



## Vincent Fecteau/MATRIX 199

### Recent Sculpture

August 11 – October 6, 2002

**University of California  
Berkeley Art Museum**

December 4, 2002 – March 2, 2003

**Pasadena Museum  
of California Art**

**MATRIX**

Vincent Fecteau/MATRIX 199

*“For some time I have been curious about the idea of affectation. I think it is related to my interest in models. Both are distancing mechanisms that create space around the ‘real.’ I think it is this distance or space, full of complex and contradictory meaning, in which an ironic pose can express a sincere desire.”*

—Vincent Fecteau<sup>1</sup>

When Vincent Fecteau begins one of his characteristic small-scale, meticulously hand-assembled three-dimensional objects, the possibilities are limitless. As he continues to work, an ongoing and intricate struggle for balance ensues. The success of Fecteau’s sculptures resides in their ability to teeter, at once precariously and comfortably, between seemingly disparate qualities. They are simple and ornate, industrial and organic, include handmade and found elements, reveal a sense of randomness and planning, suggest timelessness and temporality, and are affected and genuine. They combine grade-school art materials (papier-mâché and Popsicle sticks), home craft (pinecones and faux finishes), and office-supply assemblage (pushpins and rubber bands). They serve the purpose of art, as defined by John Cage, “to sober and quiet the mind, encouraging a state that is spiritual in nature but at the same time is connected to everyday life.”<sup>2</sup> They evoke an obsessive effort toward harmony.

Fecteau’s early works prominently featured collage elements, often pasted onto foamcore structures. They took inspiration from popular culture, sappy commercial photography, and architecture and design journals. One series featured numerous magazine cutouts of cat faces pasted onto the wall and stacked on the floor. Such collage works function more as drawings than as sculptures and are subtle interventions into found images. More recent works, however, focus on structure.

The thirteen untitled works in Fecteau’s MATRIX exhibition, created in 2001 and 2002, abstractly suggest that they might be maquettes for much larger projects. If seen as models, they are models for impossible structures. In one work there appears to be two “entrances” (a pinecone, placed as if in accordance with Feng Shui to direct energy, marks each). As is true here, there is a labyrinth-like quality to many of the works, which fold in on themselves and are more spatially complex than Fecteau’s earlier works.

The sculptures in this recent grouping are primarily monochromatic (white, black, gray, or beige). In one, a white cavernous dome, elements include three seashells, half a walnut shell, and rope. The rope defines the perimeter of the structure—ascending to the apex in a wave and then sloping back down into an inverse curve (referring, perhaps, to a natural landscape). Fecteau introduces randomness in the form of drips and splatters in an otherwise seemingly perfect work.

In another work, balance is created between the representation of an I-beam and actual twigs positioned as if to hold up part of the sculpture. The cool industrial feel of

COVER: Untitled, 2002; mixed media; 10 x 15 x 19 1/2 inches; courtesy of the artist and Feature Inc.



handmade bolts and beams is counterbalanced by the twigs covered ever so lightly in moss. This construction appears at once realistic in form and impossible in scale. In another work Fecteau places corrugated cardboard at a diagonal and paints it black so that it looks not like cardboard but precisely like rubber. Fecteau is interested in this sort of relativity—the ability of one thing to appear so much like another that it is difficult to distinguish between them.

The artist’s interest in affectation—“the ironic pose [expressing] a sincere desire”—is apparent in another untitled work. There is a charged relationship between a tear in the cardboard and the utilitarian, gestural, “arty” brushstrokes found on the interior form.

Fecteau likes to play with conventions within the art world such as the desire to name things in order to know or understand them, the point at which an art object becomes self-conscious or affected, and the objectification of art. He is interested in how art objects age as well as how artworks in the homes of collectors are often dusty and sport a cobweb or two. (Some of his works are prematurely aged; others appear uncared for or even slightly damaged.) In his most recent work, he intentionally includes a slightly messy quality that is only visible up close. Splintered wood, dust, and sticky patches of dried glue thwart the expectations of the viewer.<sup>3</sup> They present a rigorous challenge to the traditional aesthetics of “museum-quality” art. In contrast to some of his peers, however, Fecteau’s apparent challenge to institutional authority is not mocking or ironic. It seems clear that he is participating in the continual redefinition of art because he believes in art and in its power.

