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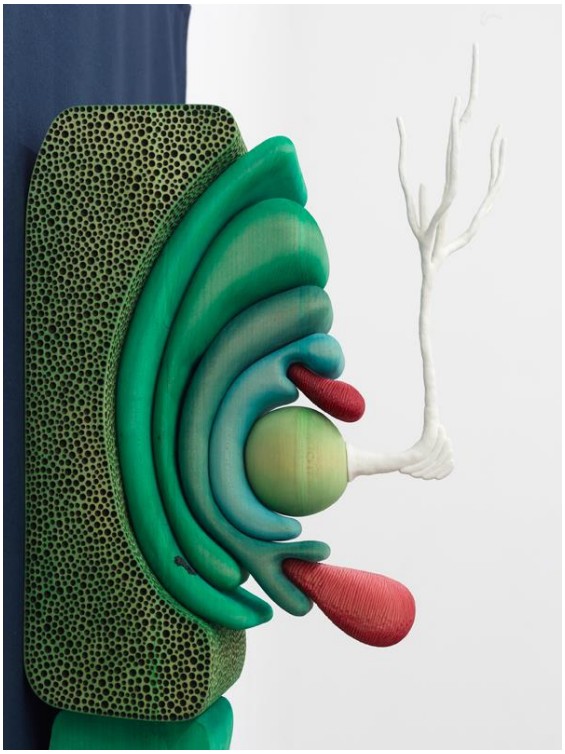
CRITIC'S GUIDE - 19 APR 2016

Critic’s Guide: Cologne

BY DOMINIKUS MÜLLER



Matthew Ronay, *Verdant Virus*, 2016, basswood, dye, flocking, plastic, steel, aluminium and canvas. 136 x 91 x 36 cm. Courtesy: Markus Lüttgen, Cologne

Matthew Ronay, ‘Dock, Berth, Antenna’
Markus Lüttgen
14 April – 28 May

Matthew Ronay’s ‘Dock, Berth, Antenna’ was the funniest show I saw during Art Cologne. The seven, brightly coloured pieces on view here can be described as very abstracted yet ‘bodily’ variations of linking, clinging together – of exchange and conjugation. How do things cohabit? How do they touch? And what does that mean? If these questions seem lofty, Ronay’s approach is playful and his strange reliefs, wall mounted assemblages and sculptures feel cheerily easy-going – whether it be the strange blue egg resting on a series of yellow-green feet (*Berthed Boiling Ovoid Budding Green Feet*, 2016) or the brightly colourful and fantasy spaceship-like object clinging to a deep blue canvas (*Purple Atmosphere Dock*, 2016).

THE MIAMI RAIL

MATTHEW RONAY: WHEN TWO ARE IN ONE

Martha Raoli | 3.29.16

Matthew Ronay. Progeny, 2015. Basswood, plastic, steel, dye, flocking, shellac-based primer, gouache, 30.5 x 73.7 x 38.1 cm

Matthew Ronay, Cairn Column Wand, 2015. Basswood, plastic, dye, flocking, and shellac-based primer, 109.2 x 25.4 x 25.4 cm. Courtesy the artist and Andrea Rosen Gallery, New York; Marc Foxx, Los Angeles; and Nils Stærk, Copenhagen

Matthew Ronay, Probe, 2015. Basswood, plastic, steel, dye, and gouache, 88.9 x 66 x 35.6 cm

The title of Matthew Ronay's installation at Perez Art Museum Miami (PAMM) asks us to consider the forms that take shape*When Two Are In One*, a condition open to numeric calculation or philosophical conjecture. Given the squirmy eros and comic brutality of his work, I'm looking for the mathematics of the flesh. These sculptures easily invoke human figures, with their upright orientation and amalgamated biomorphic shapes. They could read as abstracted body parts assembled to form a single body or, just as readily, as two bodies, each described by body parts. When organs, tongues, and smaller bits stand in for people, we can see human scenes in the throes of copulation, birth, death—the full range of motions that move us between states of singularity and duality. In this way, the works work through binary modes, tangibly and metaphysically, quivering between being two and being one. Total blending between two beings is impossible, and results in a kind of violent death for the individual. Ancient object makers have long been in touch with the deathly aura of sex.

Motifs like the vagina dentata and relics such as spiked Venetian chastity belts and the great phallic stones of Scandinavia evidence lore that placed death within the auspices of eroticism.

For at least a decade, Ronay's work has responded to what happens when one thing passes through another, and the site of this passage is the orifice. These responses have taken the form of drawing, costumery, performance, sculpture, installation, and life-size dioramas. The artist's long-established relationships with Andrea Rosen Gallery, New York, and Nils Stark, Copenhagen, have produced numerous shows, and more recent exhibitions include the 12th Lyon Biennial, as well as shows with Marc Foxx, Los Angeles, and Marlborough Chelsea. No stranger to Miami, in 2011 Ronay and Nathan Carter were invited by Locust Projects to create a site-specific installation that, according to director Chana Budgazad Sheldon, "included handmade costumes, stage sets, and musical instruments based on misunderstandings of both Mummenschanz (a Swiss mime troupe started in the 1970s) and early Bauhaus performances . . . to a packed room of enthusiasts."

Though I'm sure to embarrass him by saying so, you might say Ronay makes devotional art. In the studio, he practices labor with the intention of a monk or Shaker, looking for illumination in the shapes of things. He works to enter a meditative state, from which he can source imaginative forms from his own private pantheon. That these shapes also resound with our own collective semiotics is testament to the claim that good art, art that matters to us, must serve the creator first.

He is one of the rare artists who has passed thought the MFA vortex of insular theory and come out through the other end with the earnest sensibility of a folk artist. He's a woodworker whose handsy constructions recall the earthy muscle of California clay tradition; any superficial resemblances to the oozing bubbles of Kenneth Price and the drippy sheen of Ron Nagle's little sculptures only pronounce the differences in materiality and production. This is wood worked by hand.

Each sculpture begins as one solid block of wood that is chiseled, carved, and cut into parts, shaped, and reassembled. There's poetry in how they fit; sensuality lies in the joints. An elegant example of how constituent parts are reassembled into one form is *Cairn Column Wand* (2015). A primordial signal for travelers, a cairn marks a site, lets you know you are on the right path, and acts as an existential marker of having been there. Is there a more substantial role for sculpture than this? *Cairn Column Wand* is a vertical pile of triangles and spheres, some perfectly stout and others smashed thin as pancakes, stacked one over another, over another. Achieved by the simple act of piling, the cairn, a terrifically humble apparatus, succeeds if it remains erect and doesn't topple. As for the wand of the title, its tip ends in a flourish, which I suspect holds the magic (sometimes a star, here reduced to a triangle), an apex that somehow suggests a fulcrum. The idea of balance is so much a part of the piece, and one might imagine an invisible horizontal line balancing on its tip. Other forms evoked are totem, Christmas tree with a topper, spear, skewer—I prefer these last two, because they also express the action that provokes the form. To stack, to skewer, to spear, to pile.

Cairn Column Wand may best express how Ronay is at work with his choice material, basswood. The material doesn't perform like wood. Instead it recalls, by its shape and behavior, scalped rubber balls, silly putty pounded with a fist, curved soapstone, or bean-shaped slabs of coral reef. The way the patty-cake disks drape on each other with biomorphic awkwardness does not feel like something wood does organically. Ronay works the wood so it appears to take on the physical qualities of soft

organisms, revealing woodworking so attuned to the empirical realities of the material that is has tapped into its impossibilities. You get the sense that wood has been gently willed into theatrical postures while being perfectly honest about its texture—the grain lines accented by pastel stains. Different shades and hues help distinguish the character of each piece, and it can't be overlooked how pleasingly the palette of bubble-gum pink and ocean blue and pumice gray and cobalt Klein-like blue activate the eye up, down, up, and down looking for matches, gradients, familiar prismatic relationships, searching for associations between colors and shape that leave you endlessly skimming for a resolution to an inscrutible pattern.

The title of the work *Probe* (2015) likely refers to the fanciful red wand that pierces the sculpture's hole, but it also signals formal investigations, the probing for shapes through the excavation of the wood. A slim whip lends a slight BDSM vibe. The tip of this wand sprouts a dangling beaded tassel that invokes both sperm and the flashy bait of flyfishing lures and mating feathers. Supporting the wand is a superstructure V padded by tongues and lips lining the mouth and all manner of fleshy pads and mattresses as the baseline. Cradling the inverted nub is an aortic whoopee cushion that looks comfy and fits snugly. The V, it should be noted, looks content. Could blue beads at the end of a wand be the smoke from a cigarette?

The sly *Progeny* (2015) alludes to another result of sexual union, the new human. Two alluringly grotesque, groovy green fingers slink over the rim of an aquamarine oval hollow, an egg, a decoy tomb, a womb. A finely puckered pink coin rises like an anal sun. There's fun to be had in pronouncing these shapes, while straining to recognize the real just beyond the reach of representation. Is the pink bulb riddled with holes a microphone or a rattlesnake? The fingers themselves appear to be reptilian, slithering menacingly from ominous nether regions. All this is mounted on snaking tubes, each one swallowed in progression by its larger encasement the way our blood vessels are encased and telecommunication lines are bundled.

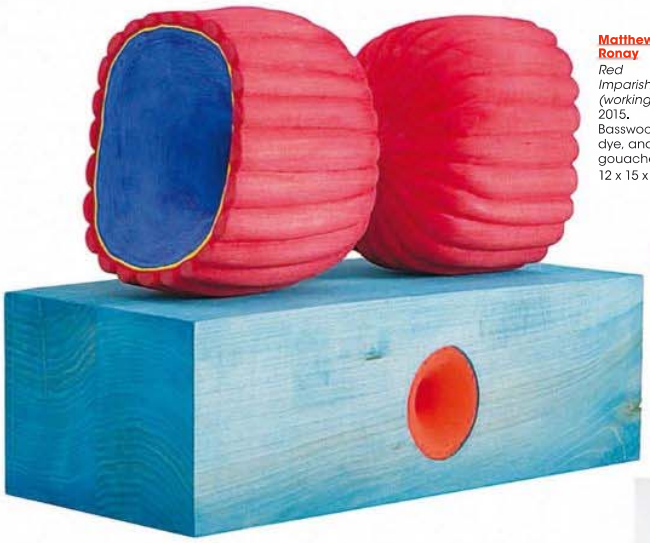
Each sculptural unit is lined up on a long plinth, in what looks like a parade of anthropomorphic objects. The artist explained that the processional quality alludes less to people than to objects: "Arranging in an ordered row always appealed to me in counterpoint to the disorder, chance, and destructive atmosphere often present in the moment before something is created. It seems that everything is in the process of falling apart to be built again." The disorder/order of creation are the forces at work here, and it's no wonder that the arrangement loosely evokes a Darwinian narrative, quickly confounded by an incoherent narrative. It's a line, but it doesn't work directionally. If this is a sentence, the words that compose it are arranged in a syntax unfamiliar to us, yet for which we have the innate tools to read.

Joyfully, Ronay's language can be accessed without a museum brochure. Though reminiscent of the talismans and prayer artifacts of this or that ideology, there is no set of privileged cultural symbols at play. As such, these quasi-ceremonial totems resist cultural hegemony. While *When Two Are In One* finds resonance with the culturally diverse ethos of the museum, its placement within the more didactic interests of the institution is complex. Through Aboriginal Australian abstract painting or the museum's ongoing permanent collection exhibition, *Global Positioning Systems*, PAMM seeks to "illuminate the role of place and location as central to the conception of itinerant identity," to quote the introduction to the recent group show*Poetics of Relation*. Ronay's work isn't framed by geo-

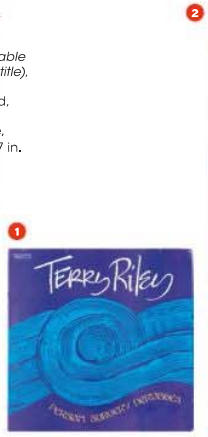
locational or anthropological clues. It's precisely this rich encoding that excited Diana Nawi, associate curator, who said, "because the visual, cultural, formal, and aesthetic references in the work are so myriad they defy us to locate or trace them all, and ultimately this 'referentiality' is only part of what I consider Matthew's very singular approach."

This installation in the gallery adjacent to PAMM's lobby teases the audience to presume it represents an elusive foreign culture. In fact, the works belong to all cultures, and as such, transcend ideologies. They can be activated with absolutely no prior or supplementary knowledge of either Ronay's personal identity politics, his ancestral culture, or any vernacular tradition of his native land. The work resists the illustrative or educational roles of art making. This is one of those projects—like Geoffrey Farmer's delightful *Let's Make the Water Turn Black* (2013–14), on view at PAMM last year, that belongs to anyone, and in fact, for this reason perfectly illuminates the mission of the museum, as Nawi confirms. "His work is certainly informed by an incredible openness to a global art history—across geographies and temporalities—and he very smartly and self-consciously engages that conversation, and he is comfortable with certain processes, influences, and aesthetics that defy a lot of dominant conversations in contemporary art, which is where I might locate the resonance of his practice with PAMM's broader program."

