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## TED FULLWOOD'S ENERGY MACHINES AT SAN JOSE INSTITUTE OF CONTEMPORARY ART

### **Eccentric and Alive, Pipe Cleaner Sculptures Free the Imagination**

By Erin Goodwin-Guerrero

Once again, Ted Fullwood lives up to his wonderful capacity to amaze and delight. Although I have only seen his work in an occasional group show in recent years, he is never far from my mind. Among original and creative people in Silicon Valley, Ted Fullwood is always right at the top of my list.



Fullwood's *Energy Machines* filled the Cardinale Project Room at San Jose ICA.

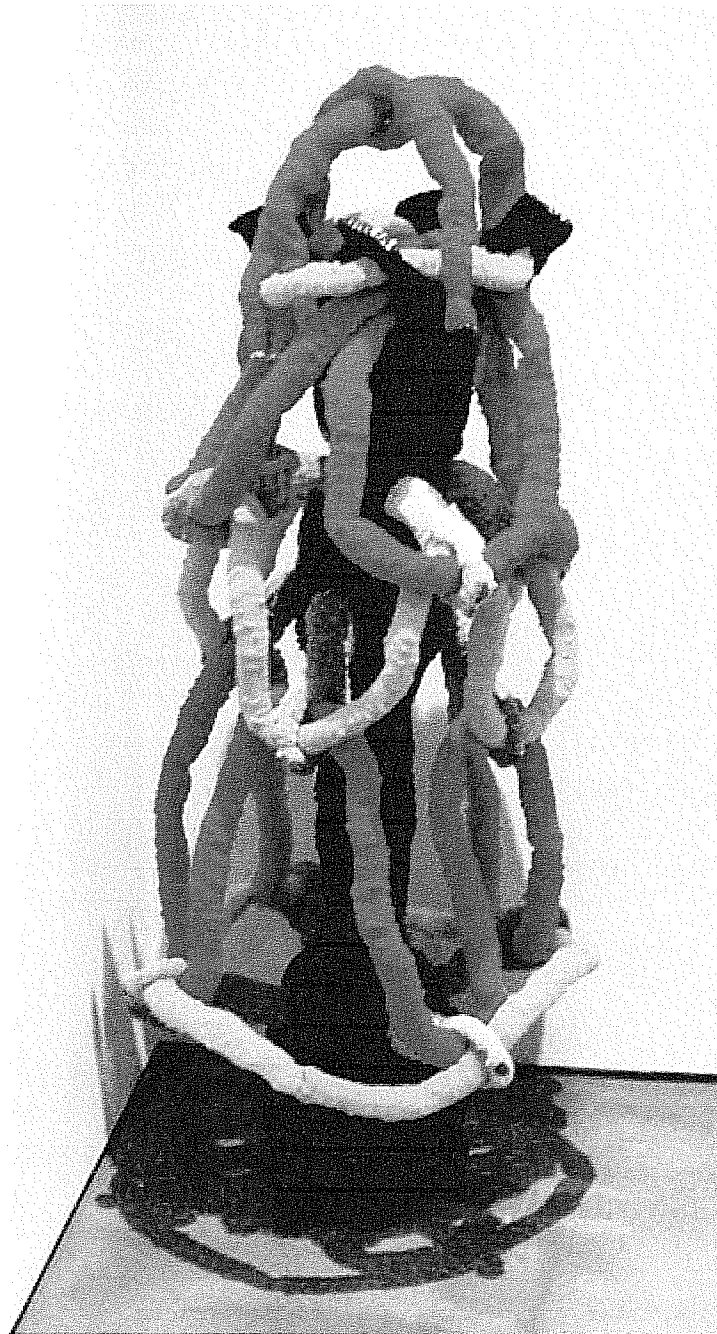
Fullwood's fans have been waiting for this new body of work to appear and were not disappointed the evening of February 5, when *Energy Machines* were unveiled at the San Jose Institute of Contemporary Art. Many gallery visitors reported that the crowd surrounding the work made it impossible to see the installation and they were resigned to come back on another day to get a glimpse of the works sporting such titles as *Oxcavator*, *Dialator*, *Rejuvenator*, *Reciprocator* and *Yellow Retort*.

Entering, amongst the collection of soft anthropomorphic pipe cleaner sculptures in the Cardinale Project Room, I found myself in a wonderland of creatures that are both mechanical and figurative. The near human scale of these forms envelops the visitor in a jungle environment of exuberant mutant beings that reach out in all directions and appear to be ever expanding. The *Energy Machines* defy any expectation that a machine should be hard, made of inert material, machined to symmetry or mechanical sleekness. Rather these are fantastic, full of color with an appealing furry surface, and lumpy with asymmetrical contours. Of course tools are extensions of our bodies and Ted Fullwood's *machines* are replete with body parts that merge into such mechanical references as an air horn or an eggbeater. Most of them have torsos. There are also arms, hands, dreadlocks, lips, legs and even weird faces. Some are a bit insect-like. Others have plant-like stalks and tentacles. And then there are the elements of the inanimate still life, too: the pedestal, the table, vase, and pitcher. I think it is safe to say that as Fullwood weaves his *Energy Machines*, he allows his infinite imagination to flow in a stream of consciousness toward an end result not even he can preconceive.



Ted Fullwood's *Dialator*, 2009, accompanied by *Rejuvenator*, 2002

*Yellow Retort* is a mysterious weave of many-hued yellow tubes perched on a couple of dark orbs in one corner of the installation. Its form was inscrutable to me until I saw the yellow face made up of triangular eyes and a triangular mouth, open as in speech or exercised breathing. Yellow dreadlocks bob out from the top of its head. Its yellow/orange torso turns to the right with one arm protectively poised, elbow out, in front of the chest. The dark orbs, at the bottom, are its skirt flouncing as the figure gets ready to throw a punch — or, is it dancing the “Twist”? *Alternator*, more abstract in the opposite corner of the installation is still a mystery to me, but funky and fun nevertheless!



*Alternator*, 2009, pipe cleaner sculpture by Ted Fullwood

The energy between *Dialator* and *Interrogator*, due to their placement in the room, was another entertaining moment of discovery for me. *Dialator*, with its red eggbeater like fist, reaches out a long skinny red arm toward his intended victim of “dialation”. *Interrogator*, meanwhile, with her purple and blue airhorn arm, is poised to “blow the whistle” on any violations of art. A defenseless lavender vase sits, protected, on *Interrogator*’s teapot purple pedestal. After their confrontation, we may assume that *Dialator* takes sustenance from the mushroom-shaped *Rejuvenator*, who waits faithfully at his feet. “Shrooms” anyone?



*Dialator and Interrogator* seem to face off in the fantasy installation of *Energy Machines* by Ted Fullwood.

As soft and brightly colorful as these works are in comparison to Fullwood's ceramics (See an upcoming show in City Windows Gallery for examples of Ted Fullwood ceramic sculpture), there are many whimsical forms and playful shapes in the *Energy Machines* that are reminiscent of his work in ceramics. The scale, that pushes a medium beyond its expected limits, also makes me think of Fullwood's ceramics. Certainly, even in the unexpected medium of pipe cleaners, there is an ongoing dedication in his work to that reflects the spontaneous, the touch of the human hand, great good humor and an artist's flight of fancy. What a joy to experience!

In a video interview, Fullwood speaks of his process and the end result: machines designed to unleash energy — imaginative energy. I would say he knows what he is doing.

Posted by erin on Thursday, February 11th, 2010 at 12:28 pm.

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