why cavities happen and why we should always brush and floss. If it's an organ-in-effigy, battery powered or not, it helps us while away the lonely hours.

But when sculpture is an object such as the 18 pieces in *Dysfunctional Sculpture*, Center Galleries' kickoff show for the fall, it works like a Tim Burton episode of "The Twilight Zone," a 3-D visual aid to Plato's metaphysics or a Claes Oldenburg set design for "Pee-Wee's Playhouse."

Pop sculptor Oldenburg, the spiritual godfather of dysfunctional objects, infuses this exhibition from afar with his generous sense of wackiness and disproportion. In proposals for huge lipstick tube statues or typewriter eraser monuments, clothespin-shaped skyscrapers and gigantic hardwood renderings of three-way electric plugs — i.e., in a lifetime of Alice-in-Consumerland madness — Oldenburg made us rethink the world of things and set off explosions of awareness in younger artists.

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Or, in an opposite direction, Robert Levine's *Deluxe Pencil Sharpener* and his *Post-It* (both acrylic on wood) are actual-scale recreations, icons to be worshipped in an as yet unconsecrated religion of bureaucracy.

The key here is that form doesn't equal function: These office supplies don't work, and the distance between real, functioning things and their useless, lovely representations allows us the perverse pleasure of mentally kicking back and adorning them.

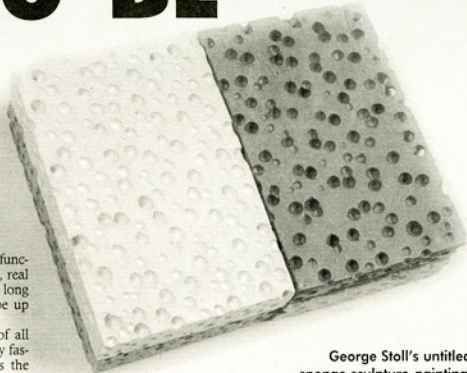
George Stoll walks a similar path with his untitled sponge paintings. Combining burned balsa wood and alkyd, he achieves the uncanny, blink-thrice resemblance that Andy Warhol made famous with his Brillo boxes and Campbell's soup cans. But where Warhol reveled in the formal purity of label designs, Stoll injects a look-but-don't-touch humor, play-

ing, like Levine, with the dysfunctionality of supplies. After all, real sponges are only pure as art as long as we don't use them to wipe up the messes of our lives.

One of the most familiar of all useful objects, and an eternally fascinating one for designers, is the chair. Four different chair projects form the eye of this exhibition's storm, taking four impossible approaches to the site of sitting down. Michele Oka Doner's *Terrible Chair* of gilded bronze is all thorns for butt torture, but small enough for Goldilocks, poor thing. In Gary Kulak's welded steel *A Study of Integrated High Chairs*, three

wavering chair shapes in a surreal conga line seem to melt as they dance to silent music.

Ghost — For Larry Bennett, formed in thin air of galvanized steel wire by Forrest Myers, is a material drawing that lifts away from the earth, defying gravity and everyday worldly concerns such as getting off your feet. And a virtual companion to Myers' piece is *The Drawing of a Chair* by Robert Rabinovitz, an even more ethereal rendering of the chair form, suspended like an abstract concept in



George Stoll's untitled sponge sculpture-painting.

space, floating with the merest suggestion of its function. Plato would have been amazed.

But *Dysfunctional Sculpture* is as diverse as it is witty and destabilizing. Yoko Ono weighs in with a life-size, cracked *Baseball Bat* of solid bronze. Tom Sachs' *Value Meal* puns on the idea of fast food from Tiffany & Co. And Dan Devine's *Inside Out TV* is literally that, a real set deconstructed then reassembled inside out; it works, but you can't see what's on or change the channel.

As if all that weren't a full enough plate, works by Arman, Susan Beiner, Dennis Oppenheim, John Piet and Sharon Que head off in other directions that stretch the real mode successive chapters in a postmodern *A Thousand and One Nights*.

Simply fabulous.

George Tysh is the *Metro Times* arts editor. E-mail him at gysh@metrotimes.com.

WHERE & WHEN

DYSFUNCTIONAL SCULPTURE

Opening Friday, Sept. 10, 6 to 8 p.m. Through Oct. 9 at Center Galleries, 301 Frederick Douglass, Detroit.

New York sculptor Forrest Myers will discuss his work of the past four decades at 7:30 p.m., Thursday, September 30, as part of the Woodward Lecture Series of the

Detroit Institute of Arts, 5200 Woodward, Detroit. Use Woodward entrance.

Call 313-664-7800.

Plato would have
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