Humanity's conception and destruction are played out in these sculptures, laid out like an intuitive anthropogenic map. Whatever we make of the familiar orbs, organ-like blobs, and the hoses and pipes that unwind around this landscape, it's hard to deny their distinct biomorphism. We may see in the sculptures an abstracted reproductive narrative, from conception to death and back again, and all the little deaths in between. We may think of each sculpture as a physical model of a logic system, perhaps in some primitive, feral animal part of our brains. Taken as a whole, the sculptures might compose an entire philosophy, a codex of psychosexual ritual, or an elaborate passion play, with a porny intermission. On the other end, through a micro-ontological lens, the whole cluster of sculptures—shapes within shapes—could be seen as some super tiny code of molecules that holds the answers to what happens when two are in one.



Matthew Ronay
Red Imparishable (working title), 2015.
Basswood, dye, and gouache, 12 x 15 x 7 in.



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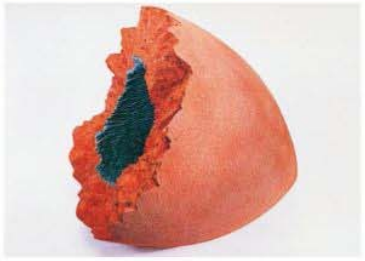

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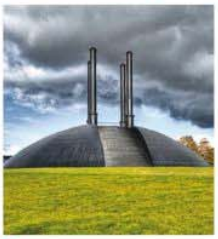


3

INSPIRATIONS

MATTHEW RONAY

Ronay's rich sculptural assemblages conjure a dizzying number of associations; they fall somewhere between New Age occultism, Willy Wonka's Chocolate Factory, Memphis Group design, and Ron Nagle's tiny ceramics. The artist has new work on view at the Pérez Art Museum Miami through January 15, 2017. Here, he shares a few inspirations that have informed his personal vision.

Terry Riley, Minimalist composer American, b. 1935

***Persian Surgery Dervishes*, 1972, Shanti Records**

"Hearing this record feels like watching a beaker of water come to a boil, cool down, and come to a boil again. Playing only a Vox Super Continental Combo organ and tape delay, Riley performs the same piece in Los Angeles and then again in Paris, with different results. Although the composition is modal, it is in no way stiff; its hypnotic and wavelike quality is in part the result of Riley's study of Eastern spiritualism. This combination of spirituality and avant-garde is completely singular, almost empirical." 1

Fernand Léger, painter French, 1881–1955

***Le feuille de houx sur fond rouge*, 1928**

"I adore Léger's works from the beginning of the 1920s through 1930. Less figurative than later works and more concrete than earlier cubist works, they titillate the same part of me that enjoys a purely descriptive passage from a Robbe-Grillet novel. This painting especially, an outlier in his oeuvre, awes me. Maybe it's only capturing the quality of a holly tree or poinsettia leaf on one hand (amazing), but on the other, it seems to be an embodiment of Jung's "shadow," a dark unidentified area of hang-ups. On top of all this, its incredible möbius-like sculptural quality gives me energy to contemplate its form, scale, and weight at length. What kind of atmosphere makes it float like that in a field of red? I must make sure to leave room for not knowing." 2

Ingvar Cronhammar, sculptor Swedish/Danish, b. 1947

"Although not trained as an architect, this artist's mysterious works verge on being dark science fiction–inspired tombs or interior cathedrals viewed from the outside. His constructions, mostly public by nature of their size, reside entirely in Sweden and Denmark and resemble buildings or possibly some kind of civic engineering; think of subway ventilation kiosks. The works that appeal to me most have an implied mass, as if they are housing some sort of super-matter, and have a psychological weight that reads as somehow mournful." 3

Graham Marks, ceramic sculptor American, b. 1951

"I was first exposed to Marks's work in Kentucky at the collection of Reverend Al Shands. Aroused, I made a photograph of the work and texted Matthew Drutt, whom I knew had extensive ceramic knowledge, and asked if he knew whose work it was. Not only did he identify it as being Graham Marks, but his mother, Helen, who founded one of the United States' first contemporary galleries dedicated to modern craft, Helen Drutt Gallery in Philadelphia, had represented the artist. Marks's celestial works—large ceramic sculptures, often fabricated inside out from coils, thick, sitting in repose—appear to be eggs broken in half. They also seem to be maps of the cosmos, something similar to a Bhu-mandala. On another level, the sculptures function microscopically and could allude to cells, ovaries, or atoms. Marks was a pioneer in using materials other than clay in his forms, such as metal nuts and bolts, to create objects that approach a look akin to members of the vegetable kingdom broken open to reveal their genesis. Are these deep personal works contemplative and healing? After these investigations, Marks possibly found the energy and conversation around making artworks lacking. He retired in 1992 and turned toward something more socially useful: an acupuncture practice." 4

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: MATTHEW RONAY AND ANDREA ROSEN GALLERY, NEW YORK; SHANTI RECORDS; ESTATE OF FERNAND LEGER AND ARTISTS RIGHTS SOCIETY, NEW YORK; PETER ROSBJERG AND CREATIVE COMMONS; GRAHAM MARKS

Wallpaper*

Colour and form: Matthew Ronay's vivid sculptures pitch up at PAMM in Miami

ART/11 MAR 2016/BY CARLY AYRES

The New York artist Matthew Ronay has unveiled a new site-specific installation, *When Two Are In One*, at the Pérez Art Museum Miami's Patricia Papper Project Gallery this week. Pictured left: *Yellow Imparishable*, 2016. Right: *Progeny*, 2016

Palm trees and ocean breezes set the stage for the latest work by Matthew Ronay, *When Two Are In One* – a new site-specific installation due to take over the sprawling windows of Pérez Art Museum Miami's Patricia Papper Project Gallery this week.

Situated next to the museum's entrance, visitors to the Miami museum will be greeted by an eruption of vivid colour, as brightly hued sculptures with names

like *Double Penetration* and *Divided Egg Green Worm* cluster behind the window-lined front gallery.

The installation features a series of 11 large structures arranged along a long, low plinth. Each meticulously hand-carved, the pieces are a combination of basswood, plastic, steel, dye and gouache, resulting in cheerful, playful shapes — from stacked towers to misshapen orbs.

'Matthew Ronay's work is distinguished by its unique approach to ideas and forms, and to the dialogue it engages across the geographies and temporalities of art history,' says Diana Nawi, an associate curator at the museum. 'We are thrilled to have the opportunity to commission new work from such an exceptional artist, one whose practice is continually moving in new and interesting ways.' Leading up to the exhibition, Ronay was encouraged to spend time in the gallery and to create something in response to the space.

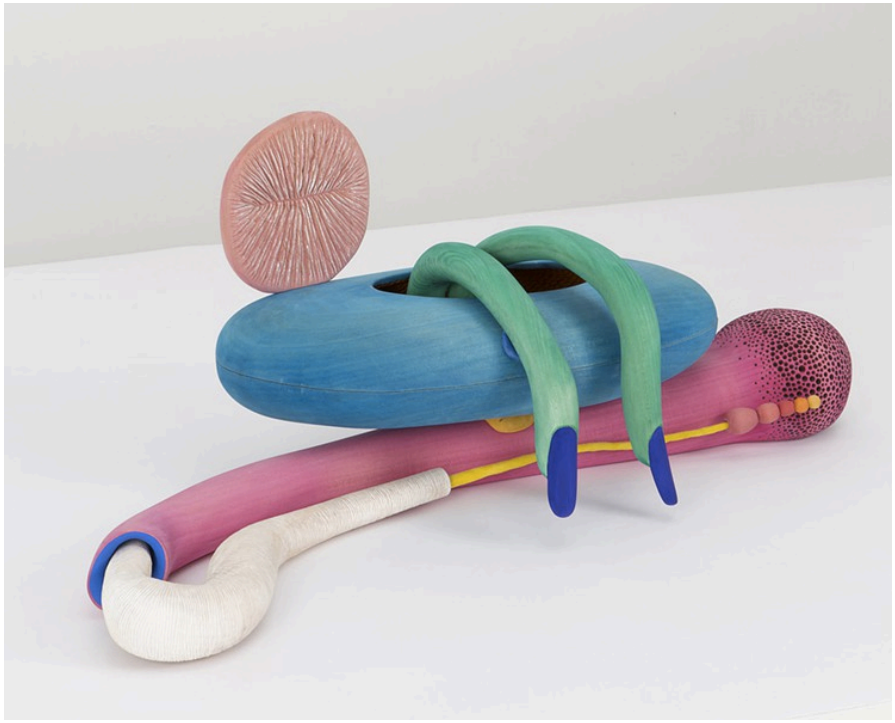
The forms draw their inspiration from biological structures and their reproductive and evolutionary processes – a hallmark of Ronay's practice. Bright colors and shamanistic symbols are another motif familiar to the New York-based artist, who takes pages from psychedelia and surrealism, as well as folk and non-Western art.

The installation will also serve as the backdrop for Ronay's own band, LOBOTOMAXX, a collaboration with fellow artists Tony Cox and Nathan Carter, who are slated to perform in the space later this year.

MIAMI New Times

SURREALIST MATTHEW RONAY BRINGS EROTIC MUSINGS TO PAMM

BY ALEXANDRA MARTINEZ
TUESDAY, MARCH 8, 2016



Progeny, by Matthew Ronay

When hiking through a forest, some people are wary of wildlife. Others look out for poisonous plants or unique trees. But artist **Matthew Ronay** searches for nature's edible fungus: the mushroom.

"It's really a Zen practice— you're not thinking about the past or future," he says. "It's about the pleasure of finding something strange."

Ronay appreciates the strange. It's characteristic of his latestinstallation,When Two Are in One, which premieres Thursday at Pérez Art Museum Miami. With a psychedelic vision, he makes sculptures from wood and high-density fiber that evoke surrealist images of organic life both colorful and erotic. As the title suggests, the otherworldly works are reminiscent of nature, but they are also anthropomorphic. Tinted in vibrant neons, each piece shouts, "This is what we're made of, and it's full of life."

The works were inspired by deep-sea creatures, mushrooms, microscopic science, botany, and biology. Life processes such as mitosis, fertilization, birth, death, and cancer mutation are all on

display in Ronay's buoyantly colorful collection. For every amazing and positive element, there's an equally destructive, frightening one. There is beauty, mystery, and decrepitude. The pieces, which are all made of wood, fill the window-lined Patricia Papper Project Gallery, adjacent to the museum's entrance.

"My inspiration [in] science is probably due in large part to my misreading of it," Ronay says. "I use science or biology to kind of see and back up other inclinations that I might have. [For instance,] when two people come together erotically, in that moment of two things unifying, the two parts kind of die and make one part."

Ronay's work has always been fueled by his surroundings. At 13 years old in his hometown of Louisville, Kentucky, he created punk-music zines with a good friend. It was the early '90s, and he was surrounded by a fertile Midwestern punk scene that gave way to indie groups Slint and Crain. With a Canon A1 camera in hand, he ventured into the streets and took photos of what he found.

"We were just annoying skate rats, skateboarding, and getting on people's nerves," he recalls, "but we had our own zines where we could review records and concerts and make fun of people."

Ronay then began training with Louisville artist Paul Fields. The late sculptor, known for organic marble pieces exhibited in Louisville parks, triggered Ronay's interest in the physical. Fields created from rock realistically smooth curves and ripples. He showed Ronay how to do it.

"It was difficult — I didn't continue to work with marble," Ronay says. But he had found his calling. "Intuitively, my body understands the physical space. I try to create forms by subtracting materials."

Humming Tubes (left) and *Divided Egg Green Worm* (right), by Matthew Ronay

Now 40, Ronay has shifted his work from literal representations of the psychology of life and death to abstractions. His earlier sculptures included disembodied limbs and pancakes.

These literal representations have found homes in the collections of New York's Museum of Modern Art and the Whitney Museum of American Art. His work has roots in that of surrealist masters such as Yves Tanguy.

His more recent shows have been influenced by biological processes. A 2014 exhibit at the Andrea Rosen Gallery in New York City featured saturated gouaches representing the respiratory system. Though two-dimensional, the pieces felt alive. "When I was younger, it was more blatant and the work was more about sex and death," Ronay says. "As I've aged, the work has become more abstracted and more open-ended and personal."

Ronay's work is also based in pulsating color. Though he is color blind, his pieces are defined by this sensitivity. He communicates powerful emotions through color. "I can't take color for granted," he says. "I can't use the same language like a normal person might use. So for that reason, I look at color as a way of wonderment. What is it? Is it turquoise, or is it purple? It's hard for me to tell, so I spend a lot of time thinking of color."

His wife Bingü, who is a graphic designer, collaborates with Ronay to achieve the appropriate and intended color temperature. "I work with my wife on palettes, and we discuss how I can tell the story I want. If I want something to feel alive, like a plant, we go through possibilities to think of how to do that."

Ronay began working on *When Two Are in One* while on a site visit in August. He drew his visions as "large and autonomous of the outdoor space." From a slew of drawings, he finally chose the 11 pieces on display at PAMM. Despite a squishy sensibility, each piece is made of varying combinations of basswood, plastic, steel, dye, and gouache. One sculpture, whose working title takes its name from the Roman god of beginnings, *Janus*, stands at four feet tall, dripping soft-pink pellets and oozing a yellow membrane.

Two summers ago, Ronay was on an artist's retreat in Heiligenberg, Germany, working on the gouaches he would later exhibit at the Andrea Rosen Gallery. The lush forest was a welcome escape from his Williamsburg, Brooklyn home. For a month and a half, he would meditate, hike, and forage for mushrooms daily.

"It really recharged my soul. One of the goals or qualities that I seek the most is to create sculptures that are not so much made by a person but grown," he says. "When you look at a tree and see hundreds of thousands of leaves, [you know] it's such an impossibility to create that with your hands... it grew itself."

