

Art in America

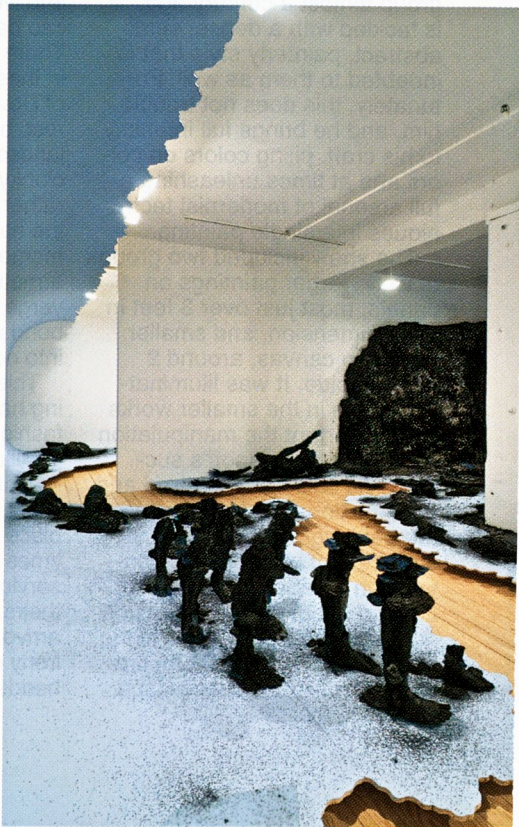
December 2007

Alexander Lee at Clementine

After this, his first New York solo exhibition, "The Departure of the Fish: Redux," Alexander Lee had to dismantle some of the sculptures included in his nicely crafted but unintelligible installation. Some parts were made on the premises to fit the gallery, as evidenced by black splatter marks on the walls surrounding a large, gloppy, black resin volcano intended to conjure up the artist's native Tahiti. Everything in the show sat atop light blue wooden platforms with scalloped edges evoking both sea and sky. One of the platforms curled like a wave up the gallery wall. Also contributing to the island environment were several scattered, sand-covered cast-resin sculptures of fish, eels and even a female torso with a fish head, though the presence of dismembered hands and arms was puzzling.

Lee cites a Tahitian creation myth as his inspiration for the exhibition: in the mythological place of Havai'i, a volcanic island is said to have transmogrified into a fish, which swam south and became what we now know as the Tahitian islands. The installation, however, with its landlocked sea creatures and dismembered limbs strewn about, also brought to mind disasters like Hurricane Katrina, the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami, the effects of global warming and, at least according to the artist, 9/11. The exhibition's press release quotes Lee saying he has an "interest" in "trauma as spectacle," which is certainly a timely enough issue to bring up these days. But the conceptual gap between obscure

View of Alexander Lee's exhibition "The Departure of the Fish: Redux," 2007, volcanic sand, coal slag and mixed mediums; at Clementine.



Tahitian folklore and horrific current events is so wide as to render the analogy irrelevant.

A cast head appeared charred and lay nose up, black sand covering one eye. Arms and hands, also partly covered in black sand, were surrounded by unidentifiable forms that may have reminded viewers of the consequences of suicide bombing. Certain of Lee's casts, including a luminous, turquoise resin fish, had an odd

beauty as they gleamed from beneath sparkly sand that was sprinkled throughout the show.

What little ideological coherence there was underlying this exhibition was no doubt further diminished once its constituent parts were separated from the setting. But the quality craftsmanship and ambitious use of space suggest that this young artist shouldn't be written off.

—Sarah Valdez