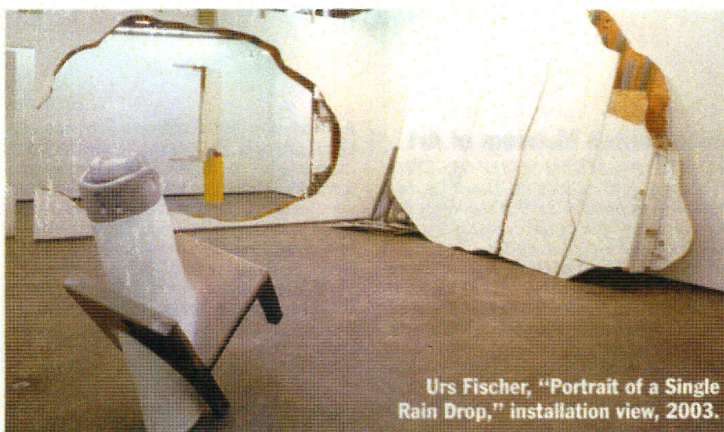Urs Fischer, "Portrait of a Single Rain Drop," installation view, 2003.

Urs Fischer, "Portrait of a Single Rain Drop"
Gavin Brown's Enterprise, through May 10 (see Chelsea).

Urs Fischer's impressive New York solo debut tests the limits of senses dulled by predictability. Juggling several mediums, all competently, the Swiss artist achieves a mysterious alchemy that makes his work immediately accessible and powerfully intriguing. For example, in a small side room near the entrance we encounter two clay heads, which have been violently broken open to extrude streams of viscous goo. Although ominous and abject, they are refreshingly devoid of horror-show theatrics.

The main gallery features pieces of furniture impaled on oversize cigarette lighters, both crafted from Styrofoam and painted in acrylic. There are also large two-dimensional works: wood panels decorated with an astonishing array of materials—everything from paint marker to computer-generated images—which Fischer combines to form something resembling a landscape of the mind. The final element is a large, jagged hole that Fischer has cut in the rear wall, transforming Gavin Brown's back room into an ad hoc extension of the exhibition space. Unlike the physical "deconstruction" of much recent art, however, this gesture isn't a philosophical conceit; it's a prerequisite to Fischer's literal and conceptual possession of the gallery.

Following in the footsteps of Franz West (though not so closely as to seem derivative), Fischer's constructions are less finished products than they are records of a process. Working in situ, he creates his exhibitions in the week prior to the opening. The resulting dialogue between art and context is thus born organically rather than through a strict reliance on some abstract dictum. Much of the work looks like it's been caught in mid-step, as if Fischer had left the studio for just a moment. But that seems to be the point: Fischer contests the aura of the perfected object, insisting on failure and flux as crucial components of the aesthetic experience.—*Chivas Clem*