



Stuart Netsky, *Greek Urn*
(*Resin Blue*), 1993.

Stuart Netsky, "Alchemy"

Z Gallery, through Sat 17 (see Soho).

New York art mavens are already busily making hotel reservations for this summer's Venice Biennale, the Basel Art Fair, Documenta and Münster Sculpture Project. But while it's nice that New Yorkers are so curious about the rest of the world, there remains an overlooked and fascinating art scene less than two hours away—in Philadelphia. Just beyond the art world's radar, a group of installation-based artists have blossomed there. Gabriel Martinez, Craig Bruns, Virgil Marti and Hillary Harp have all had outstanding shows in Philly, as well as in Gotham's alternative spaces. Now, Stuart Netsky—the group's elder statesman—is having his New York gallery debut.

Like Cary Liebowitz/Candyass, Netsky also bases his work on a queer stereotype. While Candyass gives us the nerdy gay high school kid who transforms homophobic taunts into a source of strength, Netsky builds on the decorator/hairstylist/sissy. Of course, unlike the buff Chelsea boy, the stylist/sissy is generally seen as an embarrassing anachronism within the gay community—a view, Netsky seems to say, that overlooks the subversive potential of something like an openly gay man touching up Nancy Reagan's roots.

Netsky's paintings made from hair dye and nail polish suggest the makeup artist's point of view. One exquisite minimalist square, made of hair bleach and dye on linen, equates the glamour of the sleek, reductive object with the glint of Zsa Zsa Gabor's hair. And his sad, romantic side comes through in a series of small pieces made from ground-up flowers that have either been given by ex-lovers, or (in a pointed bit of psychoanalytic transference) pinched from his shrink's office.

Unfortunately, Netsky—whose survey of installations at Philadelphia's ICA would have made him a star if it had come to New York—is represented here only by smaller objects. Although they are engaging, they simply don't compare to his larger work. Including something like his mind-blowing '70s shag rug transformed into a Japanese rock garden would have made this a better show. Still, for viewers unfamiliar with Netsky's work, this occasion will serve as a tasty introduction.—*Bill Arning*