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Robert Fishko, *Director*

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## ART IN REVIEW

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### **Robert Cottingham**

*Forum*

*745 Fifth Avenue, at 57th Street*

*Dieu Donn  Papermill*

*433 Broome Street, SoHo*

*Both through April 24*

Robert Cottingham, the Photo Realist painter of neon signs, has been painting old typewriters. The subject matter may not sound exciting, but Mr. Cottingham's overhead views — including near wall-size canvases and life-size delicately luminous watercolors on view at Forum — yield a fine combination of intricate abstraction and vivid illusionism.

Part of the attraction is in the transparency of the machine itself. Unlike the industrial printing presses depicted in several of the show's less interesting paintings, the typewriter has all its elements exposed — the lettered keys, the radiating type bars, the ribbon spools, the

carriage return levers and other parts whose names some viewers may recall from high school typing class. Cropped or fully framed, the machine's functional organization translates into two dimensions in a way similar to how neon signs did, guaranteeing absorbingly complex compositions.

He does not just slavishly copy photographs of typewriters. He clarifies and intensifies color, light, shadows, edges and reflections while giving the image a slightly softened, Vermeerish focus and a satiny smooth finish. In another artist's hands, the combination of Photo Realist style and pre-digital subject matter might produce only nostalgia or irony. Mr. Cottingham, a cool romantic and masterly craftsman, keeps it bright and fresh.

At Dieu Donn , a fine-art paper-making studio, there is a new series of pictures made of paper pulp. These shadowy, monumentalizing close-ups of simple, blocky machine parts in severely muted colors might lead to new possibilities, but you wouldn't want Mr. Cottingham to quit his day job just yet.

KEN JOHNSON