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Review At Marc Foxx Gallery, the wild and whimsical world of Matthew Ronay

By David Pagel May 16, 2017

Los Angeles Times



Matthew Ronay, installation view, "Surds," (Matthew Ronay and Marc Foxx)

Matthew Ronay's pint-sized sculptures strut their stuff like nothing else. The imagination races to catch up with the stories that spill from the New York artist's evocative works at Marc Foxx Gallery, where nine candy-colored abstractions stand on cloth-draped pedestals and four yellow-hued doozies hang on the walls.

Wild forest orchids and poison dart frogs come to mind — the first for their exotic beauty and fragile elegance, the second for their eye-popping colors and the dangers they signal.

But a few moments in Ronay's exhibition, "Surds," buffer such extremes. To look closely at his playful pieces is to see the hand of a master craftsman at work, the mind of an original thinker at play and the heart of a generous giver doing his thing.

Ronay's sinuous forms are so carefully carved and lovingly sanded from chunks of basswood that you want to caress them like pets. The sense of friendliness is accentuated by the dyes Ronay has applied to his sculptures, leaving the wood grain visible and further softening their contours.

Right angles and hard edges are nowhere to be found. Ronay's sculptures look as if they might be the offspring of a preschooler's building blocks and a rogue coral reef. Some parts of some sculptures have been coated with flocking, making their organic forms appear to be covered by a layer of unnatural moss, synthetic lichen or clothing.

Some of the tabletop pieces resemble otherworldly landscapes. The hoodoo-packed expanses of Bryce Canyon National Park are evoked, as are the whimsical worlds that appear in Dr. Seuss stories. Others recall cartoon ray guns, intergalactic transmitters, architectural ornamentation, sea snakes and wind instruments.

If Pandora's box had an opposite — or an antidote — it might very well be "Surds."

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ARTFORUM

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Matthew Ronay

MARC FOXX GALLERY

6150 Wilshire Boulevard

April 29, 2017–June 3, 2017

No one moves quite as fluidly between art and science, spiritual and urbane pursuits, or craftsmanship and conceptual rigor as Matthew Ronay. In this exhibition, Ronay presents refined, colorfully flocked-and-dyed carved Basswood orbs, black holes, tubes, cones, and bricks, many meticulously built from single pieces of wood and then reconstituted with hidden dowels. His objects connote both otherworldly shapes and eighteenth-century utopian architecture—think C. N. Ledoux—as much as mammal innards, vegetables, minerals, and undulating sea creatures.

The show is titled “Surds” after one of pi’s siblings, an irrational integer reduced to a square root. These sculptural arrangements, displayed in an X-shape on five square plinths that checkerboard the gallery floor, look like a three-dimensional mandala or some alternate universe’s fractal collapse. That said, the installation has a Zen-like calmness about it: The engineered organization of these wild forms is complemented by the wrinkled hand-sewn slipcovers Ronay made to offset the wood’s smooth Pop allure. Inspired by the Mayan system of counting, *13*, 2016, looks like a factory town built of hot dogs, while *Scanner*, 2017, resembles an acorn squash or carnivorous flower with a stamen or pistil structure. The largest piece, centrally installed, is *Magnitude Source*, 2017, a green, purple, orange, and blue orb with wavy beams of wood radiating from it, like an electrified sun topping a giant, brilliantly queer wedding cake.

Key to the artist’s material metaphysics is the way his wood carvings look gummy, soft, bulbous, vegetal, even spongy, while his sewn objects sometimes adopt harder angles. Ronay’s abject symbolism is carried out through sexualized forms, ruptures between exterior and interior, and objects that elude simple recipes for attraction or repulsion. These sculptures brilliantly challenge short attention spans, inviting us into intimacy.

— Trinie Dalton



Matthew Ronay, *Magnitude Source*, 2017,
basswood, dye, steel, 19 x 40 1/2 x 12".

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Matthew Ronay *SURDS*

Toeing the line of transcendent spirituality and out-and-out sexuality

By Lindsay Preston Zappas

ArtReview



Scanner, 2017

Sometimes Matthew Ronay whistles in the studio ‘with a lot of vibrato’, he once confessed in an interview with David John. ‘I’m normally ecstatic in the studio,’ he continued. Ecstasy has many variants: overwhelming joy or exuberance, sexual bliss, spiritual awakening. Think Bernini’s *The Ecstasy of Saint Teresa* (1647–52), which exhibits a bit of each.

Ronay’s Technicolor basswood sculptures also toe the line of transcendent spirituality and out-and-out sexuality. In *Thermal Organ Apparatus* (all works but one 2017), a yellow-flocked phallus protrudes from a large rectangular base. In the more architectural *13* (2016), a baby-pink orifice is carved centrally into the sculpture’s backside. Some of these inclusions can feel like dude jokes, but Ronay’s formal agility produces complex formal relationships that well transcend the vulgar. Like Bernini, he creates rippling and undulating folds out of an otherwise hard material. The tabletop sculptures are exquisite puzzles of delicately carved parts, each piece stained in a unique colour. Compositionally, they would be at home with work by Ron Nagle or Peter Shire – intricate details and unexpected hues surprise at every turn.

The sculptures’ placement on low-slung pedestals encourages an intimate investigation of each work. Only when hunched over each carved microcosm can one make out brightly flocked holes or thin wood edging, which appears as malleable as Play-Doh. *Scanner*, more sci-fi invention than formal experimentation, consists of a large shell-like orifice resting atop a slanted pink base, which recalls both a computer keyboard and a topographic slice of land. A fistlike form juts out of this base, bending around to almost kiss the purple shell; there is a sensual tension in their almost-meeting. Like a third wheel, a wiggly pink form surprises on the backside of the sculpture, edging into the action.

Wrapped around each pedestal is a fitted cotton tablecloth, offering a bed of softness under each wooden composition. Where the sculptures are perfectly composed and solid in their forms, the fabric sits awkwardly; their hemlines fluctuate while large wrinkles make the wraps appear unconsidered and rushed. Like a rusty anchor to Ronay’s otherworldly constructions, the table dressings root the sculptures in the everyday rather than letting them expand outward into the transcendent. While individually the work in *SURDS* is utterly spellbinding, the installation as a whole seems to point directly to the future life of these alien objects: a quiet existence, sitting atop a swathe of linen somewhere in the Hollywood Hills.