When he's not foraging or working in his Brooklyn studio six days a week, Ronay plays in the electronic art band Lobotomaxxx. An early iteration of the band performed at Vizcaya during Art Basel 2007. The bandmates dress up in colorful space-age costumes, make noise, dance, and perform onstage. "It's punk, industrial, more like absurdist modern dance and speaking in tones," he says. "It's very abstract."

This week, Ronay will be present at PAMM to talk about five individuals who have influenced his artistic practice. The talk will explore ideas in wavelengths, biology, maps, and mysticism.

KOPENHAGEN MAGASIN

25.08.2015 **INTERVIEW**

Matthew Ronay in his installation at Nils Stærk, Copenhagen Foto: Christine Løkkebø.

Work being pray - A conversation with Matthew Ronay

The American Artist **Matthew Ronay** is at the moment showing his exhibition*Ind and Out, and In and Out, Again* at gallery Nils Stærk. We met at the gallery before the opening, to talk about the meditative nature of work, muscle memory and the pressure of having to explaining your works.

AF MYNTE CORELL

The installation is a couple of years old now, when you first showed it in 2013 at the Biennale in Lyon you talked about mythologies. Do you find that your work, or in particular this work, changes it's meaning over time?
For this work I haven't, but absolutely I think, for me, the concepts or the narratives that I come up with are only guides for possible ways of interpreting the work. And so often that can change or should change for the viewer. And as I change myself, obviously some times the meaning shifts. I also think that the symbols are in an constant state of revealing themselves.

Your works are often shown as an abstraction of something real, do you use your art to process and understand the world?
I do, in the sense that after the works are made, or while I'm working on them, I have a chance to think about the contents and what happened in the process of making the works, but mostly the works are in a way born within themselves.

You talked about being creative and being inspired comes from your body or more specifically a muscle, can you explain to me what you mean by that?
My thinking on that is often when we conceive images we think of something and then we do it. So if you wanted to make a drawing or a sculpture of a dog, you might think of a dog and then make it, but for me most of the images that I come up with starts with drawing. When the pencil is on the paper I'm not thinking. The reason why I'm talking about muscle memory is that the muscle knows when to move, because there are signals sent from the brain, but it's possible that the message is sent closer to the actual thing that moves, its not necessarily always sent directly from the brain. When I'm drawing I feel the muscles in my hands and in my arms have cultivated a certain way of moving. That way of movement has a lot more to do with muscle memory in the same way as an athlete practicing over and over again so their muscles get memory of how to perfectly

do a certain movement. So it occurred to me, maybe the images that I create is like a muscle memory from drawing over and over again - that there are certain kinds of images that my body does that are not necessarily willed by my mind.

You talked about creativity or the felling of being creative is sexual in its nature, it sounds like being creative is a kind of lust for you?
I think maybe desire is a more precise word. The reason why I made the analogy about sexuality was more to say that there are moments when you feel desire, and then you act up on it either on your own or with someone else. So for me, I tried to make the analogy about creativity as sexuality in the sense that it's a wave of desire that floats over me to do something. It's almost related to ego death, you must do something to say "I'm here and I'm alive". Maybe the sexual impulse to reproduce is the same to create.

You talked about work being prayer. It sounds like you use art, and the process of making it, to meditate and to find a kind of peace within yourself. Can you tell me a little about your thoughts on that?
It took me a long time to be able to admit to myself that what I really enjoy is the process of working, and that for me, the repetitive nature of working I find tranquil, and so when I am working - lets say if I am making thousands of little holes in to a piece of wood – there is a certain mindframe that you go into. It wasn't until I had myself started meditating that I realize that that was a space that I had always accessed. And what treated my inner being kindly was to put time into an object to show your trace by subtracting the material to show each line and each hole has a moment of time - a kind of energy you can impregnate in to a piece of wood. It didn't occur to me that it was a legitimate way to relate to why I do what I do. I was trained to think of artworks more in terms of concepts and philosophies and so it wasn't until I was able to admit to myself that what I enjoy the most is the actual labor and the recording of time.

Do you think that your work has more of a value in the process of making it? Is the process of making art more interesting than the actual artwork?
Yes, for me it is true, and I think my experience, although I love to look at other peoples artworks, I find sometimes writing or music or cinema to be a more primary inspiration. The finished artwork are the end of the journey for all of the ideas, so the process of getting here, was more exciting for me than looking at the work as a finished thing. That being said, I do think that if I felt more comfortable with knowing that things don't need to be explained, then I would enjoy better what I've done, because when I looked at it, I wouldn't have to think of what it is, what it means, and what people would take from it. Many times I've tried to relax and be comfortable with the fact that things aren't explainable, but somehow in the end, as people re-expect some kind of explanation – I'm not sure that adding any language to the work actually does it better or not.

Do you think that it is a problem in general when talking about contemporary art that people are afraid to interpret it differently than what we have been told by art history – the notion that certain works or symbols carry certain defined meanings?
I don't know if it's necessarily a problem. I think its good to discuss and to think about things and I think that languages almost are an economical way to discuss and to say what we feel and what we think and to describe what we see. I do feel that maybe we are not as equipped (23.20) as we could be to experience things emotionally, or in some sort of mysterious other way of absorbing content that's not just in terms of making divisions and trying to make things specific or concrete. I mean, for example, when you walk into a sacred space there is a quality of being in a space that isn't translatable to writing. I think what's interesting about artworks is that whether they are music or poetry or object-oriented it is a really amazing way to estimate those kinds of experiences.

A thing I like about your works and this work in particular is that it can be a single piece or it can be an installation or a performance. It has diversity to it. Usually I find that most art works are really particular in its media. Do you like to mix these divided ideas or understandings about art and its media? I do because I think when I conceive the works - when I am drawing, I often draw one thing at a time. There are times where I have drawn an entire installation in one drawing, but more often I am drawing a single sculptor. What always excited me is that you can strengthen or intensify the possibilities by combining everything, and kind of making it a bigger statement. I think for a work like this, adding performance or a ceremonial kind of aspect gives it another possibility. In terms of that it has specific use, these things all come together under the idea of ceremony or something transforming, the more senses you can involve in the piece the richer are the possibilities.

You have added some new pieces to the exhibition, when you add something new to an old exhibition, how do you choose which works to exhibit? Are the particular works of art meant to be understood as isolated or combined with the original part of the exhibition?
I don't think that there is necessarily a continuous narrative for these groups of works. This is a new way to experience my ideas. I wanted to find a way where I could experiment with imagery and ideas one a smaller level with sculptor, because I feel like it's more my natural talent. And so this was a way for me to work with the imagery, to find out whether it works for me or not. They are not quite studious for something larger but they allow me time to experience these shapes and forms and ideas before I would maybe commit to something bigger.

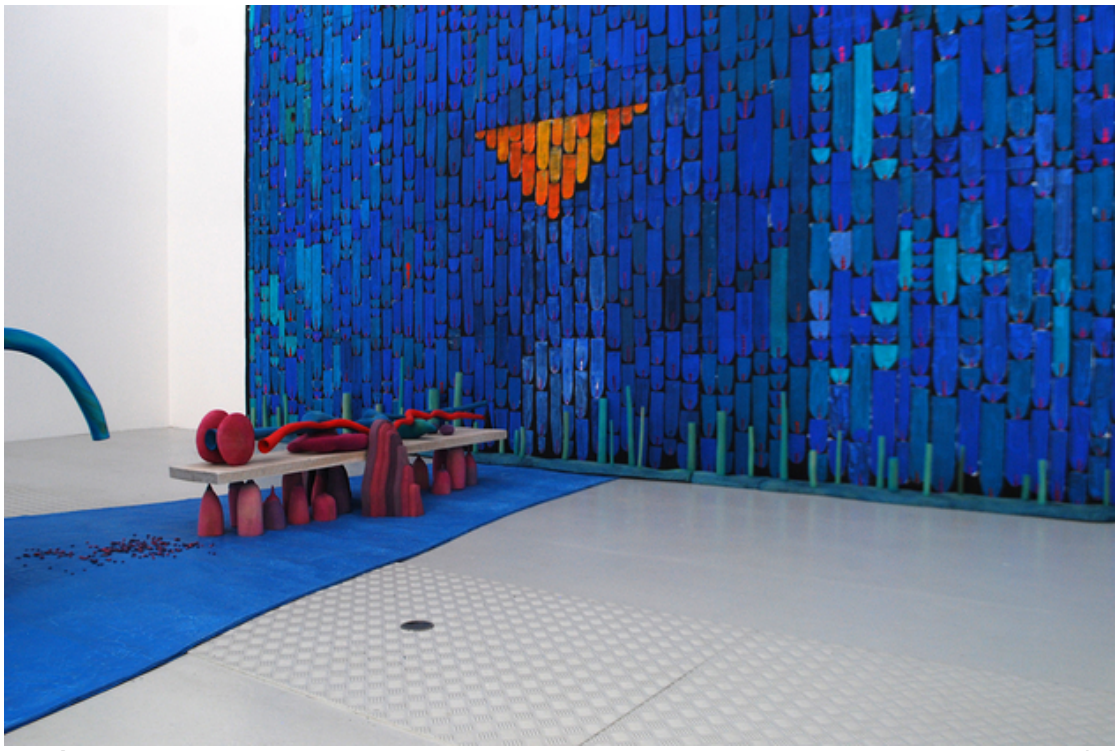
At some point your work was more political, and recently I heard you talking about the psych and self. Does your work in someway pick up inspiration from what's going on in society, or do you feel an urge to express these things in your art?
I do, but I think it is intuitive and it's not ever illustrative. I crave lots of information. I am usually taking in information and then it sits inside me and then it comes out almost subconsciously.

So it is a way for you to process how you experience the world?
Yes exactly, I think almost all artists crave information. I think that's part of the curse. You want to understand, and take things in. Of course that can be for different people obviously different things, but it's like you still kind of have a greed for information, and you take the information in and you develop it, and process it, and it comes out in different ways, and in different things that you do. What shows the most in my work is my fascination with the natural world. I crave a lot of information and images from and about the nature, I don't feel like I necessarily chose those things, I was just magnetized to them. When I really searched myself for what was important and inspiring, and how I would want my work to be, I definitely came back to the physical world, and I think it is just incredibly fascinating, and I think that in the moment when you are looking at it, it tells you exactly what you need to know.
Thank you

Matthew Ronay: *In and Out, and In and Out, Again (installation view), Nils Stærk*, 2015. Foto: Christine Løkkebø.

Matthew Ronay: *In and Out, and In and Out, Again (installation view), Nils Stærk*, 2015. Foto: Christine Løkkebø.

Matthew Ronay: *In and Out, and In and Out, Again (installation view), Nils Stærk*, 2015. Foto: Christine Løkkebø.



Matthew Ronay: *In and Out, and In and Out, Again (installation view), Nils Stærk*, 2015. Foto: Christine Løkkebø.

Matthew Ronay: *In and Out, and In and Out, again (installation view), Nils Stærk*, 2015. Foto: Christine Løkkebø.

Matthew Ronay: *In and Out, and In and Out, Again (installation view), Nils Stærk*, 2015.

Matthew Ronay: *In and Out, and In and Out, Again (installation view), Nils Stærk*, 2015.

Matthew Ronay: *Clogging Sacks*, 2015, 36.5 x 30.8 x 5.43 cm, Basswood, dye, gouache.

Matthew Ronay: *Incubating Chimeric Zygotes,* , 2015, 41.9 x 28.6 x 5.7 cm, Basswood, dye, gouache.

Matthew Ronay: *Perspiring Pearl Tipped Pylon*, 2015, 55.2 x 41 x 5.5 cm, Basswood, dye, shellac-based primer.

Matthew Ronay: *Pulsing Mound Interred Infinitely*, 2015, 60.1 x 44.4 x 5.4 cm, Basswood, dye, gouache.

Matthew Ronay: *Carriers Concoction*, 2015, 40.1 x 30.8 x 5.4 cm, Basswood, dye, gouache.

Matthew Ronay: *Humid Virus Beacon*, 2015, 54.4 x 41.4 x 5.5 cm, Basswood, dye.

The New York Times

ART & DESIGN

10 Galleries to Visit in Chelsea

By **ROBERTA SMITH** APRIL 16, 2015

NO gallery scene is static, but lately Chelsea's has been especially in flux.

Its maze of galleries — New York's most populous — now has the new Whitney poised on its southern edge. Yet towering apartment buildings are rising on nearly every block and rents are escalating, along with rumors. This makes it hard to tell what the future holds for galleries that don't own their spaces — which is most of them; already some have closed, others have merged or moved. And one of the anchors of the neighborhood, the commodious brick building at 548 West 22nd Street that once housed the Dia Art Foundation, and recently played host to art fairs, is now slated for development. And yet, the neighborhood can still feel like a perpetual art fair — in a good way — with galleries of all sizes and orientations sifting through past and present in exciting ways.

Excerpt from section of article:

DON'T MISS

Ten minireviews can't do justice to Chelsea's art offerings. MITCHELL-INNES & NASH has a museum-quality, nearly comprehensive show of Joseph Beuys's multiples (at 534 West 26th Street, through Saturday). At JACK SHAINMAN Hank Willis Thomas's archival tour de force, titled "Unbranded: A Century of White Women, 1915-2015," presents 100 carefully culled print ads that trace the halting progress of feminism and — by omitting nonwhite women — the even more dispiriting state of racial equality in this country (513 West 20th Street, through May 23). And in a seductive duo show called "**Outer Loop**" at **MARLBOROUGH CHELSEA**, **Tony Cox's embroidered paintings and Matthew Ronay's painted-wood sculptures parlay color, craft and several Asian precedents into some of each artist's best work yet** (545 West 25th Street, through May 9). Beyond this, you're on your own.