The art of Richard Tuttle is an influence on Fecteau. In his sculptures, drawings, and installations, Tuttle combines an interest in Minimalism with a love for unusual materials. His delicate, intimate works are produced from pencil marks, wire, and shadow effects, in addition to wood and paper. Tuttle’s simple works speak quietly to their environment, asking viewers to take stock not only of the artwork they are regarding, but also of their surroundings, a quality that also exists in Fecteau’s artwork.<sup>4</sup>

Fecteau spends years working on each of his sculptures. His process has evolved from one of planning (when he worked on collaging images of which he had only one copy) to one of breaking down, cutting apart, and reworking. This repetitive, obsessive endeavor aims at achieving what, for the artist, is a kind of perfection.

Untitled, 2002; mixed media; 12 x 10 x 20 inches, courtesy of the artist and greengrassi.



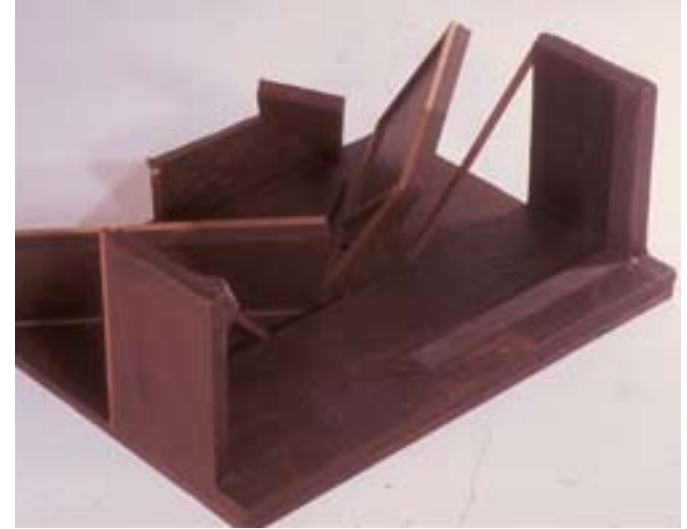
Similar to a Japanese rock garden in which each object is placed in relationship to the other elements and harmony is maintained by continual raking of the sand, Fecteau’s forms are about relativity, placement, and balance. In order to effectively still the eternal entropy of the universe and so achieve harmony in his work, Fecteau creates within his studio a space in which the laws of time do not apply—an environment of artificial stasis.

Fecteau’s work is the physical manifestation of his process. By producing spare, reductive objects well worn with his efforts of making, unmaking, and remaking them, in a modest way he posits an individual system of time. What are acceptable amounts of time to spend on individual preoccupations? Fecteau’s management of time recalls historical fascination with marking and controlling time, of which an example is the Book of Hours. The Book of Hours was used during the Middle Ages for private devotions.<sup>5</sup> Often highly ornate and personal, in appearance and utility it is an interesting precedent for Fecteau’s works, each of which is an intensely private art object imbued with a sense of contemplation and diligent reverence.

Fecteau is interested in “living life as an artist.”<sup>6</sup> His practice is art. Several Buddhist tendencies can be read into his work, goallessness and the quest for a “being there” experience among them. Within the critical dialogue, Fecteau’s works are often defined by what they are not. By effectively existing in a space of being both what they are and what they are not, his sculptures question what is important. In Buddhist terms this is a question of form as opposed to emptiness. The dialogue can be illustrated by a quote from a Wallace Stevens poem, “Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird”: “I do not know which to prefer, / The beauty of inflections / Or the beauty of innuendoes, / The blackbird whistling / Or just after.”<sup>7</sup> Fecteau’s objects are inflections and his processes are innuendoes. Each potentially contains profound possibilities.