From the Summer 2017 issue of *ArtReview*

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BLOUINARTINFO

Matthew Ronay at Perez Art Museum, Miami

By Isabella Mason | November 08, 2016



Installation view: Project Gallery: Matthew Ronay, When Two Are In One Pérez Art Museum Miami, 2016. Photo by Matthew Ronay. (Courtesy: Pérez Art Museum Miami)

Patricia Papper Project Gallery of Pérez Art Museum, Miami, is hosting an exhibition by Matthew Ronay, titled 'When Two Are In One'. The exhibition will run through January 15, 2017.

This exhibition is a new installation by Matthew Ronay who is best known for his sculptural work. Ronay creates beautifully crafted objects from wood, fabric, and clay, which ranges from small free-standing and wall-based sculptures to immersive installations. Through his unique use of form and color the artist draws out the totemic and surreal qualities of objects, which portrays traditions of non-western art making and American folk art, as well as spirituality and psychedelia. Ronay's sculptures overcome the barrier of language and image and the artworks are open ended giving priority to the viewer's experience.

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OBSERVER

10 Things to Do in New York's Art World Before July 1

By Ryan Steadman • 06/27/16

TUESDAY, JUNE 28



Graham Marks, *Untitled*, 1991. Photo: © Graham Marks Courtesy Andrea Rosen Gallery, New York Photographer: Lance Brewer

Opening: "Empirical Intuitive Absorption" at Andrea Rosen Gallery This should be a probing group effort curated by (and starring) Rosen gallery artist Matthew Ronay. Here the artist wonders aloud whether abstraction throughout the ages can intuit microscopic or astronomical science. His selected artists—which also includes Serge Charchoune, Fernand Léger, Graham Marks and Terry Riley—range from early Modernists to Minimalist musicians and contemporary sculptors, but each reflects a certain biomorphic structure with their ponderous yet beautiful works.

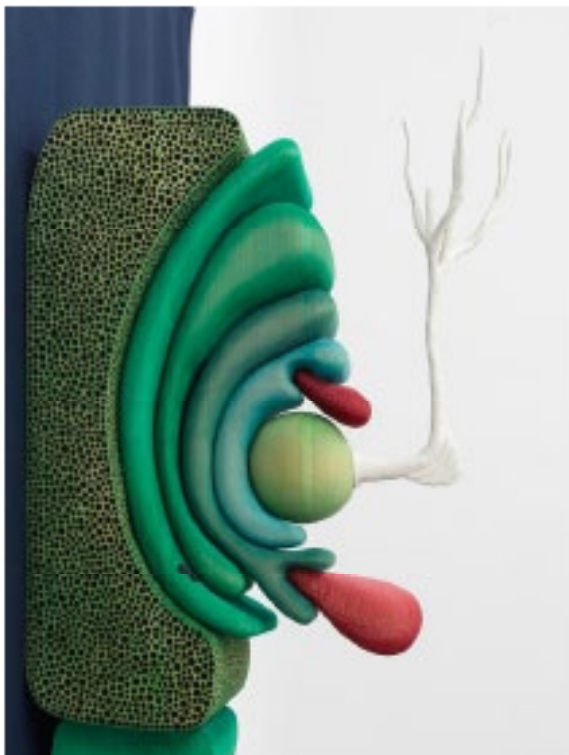
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CRITIC'S GUIDE - 19 APR 2016

Critic's Guide: Cologne

BY DOMINIKUS MÜLLER



Matthew Ronay,
Verdant Virus, 2016,
basswood, dye,
flocking, plastic, steel,
aluminium and
canvas. 136 x 91 x 38
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).

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

Wallpaper*

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'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.

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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 latest installation, *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)

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.

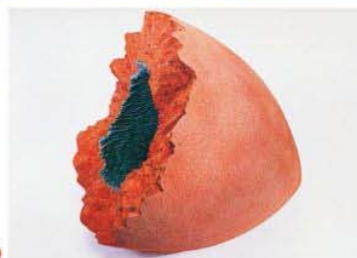
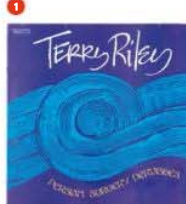
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MODERN PAINTERS

PORTFOLIO // TRENDS // SNEAK PEEKS // NEWSMAKERS



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



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 Bhūmandala. 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; TERRY RILEY, SHANTI RECORDS; INGVAR CRONHAMMAR, GALLERIE KONSTHAUS; GRAHAM MARKS, PETER ROSENBERG AND CREATIVE COMMONS; GRAHAM MARKS

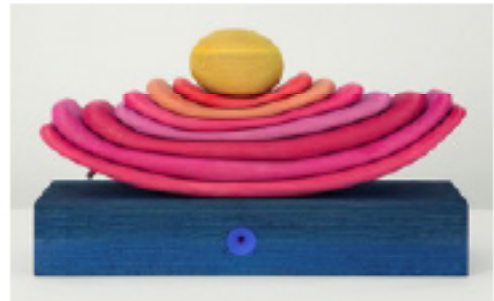
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ARTFORUM

"Empirical Intuitive Absorption"

ANDREA ROSEN GALLERY

As an extension of a lecture he gave in March 2016 at Miami's Pérez Art Museum, Matthew Ronay contextualizes his own recent wood sculptures with works by Fernand Léger, Serge Charchoune, Terry Riley, and Graham Marks to investigate how abstraction can intuitively tap into and communicate elemental concepts. With the exception of Léger's foreboding, nebulous form in *Green Foliage*, 1930, the artist's graphic, object-centered works struggle to transcend their subject matter and are the least effective here. But we do get a rare opportunity to view the work of Léger's contemporary, Charchoune, an overlooked painter and poet who hopscotched between genres, eluding categorization.



Matthew Ronay, *The Kernel*, 2016, basswood, dye, gouache, steel, 18 x 31 1/2 x 11".

Ronay's selections illustrate Charchoune's electric approach to abstraction, from doodled symbols to dense monochromes. Charchoune's vibrant, symmetrical seascape, *La croix marine* (The Navy Cross), VII-VII, 1950, looks like the direct inspiration for Ronay's sculpture *The Kernel*, 2016, a boat of stacked tongues carrying a spongy egg across a rippled slab of azure-stained basswood. Ronay transforms his material into supple, velvety forms that playfully allude to the body—arterial tubes, porous sacs, and juicy folds. In contrast, Marks embraces the imperfections and grittiness of clay to create heavy earthen sculptures that resemble overgrown seedpods or geological specimens.

