

Paul Thek

HANNAH HOFFMAN GALLERY
1010 N. Highland Avenue
November 11–January 7

In a 1966 interview with Gene Swenson, Paul Thek described his series of “Technological Reliquaries,” 1964–67, as “agnostic,” adding that they “lead nowhere, except perhaps to a kind of freedom.” This profoundly quixotic statement could be handily applied across the entirety of the artist’s output. As is the case of any artist with a wide-ranging practice, a retrospective exhibition of Thek’s work is likely to raise accusations of omission, yet this tight, elegiac presentation manages to give a sense of both scope and depth to a complicated oeuvre.

Each of the three galleries here presents a different aspect of Thek’s work. The first room accounts for a diverse range of media and display strategies. One of the pieces, *Untitled (Dinosaurus)*, 1971, suggests the devices of a traveling salesman—a shipping crate, which, when opened, reveals a painted and sculpted dinosaur diorama. The second gallery is dedicated to a group of graphite drawings, mostly pages from the artist’s sketchbook, which prove that he was a studious draftsman. In the courtyard is a playful hanging of four paintings: an abstract pattern of white, loopy squiggles and pizza-like triangular shapes; a painting of a dinosaur done on newspaper; and two diminutive canvases, with their picture-frame lamps and plastic labels.

In one of the later works included in the exhibition, *Untitled (Whaddaya Wanna Be a Flower?)*, ca. 1986, Thek has scrawled the titular question over a slew of confident yet messy and loose crosshatches. This drawing is installed across the gallery from two of the earliest works on display (both from 1957), a pair of barely there ink drawings of flowers on stained, worn paper—tentative and shy. Separated by nearly thirty years, each drawing rejoins the other, proving that nowhere is somewhere after all.



Paul Thek, *Untitled (Whaddaya Wanna Be a Flower?)*, ca. 1986, ink on paper, 14 x 17".

— Andy Campbell