

## Noah Fischer

★★★★★

**Oliver Kamm/5BE Gallery**, through Jan 6 (see Chelsea)

*Rhetoric Machine*, Noah Fischer's two-room spectacle, combines flashing lights, sound effects, presidential speeches, pop songs and loaded American symbols. In the first room, a tiny silhouette of a man behind a podium stands on the floor at the apex of an inverted V formed by two rows of rough-hewn kinetic sculptures on poles. A plywood model of a tank projects a spotlight around the room from the barrel of its gun; a plaster eagle slowly raises and lowers skeletal wings with jagged feathers.

A soundtrack of speech-making Presidents—including FDR, JFK, LBJ, Nixon and Clinton—expounds triumphalist American virtues and, in some cases, the dangers of the Red Menace. The lyrics of love songs act as a foil for this oratorical bombast: When Stevie Wonder's voice is heard over the sound of explosions, the expression of hope in the face of devastation is unexpectedly moving.

The next room holds the mechanism that controls the son et lumière. A large plastic drum slowly revolves, and black foam strips attached to its surface trip simple switches (it works like a music box or player piano).



*Rhetoric Machine*

Blinding 300-watt bulbs glare as the voice of the Great Communicator himself, Ronald Reagan, tells the story of a young father who would rather see his children die than succumb to godless Communism. Applause cuts in, an eagle screams, and the whole program starts over.

As Fischer's fantasia caricatures the rhetorical apparatus of America's war-mongering past, it finds 21st-century echoes, suggesting we are forever doomed to "stay the course."  
—Joseph R. Wolin