As Riley's undulating and hypnotic compositions wash over the exhibition, ebbing in and out of our awareness, Mark's sculptures lie in repose, functioning as punctuation marks. Performed on a electronic organ modified with digital delay loops, Riley's drone-heavy, raga-like pieces, including *Shiri* (Mister) Camel, 1980, play from a wall-mounted turntable, though they might as well be transmitted from an interstellar church. For Ronay, these varied abstractions are more than a reduction of forms—there is a consciousness that connects the works to one another, and forces far greater.

—Chris Murtha

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The New York Times

ART & DESIGN

Matthew Ronay: 'Wavelength'

By ROBERTA SMITH AUG. 14, 2014

MATTHEW RONAY

'Wavelength'

The 30 gouaches in Matthew Ronay's latest show compress the tableaux, 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.

A small rectangle of deep purple of 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. Hopefully, 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**



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

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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 created 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 the 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.

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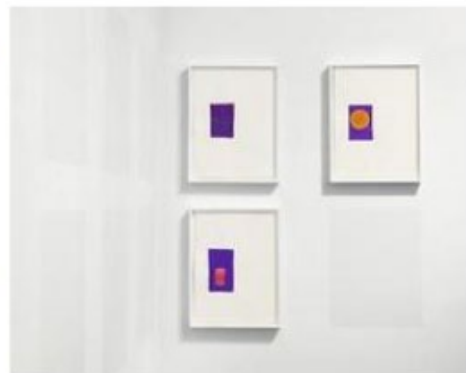
CRITICS' PICKS

Matthew Ronay

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544 West 24th Street
June 28–August 22

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 amorphous 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.



View of "Wavelength," 2014.

— *Maya Harder-Montoya*

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BORDEAUX, FRANCE

"Secret Societies"

CAPC, MUSEE D'ART CONTEMPORAIN

The social turn, the pedagogical turn, the speculative turn. How many more "turns" can the art world put up with before getting too dizzy to stand up? One turn that I hope is here to stay, though, is the esoteric turn, with its passionate quest for the murky realms of the unknown. But how does one expose secretive practices without killing the mystery? Shouldn't the occult remain occult? Still, the timing of "Secret Societies: To Know, to Dare, to Will, to Keep Silence," curated by Alexis Vaillant and Cristina Ricupero and previously on view at the Schirn Kunsthalle Frankfurt, would seem to be perfect, given such disparate phenomena as WikiLeaks' "war on secrecy" and the US government's widely proclaimed yet more or less hidden "war on terror." The world is rife with conspiracy theories. And the art world itself can be seen as a huge secret society for the already initiated. If anything, curating a show on the subject might seem slightly redundant.

Entering the exhibition was like being admitted to a clandestine club in which a party might have been about to start at any minute. At the entrance, a bizarrely ornamented golden foot was leaning against the wall, looking like something from a parallel civilization. The artist behind this work, *Obst* (Fruit), 2008, is Steven Claydon, the British syncretist who loves to create installations representing all kinds of philosophical principles and deities. Further along, *The Somnambulist*, 2006, a wax doll representing an underfed, punky vampire by Goshka Macuga, lay peacefully on a gray carpet. To its left hung a nineteenth-century painting borrowed from a Masonic temple in Stuttgart, Germany, and a wall sculpture with totemic figures, *Double Cloak of Stars*, 2009, by Matthew Ronay. In the next room, *Karo Sieben* (Seven of Diamonds), 2007, a reconstructed chessboard by Ulla von Brandenburg, seemed to echo the typical decor of Masonic temples, perfectly accompanied by an astonishingly odd sculpture—*Font*, 2010, by Tim Ellis.

The exhibition's labyrinthine structure drew one onward. A couple of wooden figures, Enrico David's *Spring Session Men*, 2003, seemed to be caught up in a mysterious dance in front of a huge table piled with

documents about an imaginary male secret society. In the following rooms, one could find Brice Dellsperger's video *Body Double 22*, 2010, a burlesque remake of *Eyes Wide Shut*; Donghee Koo's 16-mm film transferred to DVD, *Overloaded Echo*, 2006, shows a bunch of world-weary people gathered around a naked man who seems about to be sacrificed or punished. Who knows? The film ends just before the denouement.

"Secret Societies" was an extremely staged show. But its visual grammar was well balanced, enabling a harmonious oscillation between the spectacular and the subtle. And there were some revealing juxtapositions—for instance, between Art & Language's *No Secret Painting X*, 2007, and two of Jenny Holzer's hermetic text eradications, *Water Board Zubaydah* and *Certified Interrogators*, both 2009. A neon installation by Cerith Wyn Evans figuring André Masson's headless figure for the cover of Georges Bataille's magazine *Acéphale* echoed Goldin+Senneby's mind-bending, Bataille-inspired installation *The Decapitation of Money*, 2010. Other outstanding individual works included Benedikt Hipp's painting *Baum am Rand einer Scheibe* (*Appendix*) (Tree on the Verge of a Disc [Appendix]), 2009-10, and Kenneth Anger's magnificent 1969 film *Invocation of My Demon Brother*. And there were many more, by fifty-two artists all told, not to mention the items that came directly from "real" secret societies. At the end, one wished only that the show itself had a secret room or the like, a *mise en abyme* offering a true initiation rite. But I guess some things are better left to the imagination.

—Sinzianna Ravini

Matthew Ronay,
Double Cloak of Stars,
2009, cotton, nylon-
waxed cord, fiber rush,
plastic, walnut, papier-
mâché, paint, plaster,
cotton, gold leaf,
8' 5" x 12' x 10". From
"Secret Societies."



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OPENING CEREMONY

Est. 2002

OPENING CEREMONY NEW NEWS



Matthew Ronay's incredible, mystical world

Mon, June 27

Surfaces and the Strange at Andrea Rosen

by SOFIA CAVALLO

On Thursday, Andrea Rosen Gallery opened two sets of work to the public. The first was Matthew Ronay's *Between the Worlds*, an enclosed, black-and-white *Where The Wild Things Are*-meets-Tim Burton forestial wonderland. The environment Ronay creates gives a creepy but cool sense of total displacement, with its spooky animals (owls and urchins and jellyfish—oh my), eerie totemic figures and mystical hanging feathers, eyes and beads.

