

Art in America



View of Michel François's exhibition "Theater of Operations," 2006; at Bortolami Dayan.

Michel François at Bortolami Dayan

The allusive images of Michel François's "Theater of Operations" proposed logical relationships within an inventory of diverse elements. On the Saturdays of the exhibition's wintry run, François, a poet of multiply-referential imagery as much as a sculptor, deployed *One Frozen Eagle Melting in the Theater of Operations* (2005)—an ephemeral raptor cast in frozen ink—on a packing crate close to the gallery's entrance. This dour invitation to his mutable theater recalled such art-historical icons as his Belgian compatriot Marcel Broodthaers's *Department of Eagles* (Documenta 1972) by way of Marc Quinn's fro-

zen-blood *Self* (1991) and Julian LaVerdiere's milled polymer eagle (2003).

Beyond the entrance and a mound of plasterboard removed from the aluminum studs of a partition wall, a white pennant rippled in a constant breeze transmitted up the length of a flagpole from some device concealed below its base platform. The platform itself was carpeted in white and randomly patterned with divots of excised disks. The disk form was repeated in *Hole and Wall* (2006), a core sample of brick and plasterboard removed from the gallery wall, and recurred in a near-subliminal video loop of bouncing black

balls projected on a world map painted black. Together, these elements provided an absorbing exercise in a postmodern idiom.

Neon Rope (2006)—a vertical extension of white neon tubing—stretched from floor to ceiling like a magician's sleight of hand, optically intersecting the horizontal gesture of *Contamination* (2005), a long, sooty line of charcoal inscribed high on the gallery wall with what appeared to be a brace of charred wooden apples. There were also manipulated photographs, including an elaborate, 13-by-16-foot grisaille digital image, *Octopus* (2004), printed on canvas and spattered with black ink, and *Now or Never (The Speaker's Corner Project)*, 2005, a 6-by-4-foot chromogenic print of a

placard-bearing orator standing on a cube of melting ice.

François revisited an earlier work, stacking current copies of the upscale, shrimp-colored *Financial Times* (1997/2006) beneath an egg-shaped balloon plastered with strips of the specialized newspaper. Across the gallery, he placed the simple blown-glass *Black Balloon* (2003) on a pedestal, and on another pedestal nearby was a small, not-quite-cubic block of raw clay covered with gold leaf and gouged by his own fingers, the excised material resting on the block's upper surface. In his first solo appearance in New York since 2001, François graced this young gallery's adventurous and cerebral unfolding exhibition program with the disparate elements of a narrative in search of a paradigm.

—Edward Leffingwell