There is a myth of existence that is shared between 1970s earthworks and the work of Fecteau. To contemporary viewers, earthworks are known through documentation and art historical lore. This secondary or tertiary knowledge stands in for real experience. Limitations—both artist-imposed and nature-imposed—prevent primary knowledge. Michael Heizer’s *Double Negative*, a work completed in 1971 that consists of two giant grooves carved into opposite sides of a canyon wall in Nevada,

Untitled, 2002; mixed media; 9 x 16 x 16 1/2 inches; courtesy of the artist and Marc Foxx Gallery.



is hard to find or access.<sup>8</sup> And Robert Smithson's monumental earthwork *Spiral Jetty* (1970), located on the Great Salt Lake in Utah, has disappeared.<sup>9</sup> Through the progress of time, these and other earthworks transform or mutate into something other than what they were created to be—instead of monumental interventions into nature, they exist in pure form only in memory, itself an amorphous space. Fecteau's works also suggest something other than what is seen or exists: he avers an interest in small forms because they facilitate the imposition of imagination on space.

“One of the most beautiful things about art,” Fecteau has said “[is] the faith or will that can make a rubber band or a pushpin the location of all this meaning and at the same time acknowledge the limitations of its reality.”<sup>10</sup> At the core of Fecteau's work are faith and hope—faith in the possibility of things to be more than what they appear to be, and hope that, within the power of possibility, anything can happen.

Heidi Zuckerman Jacobson  
Phyllis Wattis MATRIX Curator

Vincent Fecteau was born in Islip, New York, in 1969. He received a Bachelor of Arts degree from Wesleyan University in 1992. Fecteau lives and works in San Francisco.

#### Selected Solo Exhibitions

2000  
greengrassi, London, U.K.

1999  
Marc Foxx Gallery, Los Angeles, CA

1998  
Feature Inc., New York, NY

1997  
Ynglingagatan 1 Gallery, Stockholm, Sweden

1995  
“Introductions,” Gallery Paule Anglim, San Francisco, CA

1994  
“Ben,” Kiki, San Francisco, CA

#### Selected Group Exhibitions

2002  
“Whitney Biennial 2002,” Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, NY  
“Artists Imagine Architecture,” The Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston, MA  
“Now Is the Time,” Dorsky Gallery Curatorial Programs, Long Island City, NY  
“Guide to Trust No. 2,” Yerba Buena Center for the Arts, San Francisco, CA

2001  
“Marked: Bay Area Drawings,” Sonoma Valley Museum of Art, Sonoma, CA; Hunter College Art Galleries, New York, NY  
“Maureen Gallace and Vincent Fecteau,” Gallery Paule Anglim, San Francisco, CA  
“Off the Wall,” Gallery 400, University of Illinois at Chicago, IL  
“Smallish,” greengrassi, London, U.K.

2000  
“Here Kitty, Kitty,” Nexus Contemporary Art Center, Atlanta, GA

Untitled, 2001; mixed media, 14 1/2 x 15 1/4 x 10 3/4 inches; collection of Bruno Fazzolari.

1999  
“Calendar 2000,” Bard Center for Curatorial Studies Museum, Annandale-on-Hudson, NY  
“Persuasion,” University at Buffalo Art Gallery, Buffalo, NY  
“BmW black met white,” ANP, Antwerp, Belgium

1998  
“Architecture and Inside,” Paul Morris Gallery, New York, NY  
“Ingenook,” Feigen Contemporary, New York, NY  
“Lovecraft,” South London Gallery, London, U.K.