In the second gallery, Rosen herself put together a succinct exploration of surface and texture that features Rita Ackermann, Richard Prince, Aaron Bobrow and Michael St. John. Peep our pics and be sure to stop by the gallery to see them in person!

International New York Times

ART & DESIGN | ART IN REVIEW

MATTHEW RONAY: “Between the World’s

By KAREN ROSENBERG AUG. 4, 2011

Andrea Rosen Gallery

Young artists, for the most part, haven’t been reading Joseph Campbell and Carl Jung since the heyday of Abstract Expressionism. Yet these authorities on myth are everywhere in Matthew Ronay’s immersive new installation, “Between the Worlds” (originally commissioned for Artpace San Antonio), which is both enchanting and a little embarrassing. It like walking into an early Pollock.

Viewers enter a large tent to find a black, white and gray landscape of tree trunks, mushrooms and volcanoes populated by totemic papier-mache figures. These sculptural elements, which have polytheistic titles like “Purging Cyclops Being” and “Oval Tree Double Owls Oceania,” are a little too friendly and puppetlike to stir the psyche. They look slightly lost, or at least appear to require some sort of ritual action.

That seems to have been the idea behind Mr. Ronay’s opening-night performance; he cocooned himself inside one of the sculptures, the tepeelike, crescent-topped “Masculine Pillar,” making only slight movements to alert viewers of his presence.

All of this is relatively new for Mr. Ronay, whose earlier sculptures were Pop-inflected, sex-obsessed and stridently political. And right now it doesn’t feel entirely authentic. But you trust that he, like Pollock, will emerge eventually from his primordial man-cave.

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THE NEW YORKER

GOINGS ON ABOUT TOWN: ART

MATTHEW RONAY

August 8, 2011

Ronay's immersive installation conjures an enchanted forest at dusk -- or at least a passable set for a production of Shakespeare's "The Tempest." Mushrooms sprout, owls glower from branches, and the grayscale palette makes the few colors pop, especially when they decorate the robes of towering totemic spirits lurking among the trees. It may verge on empty spectacle, but there's a certain escapist pleasure in wandering the grisaille wonderland. To paraphrase Caliban, Ronay's sweet airs give delight and hurt not.

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PORTFOLIO //TRENDS //SNEAK PEEKS //NEWSMAKERS

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 **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. Duvelyn, 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 works 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

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 or 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 for three hours. It's like a sweat lodge.

**MODERN PAINTERS**

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Brooklyn-based installation artist and enfant terrible Matthew Ronay has earned a reputation for sculpture and objets trouvés that push the semantic boundaries of humour and revulsion. His work from the early 2000s, moored on hypertrophic depictions of conspicuous consumption – both sexual and cultural – included odd juxtapositions of pop ephemera, from Curtis Mayfield to fried eggs to feline anuses.

Equally political and colourful, Ronay nonetheless abandoned this style by the end of the decade and began developing more integrated and muted environments that suggested phenomenological and anthropological influences. 'Between the Worlds', Ronay's most recent exhibition at Andrea Rosen Gallery in New York, is the consummation of these disparate impulses: an Arcadian haunt that combines the forest floor with the cosmic interiors of a theme-park ride, a kind of Bachelardian entanglement of nature and artifice.

ERIK MORSE: What were the major artistic, cultural and personal influences that led you to create 'Between the Worlds'? For me, this installation – if I can call it that – represents a secret lineage of 'interior artists' whose work in decorative arts, bricolage and artificial interiority include the earliest purveyors of Wunderkammer and dioramas, certain examples of trompe l'oeil and phantasmagoria, 20th-century auteurs like Georges Méliès and Busby Berkeley, early Hollywood set designers, artists including Cornell, Duchamp, Schwitters, Ed Kienholz and Tim Burton, as well as people like Sean Lally and Ernest Neto, all of whom have experimented in a discipline that is hard to define – namely, environmental or atmospheric installation.

MR: A lot of times I can't remember the things that inspire me... They float up inside me and transform me then disappear. Design-wise, I adore that static of Islamic patterns. Especially the tile work that I have seen in Topkapı Palace [in Istanbul]: patterns on top of patterns all created with an idea of interwovenness. The kilim's design and the process in which it is made are inseparable. Also the patterns are often referring to actual tales and function as a mnemonic device.

Joseph Cornell was my favourite artist from 16 to 20 – early on, I made boxes/constructions heavily inspired by him. I can't remember ever having been so excited to see a work in person. It wasn't so much that work in particular but just to see one of the boxes in person was amazing.



But the overall inspiration for ‘Between the World’ was more of a ‘feeling’ of space, an atmosphere: a forest in the night, lit by the moon, fog, on the verge of discovery and transformation. Low lighting is ideal for sculpture I think sometimes because it allows things to develop in space as you approach – kind of like fog does – meaning as you approach something it is easily misunderstood or difficult to see until you are upon it.



EM: Relatedly, I would say that there appears to be a shared or common artistic ‘procedure’ in your recent works that favors sculpture or installation that is immersive – often imagined or visualized through the experience of natural scapes, like the dark forest, the deep ocean, the thinly oxygenated ionosphere. I wonder how, for you, the ‘feeling’ of immersion is translated in terms of craft?

MR: I think the desire to immerse, envelope, or be bound comes from the year I spent doing sensory deprivation. The process of doing sensory deprivation consists of lying in a tank of highly salted water that is body temperature in complete darkness. What at first seems claustrophobic melts into a feeling of body disappearance. You are totally left to yourself and aim, I suppose, to leave it behind. I originally started doing the deprivation because I had heard that it invoked hallucinations, but after a couple of sessions, I found that it was much more useful as a meditation inducer.

Although at first the piece was envisioned as a type of tableau, in the end, the more I added to it, the more I think it became a place to calm down, much like the isolation tank.

EM: And is part of the pleasure of being enveloped in such a landscape also largely an effect of its inherent artifice or simulation of place, of somewhere else?

MR: Much in the same way that a dream allows you to experiment with things that may be off limits in awake time, the artificial forest allows you the limited scope of things to consider. A forest has infinite possibilities and therefore could cancel itself out in terms of attention span for some. I think in general the idea is to keep your mind enthralled and amazed

with the details while keeping it on the bigger picture. Nature provides this framework perfectly and though everyone knows that it is an endless well of harmony and enrapturing immersion it often takes a dissociative to start the engine.

EM: Does nostalgia or memory play a important role in the installation?

