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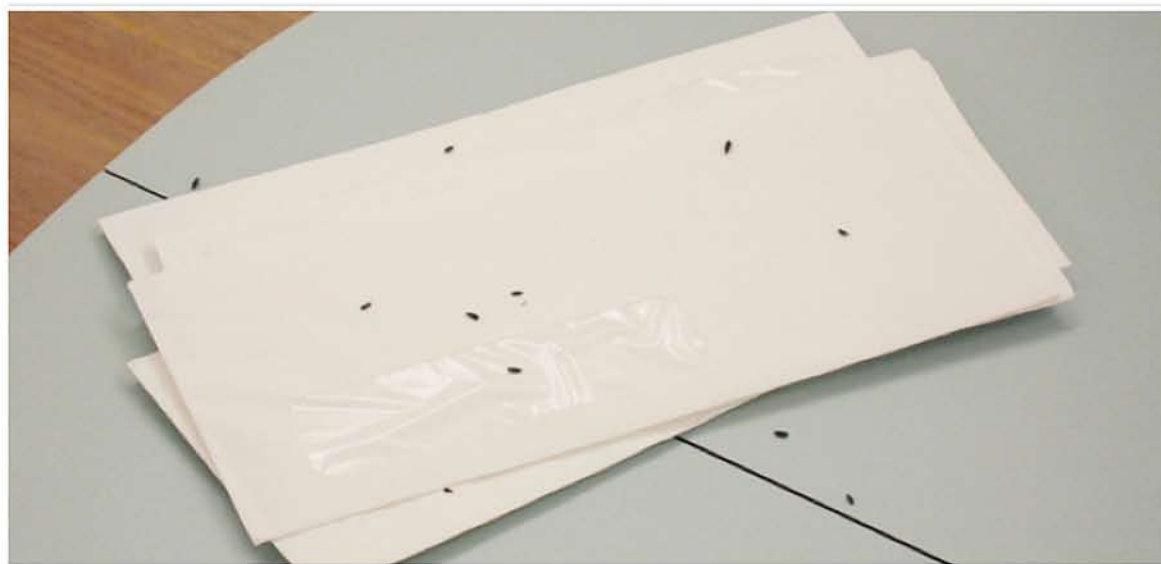
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ART ▸ GENERAL

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Trash Talks Back

by [Kathleen Massara](#)



[Nathaniel Robinson](#) pops open a manila envelope filled with a couple thousand maple seeds cast in lime-green resin. He drops a handful on the floor of the gallery, then spreads them around with the toe of his beat-up sneaker. Robinson hopes visitors will walk on the scattered simulacra, disturbing them rather than trying to impose order on the small green objets d'art. A few feet away lies a cast of a disposable coffee cup top with the "other" dot depressed. Seemingly discarded in the corner, it is a forlorn object, the replication of an everyday readymade. Robinson jokes, "This is probably the most verbal piece in the exhibition."


For his latest exhibition, [Civil Twilight](#) at Feature Inc. (through October 2), Robinson has hung a gigantic ersatz fountain from the ceiling of the gallery. When visitors walk and talk underneath, they'll likely be surprised to find their voices displaced, thrown from one end or the other. It's a strangely dislocating experience, and I suppose this is what Heidegger meant by "Being-in-the-world"—that we experience an enigmatic connection between subject and object. Robinson is plagued by this uncertainty of consciousness when he approaches each new piece. But we're all the better for his investigations into form because they challenge us to look at the world anew, with inquisitive eyes. "We're material things but are structured in a way that we care what happens to us," he tells me. "There's a horror to that, an equanimity too, and an amazing wonder that we exist."

For this exhibition the artist has diligently recreated the dreck of the modern world. The butt of a menthol cigarette is stuck to the surface of the stained faux fountain along with a used match and a few desiccated leaves. In Robinson's artwork, something is always off: objects are dented, compressed, or waterlogged. Whether it's a tattered pink catalog or the two sides of a crushed soda can, the objects are the reclaimed detritus of an artist concerned with doubt and the passage of time. These pieces, in their sad, quiet state, ask the viewer to question the object's existence and, perhaps, her own. The metaphysical ambiguities in Robinson's work act in opposition to the material realities of the form, as sculpture contains a texture, a clearly demarcated space, and a certain authoritative quality that is arguably not present in other mediums. These challenging objects are the product of a skeptical artist concerned with the things we try to discard and forget.

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