

GOINGS ON ABOUT TOWN

ART

Jimmy Wright

Two weathered-looking, six-foot-square paintings—cropped closeups of decaying flowers—inaugurate the Fierman gallery’s new space, on Pike Street, in this spare but powerful show. In the nineteen-seventies, Wright established himself as a chronicler of New York’s gay-night-life scene, rendering louche tableaux in rich, mischievous detail. But in 1988, when his longtime partner Ken Nuzzo was diagnosed with H.I.V., the artist made a dramatic shift in subject matter and began painting the still-life series “Flowers for Ken,” which includes the two dramatic pictures on view. “Sunflower Stem,” from 1989, is a rear view of a drooping bloom, its petals crisping into feathery tendrils and its once green stalk gone brown. Its companion is the despairing, even more time-ravaged “Sunflower Head,” which Wright started in 1989 and completed in 1992, a year after Nuzzo died. It’s a frontal view of the same flower, the color now completely drained from its painstakingly textured expanse. Both of these elegantly overwrought compositions were painted on canvases that Wright salvaged from a dumpster; their craggy accumulations of pigment stand as heart-piercing labors of love as well as memento mori.

— *Johanna Fateman*

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 Fierman
19 Pike St.
Downtown

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