MR: In terms of memory or nostalgia, I think my younger years of sharing the basement with my older brother may have had a lasting effect on me. A basement for a teenager is a cave haven of narcotic-like sleep and privacy. My brother made psychedelic murals on the ceiling and light sculptures in the alcoves with Christmas lights and bed sheets. We also covered a large drop cloth in stencils of Malcolm McDowell's eye from *A Clockwork Orange*. The whole space was a trippy interior experiment with moody lighting and chill out coves... I hadn't put the two things next to each other but I think it may have been one of my earliest experiences with space transformation.

EM: Were you a devotee of the haunted house as a child? There's something about the installation that reminds me of the way that a carnival ride or haunted house might be sectioned off spatially to construct small, interconnected tableaux or 'rooms', which create a kind of miniature or occluding effect.

MR: Two memories that stick out to me are – first, one of those tiny haunted houses on a flatbed that they have at state fairs, or at least the ones back in the early '80s. You sit in a little bumper car and go around exactly as you described above. For me, though, the experience was heightened when one of the automated figure that jump out actually punched me in the face. Second was the haunted house at Disney World. It makes great use of scrims and space change. It blew me away as a child. What's nice about a haunted house is that it enhances your perception to a level that even the slightest movement or development is monumental.

EM: I've read numerous critics who have used the descriptors tribal and shamanic to contextualize 'Between the Worlds', and while I would not argue with these labels, I'm more intrigued by the way you flirt with concepts of 'home' and 'worlds', which, to me, are much less reductive than appealing to some form of atavism.



MR: I agree that tribal and shamanic can be limiting, but so can imaginative and whimsical. Whereas shamanic implies a usefulness that excites me. I do not think I am a shaman, of course, but I find that older works, or works from more isolated cultures have a great connection with use. 'Between the Worlds' hasn't been made with hundreds of years of tradition directly shaping its content and it isn't digested or followed in an organized way, therefore can't be used in the way a church or mosque can be for contemplation. But in a way it can be used to turn on the switch of observation and contemplation of this world and its reflection in another dream world that it is parallel to.

EM: While walking through the installation, I felt as though I were floating on the surface of some far-away planet. Yet I never felt exposed or 'homeless'. Could you tell me a bit about how such ideas of 'home' and 'world' shaped how you schematized the space of the installation?

MR: A common way of organizing space for me has always been the order in which things are made in the studio. My studio wasn't big enough to fit the entire piece inside it so some things had to be packed up and replaced by new things. Over time this created the general placement of the object inside the installations. I think that an idea of world that is essential is balance. This is the theme of lots of different spiritual places and people – that it must have a mirror or opposite to work

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Art in America



MATTHEW RONAY IN A DARK WOOD

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

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 Foss, 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.

museums, including the Museum 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 endur-



ing and transcendental qualities he felt his work lacked. He
**RONAY'S EARLY GROUPING OF FAMILIAR
 POP IMAGERY WITH BODILY FLUIDS,
 SEXUAL ORGANS AND OTHER FRAUGHT
 ITEMS LED TO ASSOCIATIVE MIND GAMES.**

became interested in the practice of alchemy and **the trans**

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

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 deposit." 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: vaginal-like 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 sperm-like 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.

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ARTFORUM

LOS ANGELES

Matthew Ronay MARC FOXX GALLERY

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 cartoonish male members injected 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 thematic 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 easily 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. Similarly, 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, berber 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 also 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 sticks 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 potential impact of these initial offerings demonstrates why beginning anew is such a time-honored tradition.

—Michael Ned Holte

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THE NEW YORKER

March 3, 2008

MATTHEW RONAY

With these six tight Rorschachian sculptures as: assembled from wood (polished walnut, pine, maple, oak), string, canvas, metal, and so on, Ronay veers into more contemplative, less whimsical territory, than in his last show at the gallery. Perhaps the times demand it. Unchanged is Ronay's impeccable craftsmanship and pristinely economical arrangements. Sections of his ambiguous rebuses suggest Islamic architecture, divining rods, sandbags, bottles, fern fronds—even a corpse. The accumulated mystery only increases with repeated viewing. Ronay is nothing if not deliberate and in control; viewers need only surrender to the reverie of free association.

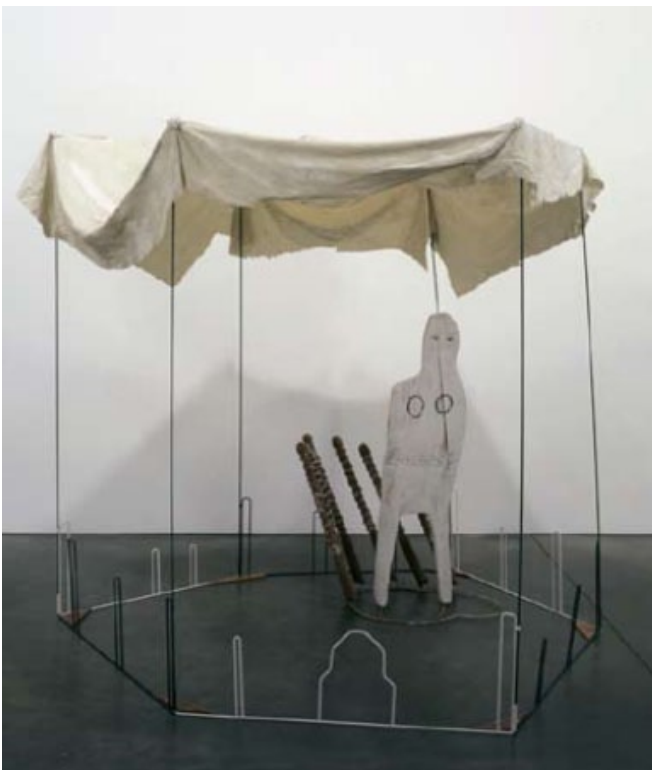
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ARTCAL

THE ZINE

Matthew Ronay at Andrea Rosen

By Deborah Fisher | Features, Reviews | February 5, 2008



Matthew Ronay is a good sculptor. He's not just making iconography in 3-D. He consistently tells a story about something larger than himself using our ideas about space and arranging objects to create interesting visual elds . I use Matthew Ronay's work when I am trying to explain the difference between a sculpture and an object to my students. He's definitely doing it right.