CULTURE KIOSQUE

Outer Loop: Tony Cox and Matthew Ronay

Outer Loop: Tony Cox and Matthew Ronay. Installation view. Photo: Bill Orcutt

Outer Loop: Tony Cox and Matthew Ronay
UNITED STATES
NEW YORK • MARLBOROUGH CHELSEA • 4 APRIL - 9 MAY 2015

The show takes its title from the beltway around Louisville, KY, where the two artists grew up together, but is evocative also of their shared penchant for the further flung reaches of culture.

This includes colorful abstraction, Appalachian folk art, science fiction and a self-determined spirituality that hints at the cosmic but positions them outside of any New Age mainstream.

Cox's paintings are hand-embroidered in bold geometric designs and stylized landscape using brightly hued and metallic threads pulled through acrylic-coated stretched canvas. The mantra-like repetition of stitches together with vivid patterning, are reminiscent of mandalas and other sacred art, but Cox imbues the works with an off-kilter humor and pathos that places them squarely in his head and from his inimitable hand.

Ronay's hand-carved basswood sculptures, while often heavily patterned with dimples, curves and cairn-like stacks, eschew hard edge abstraction for a molecular, spore-like affect coupled with a kind of suggestive figuration in the form of disembodied hands and tongues. Ingeniously and idiosyncratically composed from multiple pieces of wood and sections of canvas that have been lushly dyed in a spectrum of rich colors, the works have the natural feel of an organism, growing and replicating itself like a coral reef or Martian bacterium.

The New York Times

ART & DESIGN

Matthew Ronay: ‘Wavelength’

By ROBERTA SMITH AUG. 14, 2014

MATTHEW RONAY

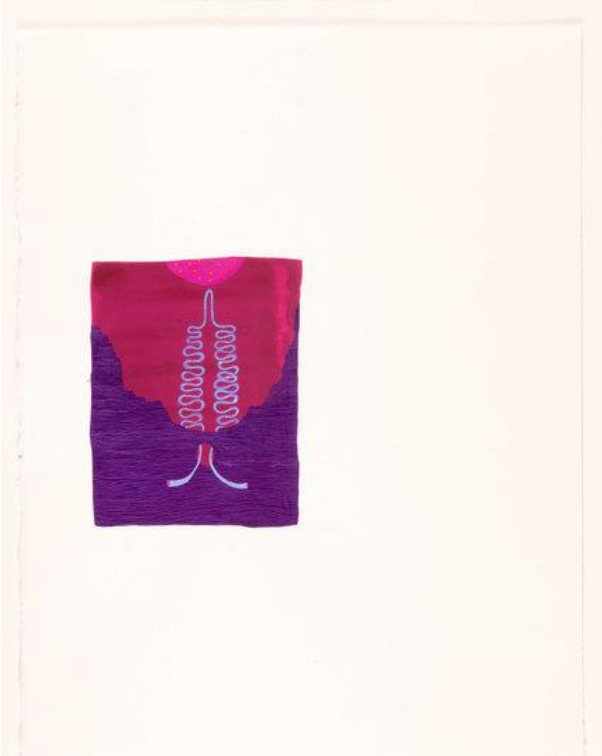
‘Wavelength’

Andrea Rosen Gallery 2

544 West 24th Street, Chelsea

Through Aug. 22

The 30 gouaches in Matthew Ronay’s latest show compress the tableaus, natural forms and saturated colors of his sculptures and installations into buzzy, phosphorescent underworlds. Selected from 100 works that the artist made at the rate of nearly one per day for four months, the pieces in the show exhibit recurring motifs of a meditative, almost devotional quality.



Undulant lines: A 2014 gouache by Matthew Ronay.
Courtesy of the artist and Andrea Rosen Gallery, New York

A small rectangle of deep purple or magenta that seems illuminated by black lights sets the scene. Against this, the action unfolds in brighter tones of yellow, blue, pink, red and light blue, so that many of the forms seem lighted from within.

The main protagonist is usually an ascending, undulant line — evocative of some exotic cactus, sea creature or internal organ — that may be delicately patterned or hoofed. It is sometimes superseded by large, finely dotted spheres, or it may be accompanied by smaller ones or delicate, wavy lines, along with intimations of waterfalls, fires, strange plants and magic carpets.

Paul Klee and Ken Price come to mind, as do New Age tantric mandalas and the intricate, opaque surfaces of Indian painting. But in his miniatures, Mr. Ronay creates the sensation of real light moving gently through the purpled space, as befits a show titled “Wavelength.”

Each work is titled with the date it was made, and each invites concentration. Seeing the entire series would have been too much. Helpfully, Mr. Ronay has not only arranged them chronologically but spaced them accordingly. Rectangles of light gray are painted on the wall where intervening works would hang, creating room for the savoring of afterimages. **ROBERTA SMITH**

A version of this review appears in print on August 15, 2014, on page C25 of the New York edition with the headline: Matthew Ronay: ‘Wavelength’.

Los Angeles Times

Review

A thoroughly engaging Matthew Ronay at Marc Foxx

Matthew Ronay, "Organ/Oganelle," installation view, Marc Foxx, 2014. (Robert Wedemeyer)

By SHARON MIZOTA

Matthew Ronay's latest exhibition at Marc Foxx is a fanciful, candy-colored wonderland. Arrayed on interconnected circles of bright red fabric are sixteen, modestly scaled but fantastical constructions that together create a kind of Seussian altarpiece to fecundity.

The carefully carved, intensely colored basswood sculptures refer to mushrooms, spores, stamens and seed pods, but also ovaries, phalluses and fallopian tubes, panpipes, gills, lichen and lava rock.

Although they are not animated, they appear on the verge of motion, about to erupt, ooze, ripple or drip into some new configuration. They are a rare example of thoroughly engaging works that require no explanation. Go see them, just for fun.

Like the works of sculptor Ken Price, Ronay's objects feel as if they dropped, fully formed from outer space, and his workmanship is both impeccable and brave.

In "Breathing Tone," a vaguely tree-shaped sculpture with oval fronds, Ronay has left an imperfection in the wood, a dark, ragged gash in an otherwise smooth, red surface. The irregularity reinforces the work's organic associations but also speaks to an improvisational attitude that is almost musical.

Although the sculptures are carefully arranged in an installation, they feel modular, as if the arrangement could be otherwise. This decision is an astute marketing move to be sure—it's easier to sell smaller pieces—but it's also an opportunity to explore a seemingly endless fecundity.

On view at Marc Foxx, 6150 Wilshire Blvd., (323) 857-5571, through Oct. 4.
Closed Sundays and Mondays.

ARTFORUM

CRITICS' PICKS

Matthew Ronay

ANDREA ROSEN GALLERY | 2
544 West 24th Street
June 28–August 22

View of "Wavelength," 2014.

Biological and psychological ritual are the backbone of Matthew Ronay's latest exhibition, which presents a series of intimate gouaches rendered in a palette of vivid blues, purples, and reds. These amorphic exercises in what Ronay refers to as "muscle memory" were composed daily and focus, as does the practice of meditation, on the undulating of the human respiratory system. Unlike some of Ronay's previous work, the erotic component of this series is nonexplicit, the focus instead on the intersection between the stimulating and the spiritual. There is the delicately sexual *12.10.13*, 2013, which calls to mind the moment of conception, and *01.23.14*, 2014, an intricate meandering of pale pink through tears in tissue-like red.

Of the one hundred works made as part of this series, only thirty-four were put on view, and the empty space creates a sense of drama, causing the viewer to wonder why certain days were omitted. The pieces are set irregularly in two rows, surrounded by barely visible gray-washed shadows of identical size, which are standing reminders of Ronay's other visual meditations. The psychosexual symbology within these works coupled with the tension between the gouaches and their ghostly counterparts ignites questions of self-censorship. "Wavelength" is an elegantly curated reminder that ritualized creation has a strong history in both the visual and spiritual.

— *Maya Harder-Montoya*

YOU HAVE BEEN HERE SO

A conversation with Matthew Ronay

"I'm always searching for that tranquil place from which to experience fully and without fear good and bad, wounding and healing.

But literally being in the studio has it's purifying qualities, like the first artist, it's primordial struggle to understand and untangle, to create imagery spontaneously out of a need to emphasize what is moving and harmonious." ***-Matthew Ronay***

(all photos by Brian Ferry)

"Inspired by the psychoanalytic Carl Jung and the mythologist Joseph Campbell Ronay works with his intuition in order to reach an expression that reach us at a fundamental and collective unconscious level. His enigmatic sculptures and stagings engender a strange remembrance of something primal and instinctively original that lies deeply buried in the consciousness of modern man." (taken from a press release)

Matthew Ronay's work has fascinated me for years, and most importantly grown with me over the years, from earlier Marc Foxx shows of fleshy colored MDF forms to recent exhibitions at Andrea Rosen, and La Conserva in Spain. Six months ago on an early Saturday morning, Matthew Ronay and I met up for coffee here in Los Angeles. He spoke of "Between the worlds," an exhibition that was presented in Spain, explaining the women that would come up to the fantastical installation: where gloved hands were reaching through holes, moving balls through fingertips, silently raising eyebrows, as they looked in curiosity. I've returned to thinking about those women who experienced Ronay's installation, and pondered what went through their mind. In my late teens, I remember an Edvard Munch show, and as I was staring at a painting in one of the galleries, I looked over at 3 women in their seventies casually chatting. I overheard one of the women telling her friend that Munch's work was "really only about sex and death, death and sex, and sex and death." I'm not quite sure why I remember that moment so clearly, but perhaps it was the first honest and open attempt to understand and simplify an artist's work. It also seemed to sum up so much of life in general. I admired those women quietly and bravely talking amongst themselves, attempting to explain what they saw, and even felt.

I witness a connection with Munch's and Ronay's work, a certain sort of darkness looming on the surface if you were to glance quickly. But in reality, there is such an openness and thrill leading towards symbolic truth. A voyage! A couple months ago, I wrote Brian Ferry, a beyond talented photographer to shoot Ronay's studio in New York. When I look at these gorgeous photographs through Ferry's eyes, I'm drawn to the colors in Ronay's latest works. A large wall hanging in electric blues, amorphic sculptures in acid oranges, and Matthew sitting in the middle of it, engaged with his craft, *hiding among the trees*. Thank you to Matthew and to Brian. This indeed is a special piece. - David John

Drawing. How do you draw, with what utensils do you prefer to draw? What makes a "good" or "preferred" drawing?

I have many different ways of drawing. But all forms of drawing I've always felt are closest to the flame of creativity. Depending on what the necessity of desire is, drawing changes. The two most enjoyable to me are drawing done to satisfy the conscious urge to create (which can be done consciously or unconsciously), and the other is drawing done unconsciously. Satisfying the creative urge happens anywhere, from in bed, to the subway, in the studio. It is deliberate and it is usually complete in transmission and done quickly. Unconscious drawing, or doodling I suppose, I find more enlightening in its lack of imposed will, as if it comes out of your muscles and inner being and has no timeline. I think it's for this reason that it happens while you're on the phone, playing cards (in the case of Charles Burchfield), or extremely relaxed. This kind of drawing I think of as vertical while the other type tends to be more dispersed and horizontal. With both of these types of drawing I wouldn't say that I see something behind my eye and I breathe life into it. It's more abstract than that. it's almost a non visual, like touching something in the dark. I'm never quite sure what will happen.

My materials change over time. I change the paper I use over three of four year periods. Right now I use note pads that I find around or steel from my studio-mate or I use the Japanese notebooks by KOKUYO that give me the opportunity to have a little more continuity. I use a Paper mate PHD mechanical pencil mostly. But I also like the Unit-ball Vision fine point roller ball or the Le Pen is fun. Sometimes but very rarely I do gouache or water colors. To me a good drawing has a magnetic feeling that illuminates the self. It feels right. It usually has a great balance of familiar and unfamiliar. That is if I have the criteria being a drawing that becomes a sculpture. But also I sometime prefer a drawing that requires more effort and patience, that has nothing to do with searching and more to do with marking time or repeating lines and shapes. Another type of drawing that is enjoyable is a more practical type. A kind of drawing that I do when I need to investigate form or the placement of things. I already know the image I just need to find out what feels right. It's so much faster than sculpting and with no risks. This is something I do in the studio and I find mysterious because there are so many permutations on the same theme, each almost the same yet totally different.

What are the different emotions you feel when you are in your studio? Anything you battle with? Are there moments of total clarity and how do you deal with it, and form it?

I'm normally ecstatic in the studio. Working for me is everything. Routine is strength to me. I focus in on the act of making in a trance-like mind frame. Many times I must wear multiple forms of safety protection which give me a quality of sensory deprivation which helps set the tone of focus. If I'm not running machinery, I'm usually entranced by music, often dancing by myself, or if I'm not listening to music I like to whistle..sometimes with a lot of vibrato.

I battle with the distraction of the internet and often with that terrible insecure feeling when the thing you are working on is just not right. Insecurity is a battle. And of course boredom, sometimes you just don't want to work and unfortunately I usually do the ignorant thing and stay here and feel bored instead of going out and searching for inspiration. Moments of clarity are elusive and usually they happen when I am running machinery and feeling focused and disciplined. Those usually allow me to work for periods measured in hours versus my normal 30-45 minute bursts.

