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John Newman (b.1952) makes serious happy sculpture and happy serious sculpture—without ever losing track of either of those qualities in the 10 jauntily inventive tabletop pieces in his first New York commercial-gallery solo show in a decade.

He began these modest-size abstract works in the mid-1990s after returning from a trip to India, a journey whose effects can still be seen in the curvilinear collisions of diverse materials, such as extruded aluminum, papier-mâché and two-way mirrored glass, and in an exuberant use of color that actually contributes to the form of the work.



Counting backwards from clear to blue, 2010

Newman disguises some fairly intricate engineering—so the viewer isn't stopped short by a science-fair "Wow!"—and maintains the single-object cohesiveness of traditional sculpture in a truly lighthearted way. The conspicuously cantilevered "Yellow Lightly Over Morning Stars" (2011) stays balanced only because the spiked brass balls on the bottom are solid. The titles aren't bad, either. "Counting Backwards From Clear to Blue," for example, is exactly what that witty sculpture, though still, seems to be doing.