

Art in Review; Rob Fischer

By GRACE GLUECK

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Whitney Museum of American Art at Altria
120 Park Avenue, at 42nd Street
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The sculptor Rob Fischer gives the word recycle a new dimension, using the commodious indoor courtyard here as a showroom for eight works.

In the inner gallery he has composed what might be called a junkyard still life, "30 Yards (Minor Tragedies Dissected)." Framed by a cut-apart, neatly quartered Dumpster are four compositions made largely of pieces salvaged from previous Fischer works: battered metal sheets, old oil drums, plumbing pipe, engine parts and other detritus. An American idyll of the Rust Belt genre, it may not only reflect Mr. Fischer's memories of a Midwestern childhood, but also serve as a portent of the country's future.

His chef-d'oeuvre, "Your vigor for life appalls me" (the title is from R. Crumb), is a monumental, jerry-built tower that all but touches the gallery's 40-foot ceiling. Composed of raw-looking modules of plaster and wood -- small versions of empty rooms and even coffins -- the benighted structure, sparked by the Tower of Babel, is held together by a fragile pipe scaffolding. Skinny, nonfunctional plumbing pipe threads through it like a set of veins, but doesn't bring life to it.

Across the courtyard is a different story, a tall, slender processional archway titled "I bet you think this song is about you" (from Carly Simon). It's a jazzy Broadway-vulgar structure, made from the skeleton of an upended Dumpster. Its chically rusted framework is gridded from top to bottom (except for the passageway) by small mirrored compartments, whose reflections make it hard to see the work as a distinct entity. But it's a snappy foil to the lugubrious tower.

Smaller works lie between the two large ones, among them "Not waving but drowning," half of a steel boat hull lying on its side, whose partially mirrored interior reflects dead space. In the canon of junk sculpture, Mr. Fischer's work has a place. GRACE GLUECK