What forms have been repeating lately in your works? What connections have you pulled from these recurring forms?

Lately: Mountains, bells, digestive shapes, filters, votives, orifice (eye, nostril, anus, vagina, ear), sun/moon, seedpod, phallus, tongue, bead (cell). The connection I think is a tranquility, a watching, a fantasy feeling of other worlds, a natural and curiously

corporeal vibe.

The large blue wall hanging in your studio with the orange triangle. Tell me about this work. The materials, the forms, the narrative if there is one.

The materials are gouache and shellac-based primer on cinefoil. Cinefoil is a matte black aluminum foil that is used in photography to mask lighting. The piece is part of a large tableau I'm working on for the Lyon Biennial. This part is the back wall of the piece. The piece in its simplified form is the journey from this world to another. This wall is the threshold. It's a waterfall of tongues, of breathes, of phalluses falling. The repeating shape is something that I drew over and over again for quite some time, but never landed on completely until I made that painting. After working on this piece I found the shape continues to unfold. At first I believed it was a penis, naturally, but I moved on to tongue, fingernail, seedpod, vessel, body, etc. And then I believed it was something more abstract, a word, a breath. It takes the same place that the "white light" might take. it's the veil before the next chapter.

You referenced drawing as almost a "sexual compulsion," a need to create. You works seems strongly planted in sexuality, a sense of birth, and production. Can you talk about this, and what role sexuality has had in your work?

There is a risk involved in sexuality, a sharing and unifying, a vulnerability, this quality can create insecurity and shame, but also incredible unity. Although I'm no Catholic I have my fair share of shame. There is a lot of decision making in art and decisions open you up to shame. This is partly why chemical reaction art fascinates me. Or any art that relieves itself of decision making. On the opposite side of this coin there is something about myself that I feel is shameless and ebullient. The friction of these two attributes creates this sexual need to create beyond practical means. In earlier works I think I sought out content that was abject and subversive, I think my attraction to this was some sort of anti-venom to numb my fears about my mortality. And I think my fear about dying came from aging obviously, but also from some sort of reaction to terrorism. Also I believe that sexuality brings out many shadowy sides of the psyche, it creates places where violence and pleasure co-exist and where fantasy reins. In the end I think my overt use of sexuality may also have had a lot to do with my obsession with the other. Without getting too personal, while I dabble in a little fantasy and shadow in my personal sex-life, I think it was my voyeuristic side that latched onto the BDSM world and other types of extreme behavior. The difference now is that I've replaced the relatively short timeline of sexual acts with a longer more drawn out and fuller cycle of life, which of course sex is a part of.

The space as a "mystical space." What does this mean to you?

It's not something I say a lot, but I think part of what I do is to participate with forms

and symbols in a habitual way, hoping to have some self discovery. Is that part of a mystical path? I think so, but I wouldn't presume so. My participation in it veers more towards fantasy and the personal than it does the spiritual, although to me spiritual is intensely personal anyway. I really enjoy the structure of ritual and the psychological state I think it brings on. I'm always searching for that tranquil place from which to experience fully and without fear good and bad, wounding and healing. But literally being in the studio has it's purifying qualities, like the first artist, it's primordial struggle to understand and untangle, to create imagery spontaneously out of a need to emphasize what is moving and harmonious.

The orifice. This is central to your work. What excites you about exploration of the orifice?

The orifice fascinates me because it is the barrier between us and the world. We can also experience it as a wound, which I find interesting. The orifice is the portal, the portal is often the entryway to the unknown, and the unknown has such great potentialities. I respond to the fluids that come out of the body. The processes of digestion and respiratory systems and their relationship to waste is so multilayered, and the orifice is at the center of all of these. Hearing, breathing, shitting, seeing. And I think sculpturally there is this "doubting Thomas" to the orifice and the wound. A kind of "is it real?" how does it work? I like its negative space quality, it's very suggestive. And of course the sexual, birthing aspect, the feminine aspect I find comforting and knowing.

I once took a 6 month course in hypnosis, and read a great deal about "trance" which opened my eyes to a lot of what I felt but could never put words around. Does the unconscious state have a power to you? How would you describe this state to someone? Have you ever had a past life regression?

The unconscious state is a huge part of what I do. But I think it's a balance. The beginning of my process can be highly unconscious but as things get rolling it balances out I think. What I respond to in a unconscious state is the surprise of seeing what is coming out. Good things next to bad things next to things that are unformed next to complete imagery, I'm talking here about drawing. when I am actually carving on things many times I feel it is akin to watching snowflakes while you're driving. thoughts about all sorts of things just float by, running off like water, usually until the physical pain of the vibrating or heat of the tool makes me stop and then a half hour has just gone by. I have never had a past life regression although for several months while doing "floating" I did do quite a bit of recapitulation.

Your greatest fear, personal or professional?

My greatest fear is Fear. Fear of failure. I have a tendency as most creative people to be relentless to myself. To be over critical and to not accept myself for what I am. In a practical sense I fear my health declining or my family's health. Nothing else matters if you or your family is sick. Professionally I sweat the little things all the time, but I try to practice perspective, mostly I fail in this sense, but practice is failure sometimes. I'm hopeful that I would be able to create no matter the circumstance, but always lurking in the back of my mind is the fear that I'll not be able to continue because of the circumstances.

What is your relationship to the "art world." When your career shifted, how did your collectors respond to this energetic shift, as well as the galleries?

I make the mistake often of comparing my backstage to other people's front-stage which makes me unhappy sometimes. Comparing in general leads me to unhappiness and often I don't participate in the "art world" because it can be such an awkward mess of competing egos, mine included. But I get out of the art world what I give. As far as my career, I think it's yet to be written. things come and go but yourself stays until it doesn't. I feel when my work shifted into a more personal area it may have been difficult for people to go there, but I can't control that, so I'm just staying on course and waiting. I'm committed.

The works in these photos that Brian Ferry captured, are they part of an upcoming show? If so, where and when?

Yes they are. They are for a show I am making in Berlin at Lüttgenmeijer. It opens February 23rd. I believe the title of the show will be "Repeat the Sounding"

Do you ever lose "faith" in your art? And if so, what else have you considered dedicating your time to? What role does your personal relationship have in your work?

I vacillate between super confidence and extreme fear and insecurity. I carry a lot of fear. But I work towards excepting that it's part of my personality and I practice hard to identify that fear and except it, it kind of takes its power away, like they do to Freddy Krueger when they realize they are just dreaming. Often when I am criticized I feel it in my stomach. I know then it's true and I am able to recover and learn, but the foundation from which my creativity is sprung is unstable at best. Confident and bold enough to be born but insecure and paranoid because it sticks it's neck out so far. Being humbled is helpful for this.

The moment you realize you aren't anyone the rest is just perspective. If I were to lose complete faith and start in a different discipline I think I would like to have been

someone like Alan Lomax, an ethnomusicologist. Documentary film making maybe. Regarding my relationship with Bengü, she is my muse, my light, and through her everything is illuminated, creatively, spiritually, and intimately. I can't even put it into words.

Masks. Pretending. Believing. What do you believe that others have yet to believe?

I have said pretending a lot and I think it deserves some clarification. When I say pretend I think I mean a kind of practicing. Transmutating, self discovery, magic I don't believe come into being by some sort of finger snapping. they come into being by inumerous practice. They fail more than they succeed. The mask or pretending's prop might be an extra push to get over the threshold or a delving into darkness and making it conscious. As far as what others have yet to believe? Your question is much prettier than my answer will ever be. Though they can't control what happens, people can control their reaction to it, that is something worth believing in.

Did humor have a role in your earlier work, and has the humor left your work? If so, then why?

Its good to not take yourself too seriously, and I don't mostly, so I don't think humor has drained from what I do, but I think humor sometimes works on a duality that I have shifted more towards a unity. I feel I have a child's wonder about the world and my enthusiasm is unwavering, so I feel flexible and molten, not brittle and bitter, humorless.

end.

thank you to Brian Ferry for photographing Matthew Ronay's studio.

AFANGAR.com

June 10, 2013

Interview with Matthew Ronay

Installation view:

It Comes in Waves
Nils Staerk
Copenhagen, Denmark
September 1 – October 20, 2012

A: What is your process? I notice in your earlier work the objects were toy like and very pristine - were those all handmade?

M: Yeah, everything I do is made by hand. I use tools but nothing is cast or anything like that. It was all MDF for the most part.

A: Is that labor intensive process a form of ritual?

M: I'm a really routine oriented person. I gain a lot of strength from my routine.

Even the process of getting dressed to do certain kinds of work can be ritualistic; but, I think for me, depending on what kind of process I'm doing - if it's a really repetitive process than I definitely get into a trance in order to endure the repetitive nature of the process. I don't know if it's so much ritual as it is meditative. Thoughts are flowing in and out of my mind while i work; but, I'm not dwelling on whether they are good or bad.

A: They just are what they are.

M: Yeah, I think a lot of the processes I use are now processes. They are not based on the future or the past - it's just watching wood disappearing or something. I think with drawing I have a similar approach - you can call it doodling but I think it's more of a process of watching something unfold and not judging whether its going to become something, like a great sculpture or finished drawing, or something that gets thrown away. Its a nonjudgemental area.

One kind of ritualistic aspect of working with tools is that tools have a tone. Like the same way that if you use the sounds of a bowl or a bell as a tool to meditate. Particular tools have a tone as well. As the tool touches the material it slows the process down and you get in this weird zone based around the tones and the tools.

A: That's so great to think of the tools as a melody.

M: One process where you can see it happening is this particular piece that was made by creating lines back and fourth and back and fourth. As the tool goes down it creates this weird sound - some of my studio mates say it sounds like a lamb crying. It has this weird quality that it gets you into the zone and I find that comforting as the day passes. Especially if you have to do a lot of a particular kind of thing, maybe in the beginning you get a little panicked because you're thinking "oh my god I have to fucking do three weeks of this" But then somewhere in the middle you build up a lot of strength.

A: And then you even look forward to the task.

M: Yeah. I think for me what is important about the handmade, I've heard this said, is that if you use a tool, not necessarily an art tool - maybe even like a pair of scissors that is made by hand, you are almost participating with the person who made it. For example, you can have a really nice handmade knife and as you're using it you participate with the person who put their love and care into making it, while you're putting your love and care into using for your own purpose.

I think its also true for art made by hand. Certain ideas benefit from some distance between the maker and the thing made; however, if your goal is less intellectual/ theoretical and more intuitive and emotional than I think you can really benefit from a process where it takes all your energy, time and desires to make something. So

when you experience looking at it, you bring what you bring to it as well but you feel the energy transference.

A: I want to go back to something you said about drawing - I am kind of blown away by having the ability to just let something be. Have you always been able to let go like that?

M: For one thing, when you work in a small sketchbook there is a lot less commitment. The commitment that it takes to make something good or bad is minimal in this form. So as you go from page to page you don't feel like these pages ever have to come out of the book and be viewed by someone else. I think the physical form of a book is nice, if you don't like what you've done you can just turn the page. If you can find a style that allows you to get your ideas onto the page quickly you can make 100 drawings in a day and you'll probably have at least one good one. I think all forms of practice are based on the idea of failure. For example with happiness or fulfillment or spiritual completion a lot of people have the idea that there is a magical thing that will make you happy - a lot of consumerism is based on that idea. But the thing is with practice its 70% failure and that is what life is. Of course sometimes you succeed, but when you do you should know you're going to fail again. And when you fail you should know that you can have another chance to succeed. I think drawing really encompasses that idea. All practices are based on that idea, it's called practice because you don't always get it right. You just have to believe that you'll eventually get something right.

T: Do you show that part of your work? Are the failures a part of it or do you just focus on the finished piece?

M: I always try to have a little bit of ugliness within the beauty. I think it helps within a piece to have a contrast between the failures and successes. But for the most part I share what I think is most successful with the work. In the earlier more cartoonish work, the sculptures were almost replicas of the drawings. And when I changed my work I allowed the process to dictate a second round of decision making. I sometimes think the work gets more raw and less controlled. As I continue to work, especially when I'm cutting wood a lot of the times I'm trying to make this one shape, and then that piece that falls off the machine and I'm left with, this negative shape, and I find I'm usually really attracted to that piece. This isn't exactly a mistake, but it wasn't my intention. I think creativity always works that way. Its similar in terms of looking at yourself. You build up an idea of who you are and then you're denying this whole other side. But if you could somehow step outside of yourself and look at that part you're trying to ignore you might realize that it actually has a lot to do with your actions and views. I think it's a good analogy for a lot of things.

A: A lot of you're forms are reminiscent of forms from nature, some of them look like they could be homages to mountains for instance. I know I keep on coming back to the idea of ritual; but, I'm curious - what is the relationship between someone living in New

York City, in the 21st century to nature or to spirituality?

M: I think it's hard in New York. I have a very isolated lifestyle. Which helps me focus. I can be social sometimes, but I don't really go out that much. I spend a lot of time in my studio by myself thinking and working. I think that isolation gives me a tiny bit of perspective on myself which is what spirituality is to me. Even if you practice in an organized way, I think the relationship is (or should) always be personal.

In terms of nature, I think it's really difficult. I often think about how a lot of artists in recent history have had a country house or some kind of retreat. I think being alone without being lonely is really important to the creative process. To be comfortable to be by yourself and not feel like you need someone else or an idea as a scratching post and to just be alone with your thoughts is really important. I isolate myself a little bit to get that but it can be hard in New York.