And when I teach really good students, I use Matthew Ronay's work to explain what happens when you do it a little too right, and do too little beyond that. His work tends to be very much of its sources. It's a little too Jessica Stockholder, and way too Paul McCarthy. It's all blustery talk about getting fucked by big black men, all cock-and-balls, but cute cocks and balls. With a candy coated shell, downright conservative execution, and very little placed on the line. The note he tends to hit is hip and imper- sonal. The idea of a disaster.

Transgression Lite.

But there are no outwardly transgressions currently on view at Andrea Rosen. And very little MDF. No bright colors, "shocking" guttural titles, blood or buttocks. No grass or landscape or freeway. Nothing glossy, nothing cartoony, nothing silly, no scatology. Go to Andrea Rosen and see for yourself. There is sensitive primitivism devoid of schtick. Some rich material choices and an overwhelming sense of the artist's hand at work. It's still on the conservative side, but it's not cool. It's representations of shelter instead of speed. It's Africa meets Sukkot meets the feeling of being adrift at sea. It's romantic and it's earnest.

The world as we know it must be coming to an end.

I'm half-serious. For all my grouching, I do understand what Ronay has been driving at since he left Yale. He's been talking about how it feels to be part of an empire that is about to fall. His vision has been airy, baroquely fucked up and internally inconsis- tent—just like the world we all negotiate.

Structure doesn't matter. Everything's ugly and shiny at the same time. He depends on surreal fragments because it's about the simulation of the thing instead of the thing itself, with humans forgetting that they are human, and human flesh rising up to meet the challenge of being ignored, but you can't see this nastiness because everything is gleaming like an iPod. The fact that Ronay's work bugged the crap out of me for years and mostly looked like hype could have meant that it was working. I can't argue with the fact that it t seamlessly into the zeitgeist.

The thing about this new show, with sculptures that are offering bowls and stacks of blocks and scraps of shelter, bearing somber titles like *Observance* and *Of Host*, is that it's just as real as the fast, glossy vision Ronay was offering in 2005. I feel very serious right now; we all do. And to walk around Andrea Rosen's gallery, knowing where Ronay is coming from and seeing what he is offering now, is to confirm that the destruction we are all wreaking has nothing to do with hype and is actually quite real. This body of work wears its earnestness heavily. The tight craft that made Ronay's older work pop looks frumpy and Puryear when extended to more precious materials. But whatever; this show also opens a door. Fast glossy fragments that cleave the status quo were once just the thing, and now they are nowhere near enough. I applaud Ronay for seeing this, and I hope this show is the beginning of a vision that he will continue to further articulate. With even more risk, a pinch of actual lightness instead of light talk, and less dependence on what is already known about sculpture.

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REVIEWS

Matthew Ronay

Issue 7 / January 2007

Officer, Officer, Officer, Officer!

2006

MDF, wood, steel, plastic bags, paint

195 x 230 x 161 cm

(c)the artist, courtesy of Andrea Rosen Gallery, NY

Art Review:

MATTHEW RONAY:

PARASOL UNIT, LONDON
 13 SEPTEMBER - 8 NOVEMBER

GOIN' DOWN' DOWN' DOWN

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, vari-

ously 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 influence the postwar nouveaux romans of French authors Alain Robbe-Grillet and Raymond Queneau, whose glittery rushes of descrip-

tion 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 Stella-referencing 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

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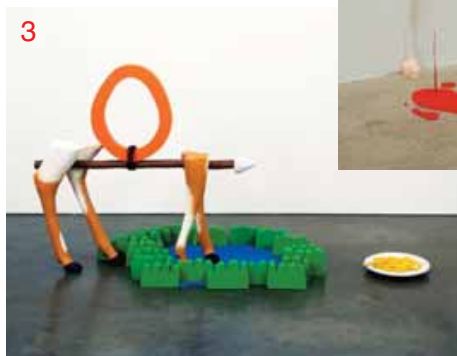


MATTHEW RONAY Goin' Down, Down, Down.

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 see 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,



ANOTHER MAGAZINE

ANOTHER WAY OF TWISTING REALITY

TEXT BY MARK SANDERS

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."

MATTHEW RONAY'S LATEST SCULPTURE IS ON SHOW AS PART OF THE EXHIBITION "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

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? •



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

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 perplexingly 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, simple 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 making sculpture as sitting in a corner dreamily playing with the idea of making sculpture. The work looks hand-made - which it is -



'Officer, Officer, Officer, Officer!', 2006

and it is over painted in a range of bright primary colours, or colors that lack any subtlety in their tonal range. It looks, jocularly cartoonish and, somewhat throw-away. It's made out of flimsy stuff, too, MDF, bits of old black bin bags, paper, string.

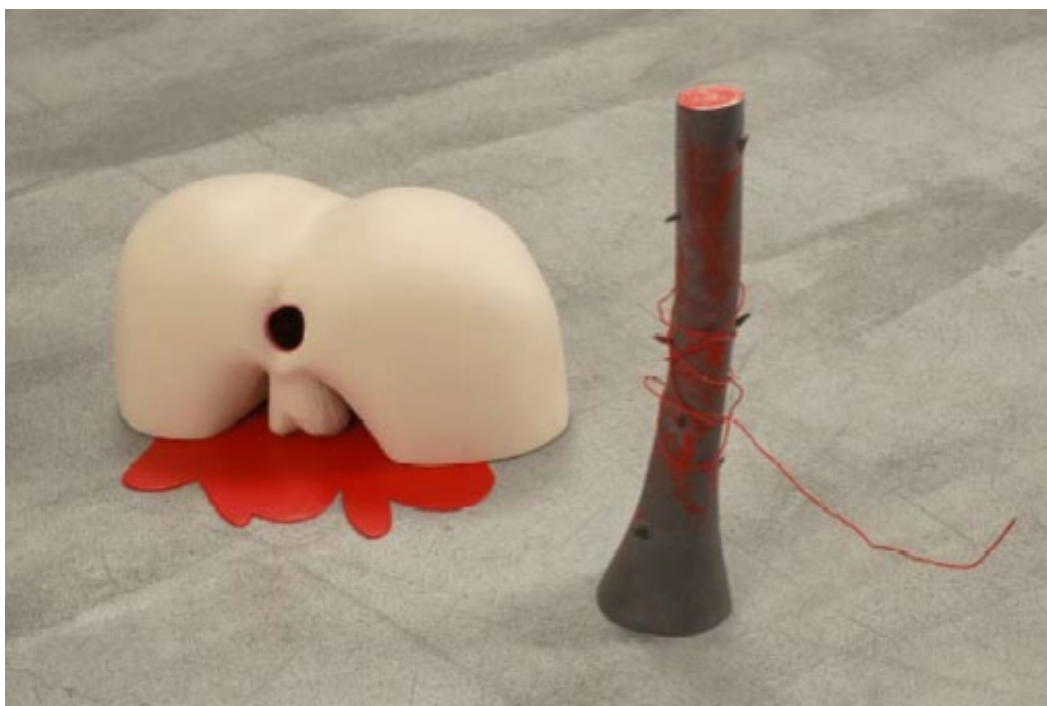
Then there is the subject mat-

ter: 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

ArtReview

December 2005

80
Future
greats



Matthew Ronay

Born Kentucky, 1976. Lives in Brooklyn, New York. Represented by Andrea Rosen Gallery, New York; Marc Foxx Gallery, Los Angeles

