

View of Urs Fischer's installation *you*, 2007, excavated gallery with dirt; at Gavin Brown's Enterprise.



### Urs Fischer at Gavin Brown's Enterprise

For his latest outing at Gavin Brown, the young Swiss-born, New York- and Zurich-resident sculptor Urs Fischer, employing heavy machinery and a team of assistants, removed the concrete gallery floor and excavated the earth beneath, leaving a raw, gaping pit. (Fun- nily enough, Roberta Smith wrote in 2003 that Fischer's approach "is to get beneath the surface of things.") Visiting the show was a surprisingly moving experience.

One entered through a small doorway into an anteroom about 10 by 10 feet, where the dirt was removed to a depth of a foot or two; a low, dropped ceiling resulted in a cramped atmosphere. Via the antechamber one entered the main room, about 38 by 30 feet, where the pit reached 8 feet deep. The windows on the gallery's south side were walled

off, so the atmosphere was one of deep quiet and stillness, and the contrast of the pristine white walls with the wrecked floor and exposed earth was stunning.

A jagged-edged remainder of floor, a foot or two wide, ran along the walls throughout, so one could do a circuit of the piece and keep one's shoes clean, standing at normal floor height but now at the edge of a precipice. Descending into the dug earth revealed shards of glass and pottery, cigarette butts and other detritus from the dig. One gallery visitor mentioned that "he loves his raw materials," but perhaps more to the point, he makes the cooked raw again.

It seemed at first simply an act of removal—Yves Klein's *Le Vide* with a backhoe—but there were discreet additions. As one crossed back through the antechamber, one noticed that it was roughly a scale replica of the main room, with faux lighting tracks, ducting and vents, and even tiny hand-crafted electrical sockets echoing those in the larger room. The petite fluorescent bulbs were covered with colored gels, producing an eerie light that contrasted with the warmer illumination in the main space. Creating these head-spinning contrasts of scale and process was a fine example of what curator Alison M. Gingeras has called Fischer's ability "to produce a complex ecosystem of extremes . . . [e.g.] delicacy and brutality . . . with an uncommon formal and narrative economy."

Since it took place in a commercial gallery, one could easily see this work as a metaphorical assault on art-world capitalism. It also recalled bomb craters and Ground Zero, as well as artistic antecedents such as Earth art and the work of Gordon Matta-Clark. But the show's title, "you," indicated that whatever associations one makes, the visitor's experience—of disorientation, discovery and childlike glee—was the show's primary subject. What's more, when stepping back up to floor level through the anteroom doorway, which was only about 4 feet high, just about everyone bumped their heads. This purely physical experience seemed a fitting note on which to end one's visit.

—Brian Boucher