But with these kinds of mountain shapes to me it can be read many different ways. I can see a mountain or a setting sun. But, I also see these as orifices: like eyeballs and tears, or nostrils and mucous. I think that's true in nature though too: a single image or form can have double or triple interpretations, really it can be infinite. As they multiply out and get bigger, they also get smaller. Like the Eames movie the Powers of Ten. As far as you go inward to see the veins and vascular networks, and then go out to see galaxies you see that everything mimics itself. From the smallest cell to the largest universe everything has similar geometry and balance. While it would be nice to have somewhere I could go to be with nature more, you can see the natural sense of order without that.

A: It provides a really great sense of comfort to think that what is outside in the whole universe can be found right inside yourself.

Can I ask about your relationship to color?

M: Well, I'm colorblind. I'm red green color blind, so anything with red or green is difficult to put a word to. I often have to ask someone "is this purple?" When I use color, like now I am using a lot of color but I go though periods where I don't use much because its difficult. For that reason I tend to use a lot of saturated colors because they are easier to see. My relationship to color is complex, but I feel like it gives me a lot of respect for it. I think everyone sees color differently though. A lot of scientists are saying we aren't actually sure what color is outside of our own minds.

I went through a 3-4 year period where I would only use the color of the material. Like purple leathers, pink or dark woods, things that weren't painted I should say. I really enjoyed that because I didn't have to think about the color so much. But as much as you gain by having a natural or minimal palette, in terms of seriousness (like dark Caravaggio paintings that have a great weight) you lose a little bit of joy

and openness of celebration - I think that's why I brought color back.

A: There is a really wonderful lightness in your work. I don't know if you want your work to be interacted with, but that fun quality makes the viewer want to go up and touch them or rearrange them or something which is really great.

M: When I changed up some things in my work I found that I was really attracted to works that are made not just to add to the discussion of art history, but works that were made for ritualistic use or just use in general, like maps, or a costume or musical instrument. Most of the things I got really excited about were things that people had to make because they were useful. I can't necessarily make that kind of work because I don't belong to that kind of longstanding tradition. When I use ritual or spirituality its fantasy based. Objects that are useful have a lot more weight than objects that are made just to add to the discussion of art - for me, anyway. Like a daybed by Donald Judd does more for me than the things that he's more known for. Not to say that design is higher or better than anything, but there is something very personal about use that adds something.

A: I also love when utilitarian objects were crafted with a certain aesthetic. I feel like it shows that beauty has a use too. It's weird because art is unnecessary and extravagant, but it's something that people have never lived without.

In terms of language - do you see your objects as symbols or words?

M: At different times different ways. Sometimes I can interpret a work almost forensically like I look at it and think "this maybe means this when it's in line with this" but that can be really tiresome. My goal with making things is to experience new thoughts and crack myself open. I think that if you expect to be able to explain your work when your are finished making it than there is non leverage to crack yourself open because you are just staying at the border of your mind. On one hand, I think if you want to infect someone with your disease it's more effective to spread it with language, but visuals and symbols are nowhere near that level of efficiency. That kind of misunderstanding and slippage is one of the great things about making art - language is sort of the same way, but we can agree more on what words mean.

A: Is your process a method of escaping something or getting closer towards something - of course it can be both, I'm just curious how you see it?

M: It's hard to say. I depends on my frame of mind. But if we open up the concept to be outside of me, personally - I like to think of it in terms of a witnessing, objectiveness. I don't think of it as escaping as much as witnessing something happen. That doesn't mean you don't experience it - it just means you experience it without judgement. The reason why a lot of works I've made over the last couple of years have a mystical quality is because I feel lacking of that mystical quality within myself so I'm trying to create it. I feel disconnected and am looking to connect.

A/V LAB

MATTHEW RONAY

Several years ago Matthew Ronay abandoned surreal, cartoonish sculpture and eliminated any trace of modern society from his art to arrive at a mythological vision of what sculpture could be. He spoke with **Ross Simonini** about his latest installation, a vast, haunting forest of symbolic forms, on view at New York's **Andrea Rosen Gallery** in June.

FROM TOP:
Matthew Ronay with a portion of *Advance/Deteriorate*, 2011.

Detail from *Between the Worlds*, 2010, commissioned by Artspace San Antonio, Texas. Duvetyn, cotton, linen, shellac primer, latex, oil, polyester thread, waxed cord, sisal twine, hemp, papier mâché, steel, copper, plastic, pine, walnut, cherry, basswood, lightbulbs, electrical cord, tulle, gold leaf, tissue paper.

Your new work suggests shamanism to me.
I try to think with a foot in both worlds. That does seem like the definition of a shaman, someone with a foot in complementary worlds: male/female; life/death; reality/unreality. But it would be pretentious to say that I'm a shaman. The goal is to get far out and follow intuitive threads. When I started reading Carl Jung and Joseph Campbell, I started feeling that imagination could do something collective and real. A lot of art is about art or cleverness or ego. Not that my art is pure. You can't get to pure. Artists should embrace the weird more, rather than trying to get shows or galleries, or worrying about their careers.

Which artists are embracing the weird? Did Joseph Beuys?
He was definitely weird, and he has a unique place in history because of Germany's past. He seemed to be an outward person. I get really excited in the isolation of what I do. I enjoy my studio time and trying to make something earnest. I want my work to be generous to other people, but I don't see myself inserted into a greater social discourse, like Beuys. I tried to change the world with my older work, and it was a huge disappointment. It needed to be digested over long periods of time in a trippy, forensic way. I'm trying to get at more basic ideas. I'm making these chandeliers, and they're about death and funerals and remembrance.

Does the work you're doing now have a specific meaning or function for you?
I love the functional aspect of artwork, even if you are pretending that it has a function. If you want to make your work meaningful, make it useful. I think about this new work like cave painting. One idea about cave painting is that it was part of an initiation rite. The paintings simulated real situations. Young people have to see what's frightening and magical and dark and confusing about the world. It's like Joseph Campbell's ideas about the forest, which is a version of the cave. Henri Rousseau was interested in the forest, as well, how it contains both beauty and danger. My new installation is like that: It's a forest. It's an open-ended site, a kind of sanctum. You go into it, get challenged, and come out the better for it, hopefully.

What about your choice of materials?
I like the idea of material as a relief from shame. If your artwork was dropping acid onto a canvas, the way the canvas looks is not because you made it look that way; it's because the materials did that, and that relieves you from making a potentially shameful aesthetic decision. I like to use a material that I can manipulate, but I just haven't found meaningful materials that I can manipulate. Honestly, my materials are humble and cheap because I don't have any money. In that sense they do mean something, because they're cheap.

For the opening at Andrea Rosen, you've said that you'll be inside one of the totem pole–like figures in your forest, as a way of "activating" the whole installation.
Yeah. I'll be standing inside it for three hours. It's like a sweat lodge.

BOTH IMAGES: KEZIBAN BARRY

MATTHEW RONAY

IN A DARK WOOD

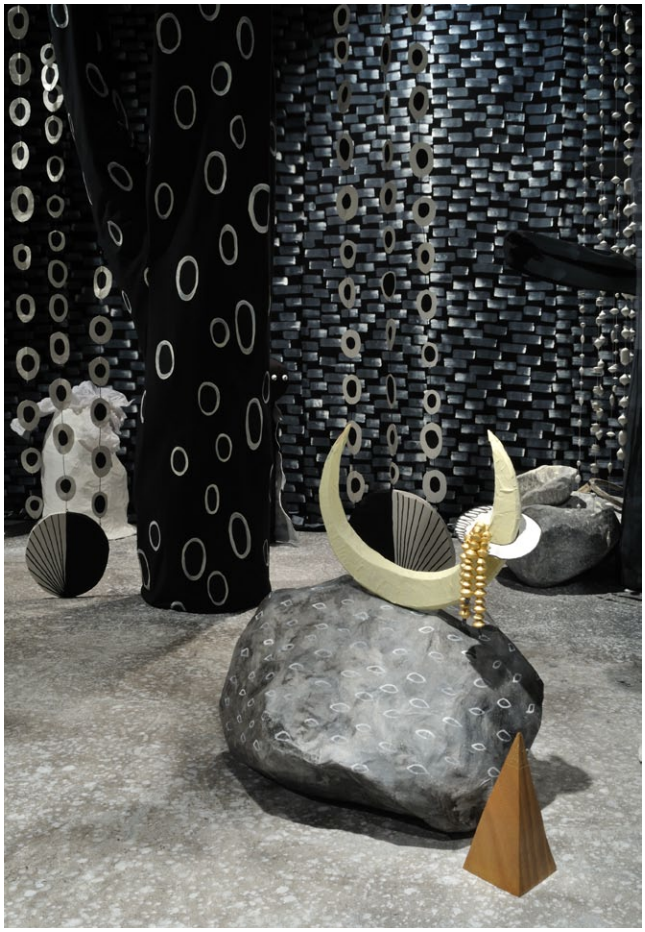
Culminating the sculptor's recent formal shift, a new installation at Artpace invites viewers into a totemic dreamscape more contemplative–and primal–than his earlier satiric tableaux.

BY CHARLOTTE COWLES

STANDING AMID THE FOREST of sculptural elements in Matthew Ronay's installation *Between the Worlds* (2010), one is enveloped in total silence. The walls and ceiling are completely covered with a soft black fabric that absorbs light and noise. Painted white dash marks float against the dark background like countless leaves suspended in midair. Despite the quiet, the space seems to teem with life. Crowding the dimly lit interior are trees made of painted fabric and papier-mâché, some with trunks as thick as human torsos, which tower to the ceiling. Their branches are occupied by papier-mâché birds and hung with strands of wooden beads that dangle like knotted cobwebs, usually motionless but capable of swinging if touched by a breeze or finger. Primordial-looking creatures are everywhere, some resembling jellyfish, others squatting on the ground like small hooded goblins. Two totemlike figures, imposing in their size and humanoid presence, bring to mind costumed shamen. One feels watched by thousands of eyes.

This massive installation, currently occupying a 2,000-square-foot exhibition space at Artpace, home to a highly regarded artists' residency program in San Antonio, is unlike anything Ronay has created before. Vaster in size and scope, it is also more dreamlike than the wry sculptural tableaux that garnered the artist significant notoriety over the past decade, with their mordant references to sex, food and pop culture.

Born in 1976 and raised in Louisville, Ky., Ronay earned an MFA from Yale in 2000 and moved to Brooklyn just as New York City was plunging into the troubled post-9/11 era. His early work was informed by the conviction that Americans, disenchanted with their country's new domestic politics and altered international standing, had entered a phase of no-holds-barred consumerism—hence his focus on society's obsession with pornography, obesity and physical disintegration. Ronay's installations were often populated with displaced sexual organs, together with everyday items like spaghetti or tampons. These components were made predominantly of medium density fiberboard (MDF), which he would glue in stacks and then grind into three-dimensional shapes, polishing the surfaces to a high shine before lacquering them with lurid hues. The cartoonish, toylike quality of these sculptures added to their shock value, a function of



This spread, two views of Matthew Ronay's *Between the Worlds*, 2010, mixed-medium installation; at Artpace San Antonio. Courtesy Andrea Rosen Gallery, New York. Photos (opposite) Todd Johnson, (above) Matthew Ronay.

CURRENTLY ON VIEW

Matthew Ronay's *Between the Worlds* at Artpace, San Antonio, Through Jan. 2, 2011.

70s FUNK CONCERT MODEL, WITH ITS ENIGMATIC MDF COMPONENTS, CELEBRATES THE BOND BETWEEN FUNK MUSIC AND VIETNAM-ERA SOCIAL CONSCIOUSNESS.

Ronay's self-described "talent" for imagining revolting scenarios. "I have this ability," he says, "to envision really, really disgusting things."[1]

Ronay was included in the 2004 Whitney Biennial, where he showed selections from 70s *Funk Concert Model* (2003), a project designed to celebrate the bond between funk music and Vietnam-era social consciousness (in contrast to what the artist sees—bafflingly, given the wild popularity of hip-hop—as the total disconnect between contemporary pop music and today's cultural and political issues). The MDF components include three low black platforms, moderate in size, representing musical acts from the 1970s. Soul singer Curtis Mayfield is evoked by a black warrior's helmet and two fried eggs, symbolizing his advocacy of black culture and his admiration for women and domesticity. The other platforms allude, by means of equally oblique object combinations, to the bands Mandrill and Earth, Wind & Fire. Elsewhere in the installation, Ronay riffs on food engineering, Through a set of four upright cow legs traversed by a spear that points toward a plateful of french fries, and foreign policy, satirized via an amputated leg with a scrolled copy of the Constitution balanced on the tip of one toe.