Sculptor Matthew Ronay in one sense works in the best tradition of the combine or assemblage, that is, the apparently incongruous combination of objects in the spirit of Surrealist experimentation. But his objects are all constructions in MDF, steel, wood, paint and the like, lending them the artisanal quality of handcrafted children's toys. Their arrangement in the gallery, often dotted about the floor at no more than knee-height, contributes to a sense that they are the aftermath of child's play, the product of reckless abandon. Their careful poise and eloquence, however, suggests deliberation and ulterior motives on the artist's part, and Ronay recently revealed a more sinister vision in his cartoon-like hanged men cut-outs shown in September at Marc Foxx.

future
greats 2005

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Art Review

MAY 2005 VOLUME LVI

Reviews

Debut Discovering emerging artists

Matthew Ronay

25 Feb-26 March
 Andrea Rosen Gallery, New York
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 www.andrearsengallery.com)

Review by Adam E Mendelsohn

I remember once walking home late at night and passing three piles of bricks neatly stacked outside the Saatchi & Saatchi building in downtown Manhattan. I couldn't help but wonder why the perfect little missiles hadn't been launched through the expansive panes of glass and into the soaring lobby - a lobby that seems to say: 'Fuck you, look at all of our precious real estate we simply wish to keep empty.' I wonder if Matthew Ronay felt this way when putting together 'It's an Uprising!', his first solo show at Andrea Rosen.

Ronay imagines a future world where genetic make-up holds sway. It's a world in which all success is predetermined by good genes, and every competition - from sports to the Oscars to presidential elections - is a fix. Ronay proposes that in such a future, an underclass of weaker-genet misfits are forced to find ingenious ways to survive in the face of an uncaring master race.

Ronay's sculptures look like big Play-Doh toys. The colours are bright and poppy, a palette borrowed from alphabet fridge magnets. It's a kiddie vernacular that belies Ronay's agile imagination and poet maudit leanings. Each of the eight pieces on show is made up of separate units that, when arranged together, generate nonfixed narratives. Like courtroom props, they operate as physical clues to fictitious scenarios. In *Epicenter World Series* (2004) we see a giant mouth, with a magic wand emerging from it, resting on a black hole which

in turn rests on a pitcher's mound. Off to the side is a pink basket filled with turds. In this piece, Ronay proposes an epic baseball game between the mutants and the genetically superior bad guys. To address the unfair advantage, the mutant team bury their own manure in the field, casting a spell of ownership over the turf. The mutant pitcher, represented here by clapperless bells, has a magic wand shot from his timetraveling team-mate's mouth, activating the bells and arming him with some extra magic.

Retards Discovering (Divining) (2004) begins with the notion that, in Ronay's future, mentally challenged people are overlooked

as having special skills. In this tableau, they have discovered the fountain of youth: the Holy Grail for the resistance. A mutant with a bizarre, testicular growth on its arm is seen triumphantly chilling out in a savaged tropical resort.

Strewn about the show is the post-riot landscape *Five eaded Cock in Drag* (2005). Amongst the littered gas cans, argyle socks and spaghetti is a mutant with cocks for fingers, having the jizz forcibly beaten out of his dangerously virile deformity. *Evil Vapor Hijacking* (2005) depicts a hound's nose in the act of sniffing out the underclass - except the underclass has discovered a way to disguise its

criminal odour. A noose hangs the smelly black vapour, literally killing the stench.

What shouldn't go unmentioned is Ronay's virtuoso fabrication of his objects. Although it isn't evident from looking at them, each piece has been designed to be assembled and dismantled like flat-pack furniture. Using nothing more than easily available materials and common house paint, the artist's materials obey his fluid, discursive imagination. Ronay makes child's play out of serious ethical quandaries, producing highly enjoyable images whose playful tone underscores dreadful real-life implications.



Above: Matthew Ronay, *Five Headed Cock in Drag*, 2004, MDF, steel, wood, paint - dimensions variable **Right:** *Epicenter World Series*, 2004, MDF, copper, paint, 134.6 x 172.7 x 104.1cm



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MATTHEW RONAY
ANDREA ROSEN GALLERY

Visitors who read a review before seeing Matthew Ronay's first solo exhibition at Andrea Rosen Gallery, or who had the temerity to ask questions of the gallery employees, were likely treated to some of the fantastical stories the artist invents to accompany his sculptures. The works in this show, titled "It's An Uprising!" are, purportedly, three-dimensional illustrations of a mythical future landscape with an underclass populated by, among others, severed limbs that act autonomously; mentally challenged people who can divine water sources; and a man with a five-headed penis who, because his proletarian virility makes him a target of recently deposed leaders aiming to stem the proliferation of their former subjects, is forced to dress in drag. Wordy yet ultimately inscrutable titles such as *Cat's Butt Hole in Role of Heaven in Reverse Rapture*, 2004, hint at this intriguingly kooky tale, which itself represents the outpouring of a relentlessly inventive mind. Whether or not you buy into Ronay's story—for each object here one is forced to do a lot of legwork—at the very least it gives some narrative coherence to the works on view.

But those not privy to Ronay's yarn-spinning—in other words, the overwhelming majority of visitors to the show—must have had a difficult time figuring out what to make of his agglomerations of small, brightly colored objects made of painted wood and/or MDF. Each of these looks like something borrowed from a painting by Tom Wesselmann or John Wesley, or a readymade appropriated from the shelves of a Bizarro World Toys 'R' Us. Scattered

across the floor, the visual juxtapositions they create are whimsical and inspired, proving that Ronay possesses a fantastic eye for color and form. But so adept is he at manipulating his two primary materials that every piece soon begins to look alike and craft almost becomes a nonissue.