1997  
“Bay Area Now,” Yerba Buena Center for the Arts, San Francisco, CA  
“The Scene of the Crime,” UCLA Hammer Museum, Los Angeles, CA

1995  
“In a Different Light,” University Art Museum, Berkeley, CA  
“lo-fi,” Lauren Wittels, New York, NY

1994  
“Next to Nothing,” Yerba Buena Center for the Arts, San Francisco, CA  
“Bong,” Kiki, San Francisco, CA  
“Sparkalepsy,” Feature Inc., New York, NY

#### Selected Catalogues and Books

Morgan, Jessica. *Artists Imagine Architecture*, The Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston, MA, 2002.  
Rinder, Lawrence. *Whitney Biennial 2002*, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, NY, 2002.  
Hunt, David. *Now Is the Time*, Dorsky Gallery Curatorial Programs, Long Island City, NY, 2002.  
Rugoff, Ralph. *The Scene of the Crime*, UCLA Hammer Museum, Los Angeles, CA, 1997.  
Pritikin, Renny. *Bay Area Now*, Yerba Buena Center for the Arts, San Francisco, CA, 1997.

#### Selected Periodicals

Bonnetti, David. “Shows at Paule Anglim,” *The San Francisco Chronicle*, November 24, 2001, p. E1.  
Cooper, Dennis. “Openings: Vincent Fecteau,” *Artforum*, April 1995, v. 33, pp. 84–85.  
Cotter, Holland. “Review,” *The New York Times*, April 17, 1998, p. E39.  
Doran, Anne. “Review,” *Time Out New York*, August 7, 1997, p. 47.  
Farquarson, Alex. “Vincent Fecteau: greengrassi, London,” *frieze*, January/February 2001, p. 103.  
Hainley, Bruce. “Trust buster,” *Artforum*, May 2002, v. 40, pp. 165–166.  
\_\_\_ . “One Thousand Words,” *Artforum*, March 2001, v. 39, pp. 126–127.

Untitled, 2001; mixed media; 8 x 13 1/2 x 13 1/2 inches; collection of Rena Conti and Dr. Ivan Moskowicz, Brookline, MA.

\_\_\_ . “Best of 2000,” *Artforum*, December 2000, v. 39, pp. 132–133.  
\_\_\_ . “Best of the 90’s,” *Artforum*, December 1999, v. 38, pp. 130–131.  
\_\_\_ . “Vincent Fecteau: Feature Inc.,” *Artforum*, September 1998, v. 37, p. 154.  
\_\_\_ . “Vincent Fecteau: Feature, New York,” *frieze*, November/December 1996, pp. 82–83.  
Helfand, Glen. “Piecemeal,” *SF Weekly*, July 19, 1995.  
Kastner, Jeffrey. “lo-fi: Lauren Wittels, New York,” *frieze*, September/October 1995, pp. 72–73.  
Miles, Christopher. “Vincent Fecteau’s Teflon Failures,” *SOMA*, October 1997, pp. 16–18.

#### Work in MATRIX

All thirteen works in the exhibition are untitled and mixed media.

#### Sculptures dated 2001 are lent by:

Joe Barron  
Rena Conti and Dr. Ivan Moskowicz,  
Brookline, MA  
Martin and Rebecca Eisenberg  
Bruno Fazzolari

#### Sculptures dated 2002 are lent by:

The artist and Gallery Paule Anglim, San Francisco  
The artist and Feature Inc.  
The artist and Marc Foxx Gallery  
The artist and greengrassi  
Private collection, Los Angeles  
B. Wurtz

#### Please Note:

MATRIX Curator Heidi Zuckerman Jacobson will lead a walkthrough of [Vincent Fecteau/MATRIX 199 Recent Sculpture](#) on Thursday, September 19, at 12:15 p.m.

On Friday, September 27, at 7 p.m., San Francisco–based sound artist Aaron Ximm will present an evening of soundscapes composed from field recordings, also known as “found sound,” in response to Fecteau’s work. Ximm’s compositions are aural collages that evoke impressionistically, rather than literally, the sense of a place.

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Untitled, 2001; mixed media; 8 1/4 x 20 x 15 inches; collection of Rena Conti and Dr. Ivan Moskowicz, Brookline, MA.

Untitled, 2002; mixed media; 7 x 20 x 10 1/2 inches; courtesy of the artist and Gallery Paule Anglim.



ENCOUNTER CULTURE