As his career gained momentum, Ronay seemed to revel in obscenity. The 2005 *Obese Eclipsed Cock*, which debuted that year in his solo exhibition "Shine the Light" at Marc Foxx in Los Angeles, is a sculptural grouping that features five normal-size hamburgers on a long support bowed between wall and floor, lined up with two enormous penises, each with a bloody bite wound, arched one atop the other. Inverted testicles complete the neat row. Ronay gleefully told a writer for the magazine *Modern Painters* that the work is a comment on the terrifying and mutually destructive interplay between the over-consumption of food and pornography: "[It's] like you ate too many burgers and you can't see your dick anymore."[2]

In 2005-06, as reports of abuses at Abu Ghraib spread around the world, Ronay was included in a number of exhibitions that examined America's accelerating moral tailspin. The traveling group show "Uncertain States of America—American Art in the 3rd Millennium," organized by European curators Daniel Birnbaum, Hans Ulrich Obrist and Gunnar Kvaran and first mounted in 2005 at the Astrup Fearnley Museum of Modern Art in Oslo, featured apocalyptic visions of American culture by some 40 young U.S. artists, including Sean Dack and Matthew Day Jackson. Among Ronay's several contributions was *Cat's Butt Hole in Role of Heaven in Reverse Rapture* (2004), consisting of a bright green pool raft, a brick wall, a flaming torch and a long, pink, tubular butt hole, all made from mdf, wood and metal. Ronay envisioned the cat's butt hole as having the power to lure and then swallow all of society's evil inhabitants, transporting them to hell.

By his 30th birthday, the artist had to his credit solo exhibitions at Marc Foxx, New York's Andrea Rosen, London's Parasol Unit, Madrid's Vacio 9 and Copenhagen's Nils Staerk. Several of his works had been purchased by major art museums, including the Museum

View of *70s Funk Concert Model*, 2003, mixed-medium installation. Photo Oren Slor.

Left, *Obese Eclipsed Cock*, 2005, MDF, Duron and paint, 43 by 6 by 100 inches. Photo Robert Wedemeyer. Courtesy Marc Foxx, Los Angeles, and Andrea Rosen Gallery, New York.

Opposite, *Observance*, 2007-08 walnut, clear pine, plaster, silk and mixed mediums, 96 by 180 by 47 inches. Photo Jason Mandella. Courtesy Andrea Rosen Gallery.

Below, *Cat's Butt Hole in Role of Heaven in Reverse Rapture*, 2004, MDF, steel, wood, paint, 78 by 140 by 151 inches. Photo Oren Slor. Courtesy Andrea Rosen Gallery.

of Modern Art in New York. It was therefore mystifying to observers when, at the end of 2006, Ronay became profoundly dissatisfied with his sculpture and halted all projects. He didn't show anything for nearly a year. When he began to produce work in earnest again in late 2007, the results were a complete formal departure: he used papier-mâché, wood, fabric and other natural materials to create almost primitive-looking, talismanic artifacts with mottled surfaces and irregular angles. He also left most materials unpainted. Since the artist is color-blind, he has always found mixing colors a difficult and convoluted process; eliminating that step allowed him to work more intuitively.

Ronay says that his disillusionment with his previous work had to do with the limitations of its glib provocations. The grouping of familiar pop imagery with bodily fluids, sexual organs and other fraught items led to associative mind games: "Even if it was a naked homeless person and a hamburger and a tampon, you could triangulate from those three and add a missing object in your head to come up with a social statement about whatever—homeless people, health care, politics." In the end, these interpretations struck him as contrived and superficial. He wanted to dig deeper, beyond the narratives he and viewers spun to explain his sculptures. Hitting that wall of meaning, he says, "Was kind of an endgame for me as an artist." He became intrigued by the open-ended nature of art: the power of an object to ignite something unpredictable and deeply personal in its viewer. Eschewing both entertainment and intellectual content, Ronay wanted his art to touch its audience on a far more fundamental human level.

THROUGHOUT HIS HIATUS, Ronay sought to disconnect himself from his previous work. He read Joseph Campbell and Carl Jung, and went for several sessions in a sensory-deprivation tank. He also stopped drawing, which had always been an essential part of his process. "Drawing was the birth point of my ideas," he explains, adding that he realized "If that's the way it happens, then I need to get rid of that birth point and figure out how to sculpt intuitively." He found himself drawn to traditional rituals, totems, sacred spaces and ceremonial costumes, all of which seemed to possess enduring and transcendental qualities he felt his work lacked. He became interested in the practice of alchemy and the trans

RONAY'S EARLY GROUPING OF FAMILIAR POP IMAGERY WITH BODILY FLUIDS, SEXUAL ORGANS AND OTHER FRAUGHT ITEMS LED TO ASSOCIATIVE MIND GAMES.

formation of objects through the application of energy and faith. his speech grew peppered with terms like "spiritual" and "tribal," which he worries have become freighted with hokey and dubious connotations. "All of those weird, amorphous, almost new age things have been left to new age people," he frets. "They're not left for artists, where I think they would maybe be best served. I'm trying to work on . . . Something more earnest, and embarrassing maybe."

The first exhibition of Ronay's new work took place at Andrea Rosen in February 2008. One of the pieces, Rewildlings (2007), features a trio of wooden bowls interspersed among three rocklike papier-mâché forms, which are anthropomorphized with empty eye sockets. The objects are grouped atop a 38-inch-long elliptical tray set on the floor. Observance (2007-08), a large post-and-lintel structure, is composed of a horizontal sapling supported on one end by a column of plaster blocks and on the other by a wooden framework that resembles the skeleton of a teepee. Small tree-shaped wooden forms dangle from the sapling on lengths of twine. Like his former work, these new pieces are all impeccably crafted.

After 2007, Ronay also began doing performances in conjunction with his sculpture. He often wears shamanistic costumes, consisting of coarsely woven gowns and papier-mâché masks, to undertake short dadaesque actions with his friend and fellow artist Nathan Carter, with whom he has an on-again, off-again band called the Final Run-Ins. Videos of the art events are posted on Youtube.

RONAY'S' NEW DIRECTION piqued the interest of Matthew Drutt, the curator of Artpace. In early 2009, Drutt invited him to stage a performance at the Austin home of an Artpace patron. Ronay set up an unlit tentlike enclosure; donned an elaborate one-armed, helmeted costume; and stood within the pitch-black chamber, while Drutt sent in one or two viewers at a time. "Some people came out and were like, huh?" says Drutt. Others laughed uncontrollably; a few hugged Ronay; almost everyone touched him; and one person groped him. Drutt views the experiment as a great success: "[Ronay] was looking to provoke a response from people that was totally different from the response they have when they go and look at art. He wanted to manipulate people's experiences in a certain way that a powerful spiritual object would. And it worked."[3] Shortly thereafter, Drutt asked Ronay to

NOW EMPHASIZED IN SOLO PERFORMANCES AND DADAESQUE ACTIONS WITH FELLOW ARTIST NATHAN CARTER, ENERGY TRANSFER IS A VITAL PART OF RONAY'S PROCESS.

mount an exhibition at Artpace's Hudson (Show)room, urging him to fill the space from top to bottom.

Prone to insomnia, Ronay came upon his idea for the Artpace project during one sleepless night in fall 2009. He pictured a forest crowded with trees and strange, otherworldly flora and fauna; it was a place of retreat and self-reflection. "The history of religions and psychology portrays the forest as a meeting place of self, where an internal battle is fought. Historically, it's been a rite of passage to go alone into the wilderness and face your demons and the natural elements." In November, Ronay began working on the forest in his Long island City studio, sewing together trees and hand-painting each dash mark on the fabric backdrop. Feathers, hair, tulle or other materials hang from some elements, presenting the kind of myriad shapes and textures that would be found in a wooded area filled with leaves, insects, hives, nests and any number of unknowns.

While most artists launching an ambitious project might hire a studio assistant (or five), Ronay is adamant about his work being the direct result of his own efforts. "It's like I'm banking energy. . . The materials change when I touch them, but instead of being just a visual analogy, I'm hoping that it's an actual energy deposart." Because he imbues his pieces with his intention and care, Ronay believes that his sculpture holds a kind of force field, a thrum emanating from his labor.

NOTWITHSTANDING THE STARK differences between Ronay's early and current works, there are significant continuities. The notion of energy transference has always been important to his process. For his 2005 Marc Foxx show, he hired a stripper to rub herself against his sculptures the night before the opening, likening the procedure to "adding a lock of boar's hair to a cauldron."[4] (With decadent sex and meaningless consumption being central themes of that exhibition, such a ritual seemed fitting.) Sexual organs remain present: vaginalike openings riddle many of the forest's tree trunks; from the ceiling hangs a form resembling a fallopian tube, an opening at its lower end revealing spermlike shapes that appear to be wriggling their way upward.

Interestingly, by the time of the forest's completion in early September, Ronay seemed to have found a new measure of acceptance with respect to his earlier work. Rather than dismissing it, he now sees parallels between it and his ongoing projects: "I don't think any of my motifs have really left; I've just re-identified with them in a context that's more substantial."

At the Sept. 20 opening of *Between the Worlds* in San Antonio, Ronay stood, silent and unmoving, inside one of the life-size totemlike figures that loom among the trees, a costume-as-effigy designed as yet another channel of energy transference. He wanted his performance to infuse the work with vitality, not unlike the stripper's ritual years ago. Viewers seemed to sense his presence, tiptoeing around the figure and murmuring to one another in hushed, respectful tones. The pathways through the installation are, in most areas, wide enough for only one person to pass at a time, which compels each visitor to make a solitary journey among the trees. For Ronay, the experience was hot and uncomfortable, but coping with discomfort was part of the point: "I was basically just trying to keep the panic to a minimum. Which is a goal in life in general."

The meditative, transformative quality of *Between the Worlds*—evident even in an early version when I visited his studio in may, and progressively resolved throughout the summer—pervades the work's present incarnation. This immersive environment might feel stifling in its warm, dense, cocoonlike silence, but the components, for all their mystery, exude a calm air of order and balance, suggesting a larger, universal design. If Ronay was hoping to create a place of wordless transcendence, where chatter is blocked out and self-reflection takes hold, then he has surely succeeded.

Above, production still of *Set Two*, a collaborative dance performance with Matthew Ronay and Nathan Carter, 2009 video, approx. 1.25 minutes. Courtesy the artist.

Opposite, view of *Between the Worlds*. Photo Matthew Ronay.

1 Unless otherwise noted, all Ronay statements, quoted or paraphrased, are from conversations and e-mail exchanges with the author, New York, May-October 2010. **2** Quoted in Joshua Mack, "Emerging Artists: Matthew Ronay," *Modern Painters*, December 2005, pp. 62-63. **3** Interview with the author, New York, May 8, 2010. **4** Quoted in Brandon Stosuy, "Interview with Matthew Ronay," *The Believer*, December 2005/ January 2006, p. 70; reproduced at www.believermag.com.

Between the Worlds is on view at Artpace, San Antonio, Sept. 20, 2010-Jan. 2, 2011. A modified version will appear at Andrea Rosen Gallery, New York, in June 2011.

CHARLOTTE COWLES is a writer who lives in New York.

ARTFORUM

LOS ANGELES

Matthew Ronay

MARC FOXX GALLERY

View of "Matthew Ronay; 2009.

In previous outings at this gallery and elsewhere, Matthew Ronay deployed sculptural objects with a smart, pop sheen that nearly disguised the works as products of mass manufacture: for example, Wiping Away Drips Obsolete, 2005, in which two blue Hula-hoops stacked in a corner are each draped with a used condom-all fastidiously crafted by the artist-or Obese Eclipsed Cock, 2005, in which two stacked, arcing cartoon ish male members inflicted with bite marks align with a quintet of hamburgers climbing a thin brown plank that leans against the wall. At first glance, these specific objects, typically made from painted wood or MDF, would seem to be more likely found at Toys "R" Us-somewhere in the vicinity of Mr. Potato Head-if the thematics weren't so blatantly "adult," here meaning they possess as much dark, violent, and depressing allegorical content as explicit sexuality.

Of course, sex and death are easily found in the toy store, too, but they are typically sublimated, whereas in Ronay's work these themes were easi ly found at or near the surface. However, his recent exhibition, titled "is the shadow," marked a dramatic shift away from the slick, plastic look of such past work with a rejection of most recognizable subject matter in favor of recognizably handcrafted objects that flirt with primitive symbols and ambiguous archetypes. Simil arly, Ronay's familiar Crayola colors gave way, overwhelmingly, to a subdued palette of black, white, and gray.

Four large, wall-bound "cloaks" and four floor-based sculptures occupied the main gallery. Double Cloak of Stars (all works 2009), with its bilateral symmetry, two head holes resembling "eyes," and arrays of painted feathers that double as tears, suggests a simplified face; the hanging garment is accompanied by two matching black hoods and a tall, carved walnut pole that leans against the wall. Despite the range of materials-black-painted cotton fabric, fiber rush, waxed cord, plastic, wood-the decorated assemblage, hanging on a wall, invariably evokes painting without fully relinquishing Ronay's ongoing sculptural concerns. Evidence of the artist's hand a lso makes the considerable labor in fabricating this work readily visible to the viewer. The other cloaks each feature one hole-still suggesting eyes- and are paired with a single hood. In four short YouTube videos (which are not in the show but are mentioned in the press materials), the garments are worn by one or two people-whose heads poke through the holes and are covered by the hoods-performing simple, ritualistic movements. The videos reveal little, further complicating the charged position of the cloaks themselves, which now must be considered in relation to performance, as well as to painting and sculpture.

The four floor sculptures also allude to ritual. Various objects are neatly piled on paper-thin rectangular bases that recall prayer mats: Protective Eyes features an unfinished pyramid formation of simplified eyes, Transmitter a bundle of carved wooden staffs that suggest Brancusi's Endless Column. Ronay has recently indicated his interest in the theories of Carl jung, and the objects in the show evince an obvious concern for archetypes, allying the artist with figures from Gauguin to Picasso to Pollock, all of whom sought out the primitive as a paradoxical way of renewing the modernist project. But I doubt Ronay is consciously seeking to position himself in such illustrious company: Who needs the pressure? Given Ronay's interest in scrappy materials, decorative repetitions, and performative intimations, one might just as well situate him alongside a handful of Los Angeles based peers such as Mindy Shapero, Ry Rocklen, and Alice Kanitz (despite his New York zip code). But regardless of these apparent affinities, new and old, Ronay's work is in transition, and the potent impact of these initial offerings demonstrates why beginning anew is such a time-honored tradition.

