

R.M. FISCHER, Artists Space:

There may be a reason why rational men parade around at parties with lampshades on their heads. If there is, R.M. FISCHER is the one who knows the meaning behind this seemingly meaningless act. Fischer's lamp objects have an eerie feeling of the same transformation reversed—lamps parading as people. Each one in his installation has a personality all its own; the pseudo-fantasy of *L.A. Lamp*, the demure prettiness of *Dinner Lamp*, the furtive hunch of *Street Lamp*.

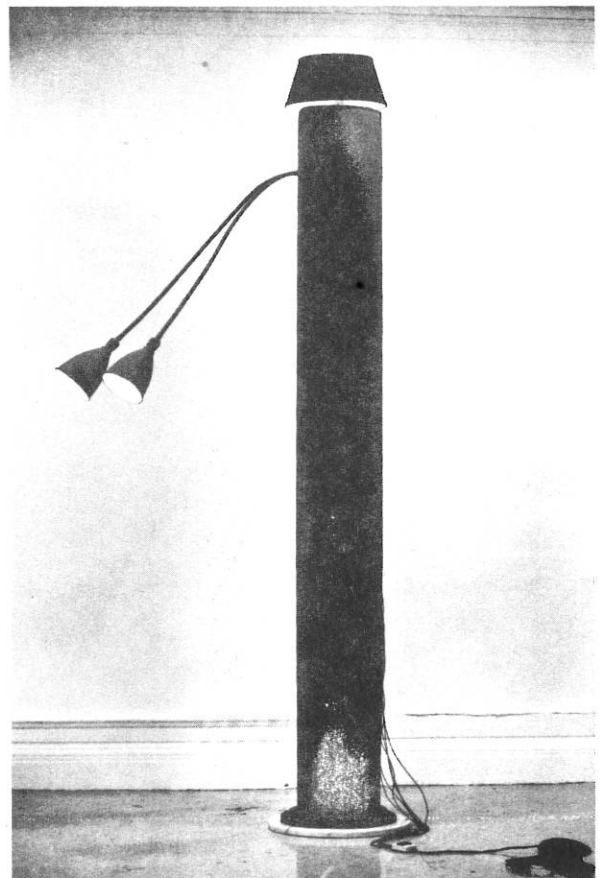
But personality is only part of the problem Fischer confronts with his humanoid beacons. *Served Up* takes its title from a four-part photograph of the same name. In it a strange metamorphosis takes place from one image to another. Harshly lit, a man cringes under an interrogation lamp in panel one; lobster dinner with all the trimmings is advertised in panel two; a man lies prone in panel three, arms bandaged and splinted. Panel four features a Fischer lamp, large, red and tubular, with two conical metal lamps extended out from the body on metal arms.

Lobster Lamp sums up the process. Not necessarily a specific illustration of one thing changing into the other, the photo hints at humans depersonalized, processed, packaged and "served up" as the ultimate object. Appearing in some strange new guise as victims of advertising hype and TV hard sell, Fischer's objects give warning against the final onslaught of the media age. Partly caricature, partly social criticism, *Served Up* owes a debt to low-budget horror movies, McLuhanism, and Madison Avenue. Its vision of the dire consequences of media infiltration could only spring from the mind of a child of our TV generation, battered by images of aliens overtaking the world, 30-second sales raps and subliminal propagandizing. Fischer's message may or may not come through to every viewer stumbling upon the installation, but the strength of the selective vision behind each lamp comes through. Such subjective object-making is rare these days, when an artist may be known for his materials as much as for his statements.

As for technique, the lamps owe their slapdash energy to the nuts-and-bolts school of sculpture. Each one seems assembled from found objects that

were just biding time till they could get into a Fischer lamp. The tiny pleated shade perched on top of the curvy wrought-iron base of *Dinner Lamp* personifies smug introspection, much as *Wired*, with its cylinder shade disproportionate to its chicken-wire wrap-around base, is comic in the juxtaposition of shape and size. On a purely formal level, each lamp is carefully balanced and ordered so that angle conveys attitude, stance declares mood. It harks back to the kind of carefully placed pieces that introduced "abstract" to the public; pieces devoid of inherent content, yet purveying a point-of-view from the attitude of each plane. Eccentricity doesn't hide this quality in Fischer's lamps—they combine understatement with straight funk. For all their bizarre humor they hint of quite serious issues. There seems little danger that anyone could dismiss them as mere functional objects. Having them around for a while might do strange things to anyone's subconscious.

—DEBORAH PERLBERG



R. M. Fischer, *Lobster Lamp*, 1978, mixed media, 112 x 46 x 12"