

# TIM NOBLE AND SUE WEBSTER

By David Frankel

To look at their work, you'd think Tim Noble and Sue Webster had read Yeats's line about "the foul rag and bone shop of the heart" when they were kids and taken it, well, to heart—in fact, had made a career out of it. This artist couple, who emerged in the wake of Damien Hirst, the Chapman brothers, and the rest of the YBA (Young British Artists) generation, and who share the YBA's sensationalist flair, are best known for a strange combination of junk and romance: works in which a sort of sculpture—an eroticized scrapheap of usually unappealing objects—is lit to cast a shadow that creates a perfect silhouette of the loving pair themselves. This kind of mixture of gross matter and affective illusion has a long history; it reminds me, for example, of Arcimboldo, who was painting aristocratic figures put together out of ignoble substances back in the 16th century. With Noble and Webster, though, the resolution of rags and bones into emotive images—into art—has a post-Freudian, over-the-top blatancy that is all its own.

Though well-known—notorious, even—in England, Noble and Webster have exhibited less in the United States, a situation addressed recently with a permanent commission at the new home of Denver's museum of contemporary art, MCA DENVER, and in New York City this month with a show at Deitch Projects (on view through March 29) and an outdoor installation at Rockefeller Center. The Deitch works were first at the Freud Museum in London, the psychoanalyst's last, lovely home,

which, as a setting both domestic and historical, must have given their sexual content a visceral punch. The project includes a particularly lurid shadow self-portrait as well as showstopping tableful of animated grotesqueries. Meanwhile, at Rock Center, the artists will present a kind of dehydrated fountain, reproducing the flow of water in carnivalesque lights.



"ELECTRIC FOUNTAIN," BY TIM NOBLE AND SUE WEBSTER (2008). ROCKEFELLER CENTER, NEW YORK, NY.