-Michael Ned Holte

Los Angeles Times

Art Review: Mattew Ronay at Marc Foxx

September 25, 2009 | 7:30 A.M.

Children and primitives have long fascinated avant-garde artists, particularly for the authenticity of their visions and the unwashed rawness of their expressions. New York artist Matthew Ronay turns this tradition upside-down, inside-out and backward, transforming a fetishistic fascination with supposedly unsullied otherness into an intimate exploration of the playful fakery and profound artifice at the root of all forms of art.

Ronay's third solo show in Los Angeles, at Marc Foxx, is a dizzying trip that takes viewers so deeply inside themselves that they can't help but come out differently.

Titled "is the shadow," Ronay's subtly understated exhibition plays off Carl Jung's ideas of internal otherness. It begins by presenting two rooms filled with what appear to be primitive artifacts. On the wall hang four poncho-style cloaks, their neck holes resembling all-seeing eyes. Beside each hangs a matching hood or two. A single hand-carved staff leans nearby. (The beautifully odd objects can be seen in three enigmatic snippets on YouTube.)

On the floors of the two galleries lie what appear to be five ceremonial rugs. Each is decorated as elaborately as the cloaks, with irregular patterns, abstract stitchery and all sorts of lumpy feathers, matte gems, stylized shells, faux teeth and papier-mâché stones. Each rug also holds an arrangement of talismanic artifacts, including golden rings, symbolic eyes, painted twigs, waxy rocks and a pint-size sepulcher.

The strangest thing about Ronay's handcrafted works is that they are made of the materials a grade-school kid would get at a fantastic summer camp, especially if his counselors were obsessed with primitive rituals, knew a bit about Hopi kachinas and let the interested kids skip sports so they could spend more time creating their own versions of sacred objects.

At once cute and deadly serious, Ronay's deceptively simple art superimposes childhood playtime and primitive ritual to short-circuit an adult's ability to keep both at a safe distance. His army-of-one, let's-pretend primitivism serves him well.

Matthew Ronay at Marc Foxx, 6150 Wilshire Blvd., (323) 857-5571, through Oct. 17. Closed Sundays and Mondays. www.marcfoxx.com

--David Pagel

ANOTHER MAGAZINE

MATTHEW RONAY Goin' Down, Down, Down.

ANOTHER WAY OF TWISTING REALITY

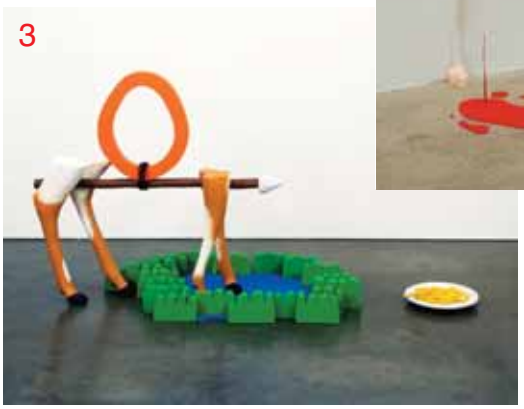
TEXT BY MARK SANDERS


3

Matthew Ronay's intricate sculptures are invariably loaded with hidden surprises. Strewn across a gallery floor, they appear at first glance like discarded toys, their pop aesthetic and bright primary colors vying for attention. But take a closer look and a world of cultural, political and sexual intrigue emerges. Contemporary issues are always a part of contemporary art, whether or not you can sec it directly" Ronay explains. "I have made sculpture about everything from funk music to the state of the nation to the exit strategy for the war in Iraq. Yet my sculpture may not look like it is socially or politically loaded. It only functions when it enters the mind of the spectator. That is, when it becomes an act of direct communication."

Ronay's aesthetic represents a double-edged sword that utilizes the familiar two-dimensional language of cartoons, only to transform it into a three-dimensional narrative sculpture with an emblematic twist. (1 & 2) One of his latest sculptural incarnations, *Officer, Officer, Officer, Officer!* (3) may appear like a rather strange still life. Standing on a table astride a set of dentures covered in food, while a butt hole wears a police officer's cap. "He is figurative, but instead of a brain he is an arse," Ronay says. "He is disgusting. He has no intelligence, no heart, just greed, while reflected in the mirror, you see a kind of fantasy version of reality, an ideal scene. The piece, for me, points to the artificial look or power, the police, the military or the government, who pretend to occupy the moral high ground. They appear here like an innocuous bunch of flowers while in reality the whole system is rotten to the core."


4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MATTHEW RONAY'S LATEST SCULPTURE ISON SHOW AS PART OF THE EXHIBIITON "PHANTASMANIA" AT THE KEMPER MUSEUM OF CONTEMPORARY ART, KANSAS CITY, MISSOURI. HE IS IN THE TRAVELING EXHIBITION "UNCERTAIN STATES OF AMERICA" AT THE HERNING KUNSTMUSEUM, DENMARK THIS SPRING. HE IS CURRENTLY WORKING ON A DEVELOPMENT OF A SCULPTURAL MULTIPLE PUBLISHED BY EDITIONS FAWBUSH


5

Political connotations are also found in the piece *Please Don't Bend, Fold, Spindle or Mutilate Me* (4), which features a black torso hanging from a set of anal beads above a gaping voracious mouth. (5) The connection to torture, homoerotic fantasy and sexual pleasure embedded in Ronay's recent work, is not just a direct response to the horrors of war. "When you look at the world, terrible things happen,"
he says. "You only have to think about the abuse of prisoners in Iraq by American soldiers to realize that the connections between torture and a perversity of pleasure are "very slight. I am interested in investigating what it is in our cultural psyche that makes these feelings manifest themselves. What is it about the West that leads us to such acts of terror? •

REVIEWS
Matthew Ronay

Issue 7 / January 2007
Officer, Officer, Officer, Officer!
2006
MDF, wood, steel, plastic bags, paint
193 x 230 x 161 cm
(c)the artist, courtesy of Andrea Rosen Gallery, NY

MATTHEW RONAY: GOIN' DOWN' DOWN' DOWN

PARASOL UNIT, LONDON
13 SEPTMEBER - 8 NOVEMBER

If Matthew Ronay's work tends to nudge the viewer towards escaping its presence as swiftly as possible, there are two plausible reasons why. The first rests on a discomfiting transposition of category: this Brooklyn-based Kentuckian's iconography mirrors the fleet irrationality of mindless doodling - that liberated dominion where it costs nothing to turn a hugely oversize molar into a long-trunked elephant, top it with a policeman's cap and position it beside a foaming flagon of beer - but is produced as cold, bright and cartoonish sculpture: a deadpan festival of gaudily painted MDF whose weight and implicit labour-intensiveness seem incommensurate with its subject matter. The second rationale is that Ronay's art scrupulously avoids any kind of experiential uplift, being manifestly engaged with the philosophical category of nihilism. Not only do his scenarios resist closure, but in the course of their irresolution they're often magnetised to the basest aspects of being.

Don't Stop... Don't Stop the Fee/in' (all works 2006) presents itself from the front as a patch of orange scrubland dotted with skinny poker-shaped plants; an ordure-splattered wooden fence rises up, at the base of which are clustered apparently cum-covered tissues. The gallery wall behind the partition supports four reliefs of children's faces, variously accusatory and amused, and the handwritten phrase 'You are a miserable lying shit and we hate you'. Deal with it, Americans like to say: in Ronay's art that injunction is raised to the level of an ontological principle. Tellingly, he notes as an inAuence the postwar nouveaux romans of French authors Alain Robbe-Grillet and Raymond Queneau, whose glittery rushes of description cover enticingly for a yawning void of meaning. One is invited to read Ronay's profusions of equalised materiality, piece by piece - to ingest the optical excess (crash barriers, foliage, miniature city threatened by a spiralling red tidal wave, swarm of bees, pile of cigarettes, bloody entrails, etc) of the aptly titled To Possess It, One Must Walk through It at Night - but any arising narrative is unsatisfying, provisional and entirely one's own.

Even when Ronay breaks down and folds in art-historical references of sorts (a bastardised formalism runs through his art, from a set of Frank Stellareferencing fences to the corrupted geometry inherent in a pair of blue hula hoops slung with dripping condoms), he still confers scant comfort. Yet what is easily forgotten concerning nihilist thinking is that, from Nietzsche to Gianni Vattimo and onwards, it has often been intended as ultimately redemptive: one hits the blackness of the ocean floor, and can then only swim upwards towards some class of light. If Ronay's stealthily ethical art isn't that floor expressed in aesthetic terms, one hesitates to enquire as to what is.

Martin Herbert

FINANCIAL TIMES THURSDAY SEPTEMBER 28 2006

VISUAL ARTS

A few killer bees, a few body parts

Michael Glover ponders the brash tableaux of the American sculptor Matthew Ronay

'Officer, Officer, Officer, Officer!, 2006

When did you·last spend some of your hard-won. leisure time pondering on the significance of a sculpture called "Obese Eclipsed Cock"?

This work is among those by Kentucky born Matthew Ronay that can be, seen at two venues in London this autumn. He has one piece on display in *Uncertain States of America*, a group show of young American artists at the Serpentine Gallery in Kensington Gardens and he also has his own solo show of new and recent work called *Goin' Down Down, Down*, at Parasol Unit in north London,

Ronay's work can be hard, to fathom. but perplexmgly it doesn't necessarily seem so when you first confront it. In fact, if you took a split-second glimpse at it through a store window and passed on you would take away the impression that you, had seen something bright, sim pIe and beguiling.

Ronay creates sculptural tableaux - they look a little like stage sets out of many different components. At first glance the work looks, childishly cute and toy-like, as if he is not so much mak--ing sculpture as sitting in a corner dreamily playing with the idea of makIng sculpture. The work' looks hand-made - which it is - and it is over painted in a range of bright primary colours, or colors that lack any subtlety in' their· tonal range. It looks. jokily cartoonish and, somewhat throw-away. It's'made out of flimsy stuff, too, MDF, bits of old black bin bags, paper, string.

Then there is the. subject matter: The work apparently faces in two directions at once. It looks as if it is to do with games, play and. childish things but the games-playing comes to involve a great deal of blood spillage and potentially violent if consensual sex. What we see at a glance is not what we get after more prolonged

looking. The work, in short is resolutely oxymoronic. The seductive. brightness of life turns quickly to the darkness of- death and d structive impulses.

The first large-scale tableau is called "To Possess It, One Must Walk Through It At Night", and consists of, various components on the floor and on the wall. On the floor there are a group of crudely painted high-rise buildings, on the end of a menacing red spiral bits of black bin bags have been thrust into the turns of the spiral a blob of fat to 'which sticking plaster and gauze have been taped, some batteries and LSD tabs. On the wall directly behind this there is a screen (it looks like ,some advertising board waiting to be fllled with the usual inanities) with' stan- . chions that project it out from the wall and, behind' that screen, a v~rsion' of pastoral - some flatly" cartoonishly painted tree shapes menaced by a zig-zag of bright yellow forked lightning, (Oh yes, on on corner of that screen there is also a cluster of killer bees. And on the sanchions that support the screen there are some limp bits, of body parts or tubing oozing painted blood.)

All this sounds, very fussy, and— it is. What sort of thing is this then? Well it

Here, the seductive bright ness, of life turns quickly to the darkness of death, to destructive impulses

has to be a kind of zany vision of apocalypse, a mad cap critique of the kind of world we have made for ourselves and are doomed to live or die in. That red spiral looks as if it is going to overwhelm those flimsy high-rise buildings, at any moment, which means it has to be a red tsunami of some kind; those killer bees look none too friendly either. And what of that poor despised blob of belly fat on the floor? It's a superfluous substance that the crazy society in which Ronay lives has made all too familiar. And' those LSD tabs all mixed up with those batteies?

This giant tableau can serve as a kind of paradigm of Ronay's work in its entirety. He assembles the oddest arid the most marginal of things...a turd, a jet of urine, shoves them together, and thereby gives them the quirkiest of twists. Sexuality, consumerism race, contemporary American politics - all these elements and more get poured into the anarchic mix. The ideas for these components seem apparently to have, their genesis, in the first place in the artist's own quick dooqles - many of which are on display on the walls of the gallery Ronay then turns his dooles into three-dimensional objects. Often the objects he pulls together are recognisable — a limp condom on a blue hula hoop, for example. Sometimes they are not recognisable at all. Nor are the meanings of these strange agglomerations necessarily apparent, even after prolonged scrutiny.

So the work is visually beguiling, and intellectually intriguing in the way that puzzles are always .intriguing. What is more, its manner of making feels quirkily refreshing Is anyone else making sculptural assemblages quite as bizarre as these? No. But the larger question has to be does it resonate? Does it feel like work of real-importance? Alas, no. Perhaps its strange inscrutability tells against it, the fact that it has been dredged up from the depths of the artist's own naively fantastic visions. Some visions simply don't cohere enough.

Matthew Ronay's 'Goin Down, Down, Down' is at the Parasol Unit, London Nl, until 9 December. Tel 020' 7490 7373