

## David Taborn

"Homunculus"

Robert Lehman Gallery at UrbanGlass

New York City

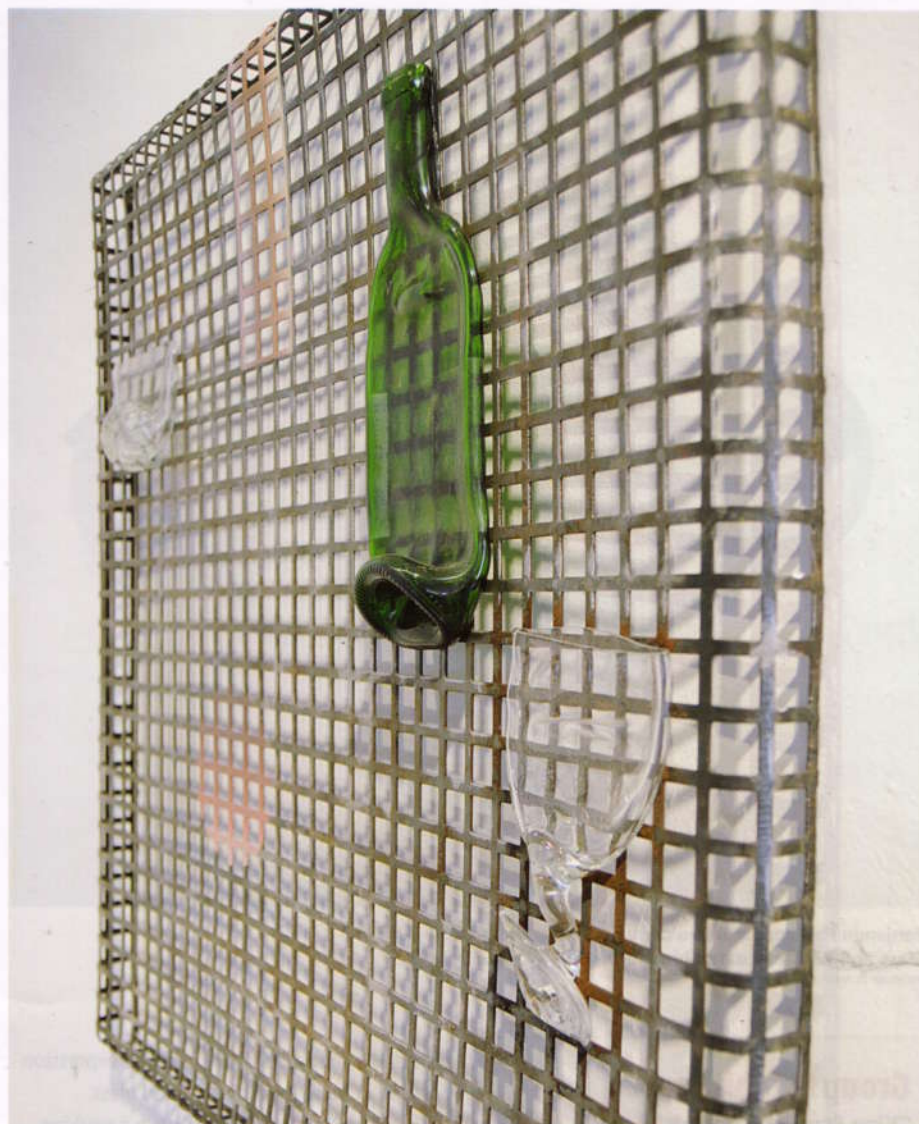
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With his exhibition title "Homunculus," artist-provocateur David Taborn references an early concept of human reproduction that imagined that conception began with a miniature version of a fully formed man. In contemporary science, the term has come to refer to an unseen agent or actor who is not understood or who may be ultimately unknowable.

Taborn uses his studio as an alchemical laboratory into inquiries that push the boundaries of what is known and knowable. His rogue science is semiotics, and the work on display at his New York City exhibition was a tour of sign-making strategies. Taborn is intent on challenging the categorizations that organize, but may also limit, creative expressions. He forces us to reflect upon what we expect to see from a painter, a glass artist, or a sculptor alongside other categories he refuses because his work traverses all encompassing boundaries.

The nondescript term "mixed media" applies best to this exhibition's pieces—amalgams of neon, copper tubing, paint, steel mesh, mirrors, and *objets trouvés* that are fused through embossing, painting, etching, gaffing, and melting, alongside a host of other materials and techniques. More importantly, these are mixed *mediations*, blending well-established categories such as bas-relief sculpture, Studio Glass, artists' books, and painting, which he constantly references in the works' wall mountings and easel sizes.

The show was anchored by four relatively intimate (20-by-21-inch) works, collectively titled "Sketchbook" (all 2008). First, the sketchbook "pages" bound by metal rings were manifested in mirrors, Plexiglas, metal, and other materials. Hardly works on ephemeral paper, these pieces nevertheless maintain the play and spontaneity that one associates with sketchbooks. Taborn's free-associative moments come about through media experimentation. We know that glass melts, but how might heat-drooped Plexiglas behave? What if it is mirrored? How does this result compare with metal embossment? Taborn presents or references a pipe wrench (among other tools) in many of his works to allow for comparative representations. How does a wrench's stamped index create meaning compared to a neon



*Homunculus (Table)*, 2006. Mixed media. H 30, W 30 in.

outline? Or compared to the actual object? Obviously, the tools also represent process and facility.

*Homunculus (Meniscus)* (2003) is exemplary for discussing this *bricoleur*—or do-it-yourselfer's—search for paradox. The work offers moments typical of the exhibition, insofar as marks are not what they appear to be. For instance, what initially reads as an impasto paint stroke is actually a Lucio Fontana-style gouge into a metallic support; elsewhere, a repoussé hex wrench complements an actual hexagonal nut. While so much contemporary art depends on uncanny surprise, Taborn seems to make his contradictions too obvious for this psychological effect. It may be better to say that our minds want to organize the information despite recognition of these oppositions. In *Homunculus Table* (2006), Taborn slump-flattens two glasses and a bottle

to solve a painterly problem—namely, how to render three dimensions in two. These objects are physical, but when squashed, stripped of their utility, and situated on a metal-mesh Cartesian grid, they become mere signifiers of objects on a tabletop.

It is refreshing that UrbanGlass, an arts institution dedicated to a single medium, has given Taborn (through an artist-in-residence program) the opportunity to experiment across a range of materials, and exhibit his results. By applying glassmaking techniques such as etching, lampworking, engraving, and slumping to other materials (sometimes in combination with glass), Taborn broadens the concepts that have come to circumscribe the term Studio Glass.

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