



HAMILTON, NEW YORK
Jonathan Kirk

Clifford Art Gallery, Colgate University

The works featured in "Machines: Fragments and Reveries" present Jonathan Kirk as a creative spirit in love with mechanisms and an artist who revels in working out ideas through materials. Trained in a strictly formalist program under the aegis of Anthony Caro, Kirk subsequently embraced his instinct for implied narratives. He invests his sculpture with recognizable forms, derived primarily from nautical and machine subjects. *Black Wave* (2012), a small work composed of painted wood and epoxy with a rippling line and a motif that evokes submarines, perfectly demonstrates this tendency.

Kirk's child-like wonder in elegant engineering has never left him, and his sculptures are imaginatively reworked marvels of the Industrial Revolution. *Old King Cole*, a near-life-size steam engine lovingly hand-crafted to the rivet, commands attention. Kirk, however, is not blind to the shortcomings of Empire, nor to the environmental evils wrought by coal-fired steam or internal-combustion engines. *Old King Cole* exemplifies these contradictory sensibilities. It is old-time technology upended, suggesting that, even if it retains admirable qualities, it is

sinking under the weight of its obsolescence.

Many of these recent sculptures are pedestal-scaled, imaginatively conceived, and constructed in the round, with interest on all sides, something at which Kirk excels. *Ashes to Ashes*, for example, is all bent and upended engine parts on one face and cubistic sculpture on the other.

In *Winged Gudgeon* (2008), a painted wood relief sculpture with dynamic forms, the neck curves away from the wall, while the lower orb swells outward. It has a waxy-brown, distressed-looking surface (a winged gudgeon is a socket or cylindrical shaft developed during the Industrial Revolution to support waterwheel or steam engine shafts). In this show, *Gudgeon* was handsomely installed with four fragments that isolated its two major curves. Kirk created these smaller forms by piecing and gluing together wooden dowels or squares—a process that highlights his working method of manipulating fragments to digest ideas. Drawing is not for him; he really must think over ideas in cardboard or wood. Elsewhere, an entire table is strewn with similarly fashioned bits that resemble little towers or parts of ships. One can only admire Kirk's dexterity in fabrication. The fragments have real charm, in part because of their diminutive

scale, but also because they are evidence of a curious mind and adept hands at work.

—Mary E. Murray