In his earlier sculptures, Ronay often aligned each individual object more or less along an axis, implying causality—this object does this to that object, and so on. By contrast, this show's willful randomness sowed confusion (one work, for example, was split into five parts and dispersed around the gallery). It was hard not to ask why, in narrative terms, the mummified hands that shoot lightning bolts at fake trees shouldn't have been paired with the stack of money in a nearby piece, or why the "retard" next to a water fountain couldn't sidle up to the Rolling Stones-style grinning mouth in another work. The sculptures' toylike quality encourages the impulse to play with them, and this may be part of the point, given Ronay's apparent reluctance to prescribe a path through his exhibition.

Ronay has cited the re-envisioning of the traditional novel carried out by Italo Calvino and nouveau roman authors as an influence. Calvino, writing in *Cahiers du Cinema* in 1966, outlined a significant problem in comparing the visual medium of cinema to the novel: "The ability to vary the distance between the camera and the object ... makes for a notable difference between cinema and oral or written narrative, in which the distance between language and image is always the same." The interchangeable nature of Ronay's objects can be seen as an attempt to bridge that gap—to make each object like a word in a sentence—but his reticence

in revealing authorial intent leaves the viewer with precariously little to hold on to. We move through the gallery, zooming in (like a camera) on a bubbling water fountain, a banana, or a severed leg, but we are ill-equipped to piece any of it together. Unconventional narratives are prevalent in video, film, and fiction, but are less frequently deployed by object-makers. The irresistible conclusion here was that Ronay should make his tales more explicit, allowing viewers to assess not only his works' formal attributes but also his experiments in storytelling.

—Brian Sholis

ARTFORUM
Summer 2005 INTERNATIONAL

MODERN PAINTERS

December 2005



EMERGING
ARTISTS

MATTHEW RONAY

Joshua Mack on the dangers of overeating

A friend of Matthew Ronay wrote the word 'Gepeto' in blue tape on the door to the artist's workroom. The reference is apt, as is the misspelling: Ronay is a modelmaker with a twist. Around the room are pieces Ronay has just completed for his exhibition at Marc Foxx in Los Angeles. Two large blue hula hoops, each with what appears to be a used condom drooping from its top, lean in a corner. Along the floor, two penises, each with a bloody bite from its shaft, curl before a sloping board studded with burgers. An oval plane sprouts tall mushroom cocks. The colours are bright, playful, almost pastel. But, just as the story of Pinocchio, the wooden boy fashioned by Gepetto, is ultimately a tale of moral growth and self-realization, rather than a simple story about a puppet, Ronay's works are allegories about politics and society in the United States today, intended to suggest or to provoke thought and associations in viewers' minds.

'My sculpture,' Ronay explains, 'is about figuring out how to change the world with a poor medium. Looking at art is the same process as reading a novel, or it should be.' Meaning should unfold over time and with consideration. 'Many viewers want a superrational explanation of the work, as is the case with Matthew Barney's art; where the iconography is highly developed, interrelated and defined. I think Barney's work is amazing, but too many artists are willing themselves to appear clever. Not everything needs to make sense,' he adds. Instead, Ronay believes in an empirical relativism: the world randomly provides all kinds of image combinations. For instance, you may go outside in New York, where Ronay lives and works, and see a homeless person vomiting on a flower. Such a sight has no absolute meaning, but is open to individual reaction and interpretation.

A significant model for his method is the work of three musical acts of the 1970s, Earth, Wind and Fire, Curtis Mayfield and Mandrill, whose use of music and album covers to convey social messages were the subject of a body of work entitled 70s Funk Concert Model, pieces from which were included in the 2004 Whitney Biennial, and of a slide presentation Ronay sometimes



gives during studio visits or at art schools. As Ronay explains, Earth, Wind and Fire believed that the imagination was a potent means of self-assertion and that love and fantasy could ameliorate social, economic and political disenfranchisement. Their album covers are a visual exotica of sphinxes and dashikis, on which band members are shown with enormous Afros that symbolize their brainwaves swelling with power. Curtis Mayfield believed that domesticity, stable relationships, and ethical behaviour within the African-American community would foster empowerment. He recorded his 1973 album, *Back to the World*, for black soldiers returning to the US from the traumatic and isolating experience of combat in Vietnam. The Mandrill, in contrast, pursued a hip internationalism, showing the black, Latino and white members of the band on their album covers, to convey a message of social integration and equality.

Inspiration from a time of war and social flux is apt. In his most recent work, Ronay was thinking about the effect of violence on American society, the fear of it in the form of terrorism and the indifference to it in Iraq. 'We're in a time when fear, pain and violence have replaced pleasure. Sex is a good way to UI).cover

Above
Obese EclipsedCock,
2005, MDF, Durron and
paint, 109 x 15x 254 eM'
COURTESY MARC FOXX GAL-
LERY,

LOS ANGELES
Opposite, clockwise
frem top /left

PeedjCummedOn,
2005, MDF, wood, steel,
paint, 84x 180x81 eM
COURTESY MARC FOXX GAL-
LERY,

LOS ANGELES
Wiping Away Drips
Obsolete, 2005, wood,
paint, 170x86xgeM
COURTESY MARC FOXX GAL-
LERY,

LOS ANGELES
Matthew Ronay, 2005
PHOTO: KARSTEN KREJCAREK
COURTESY THE ARTIST AND
ANDREA
ROSEN GALLERY, NEW YORK

that because it's super-specific yet super-common. It has so many areas yet is a universal urge,' he explains. Next to the two blue hula hoops in his studio is a gruesome, two-part work: several 'scalped' and bloody assholes are skewered on a pole like collected trophies while a hand strokes an erection in response. In another work, a bloody, trumpet-shaped stick stands next to a man's up-ended hind quarters, an image which could refer to the demonization of anal sex by the political right, to the sexual humiliation visited upon prisoners at Abu Ghraib, or the general way in which questioning masculinity has become political blood sport of late: think of Arnold Schwarzenegger's reference to 'Girlie Men' as an epithet for those who questioned President Bush's policies during the past presidential campaign.

But, Ronay insists, the interpretations of his work should be different for everyone, because in the current world everyone needs to analyze information for themselves. To me, the piece in which two bitten penises curl before hamburgers suggests the ways in which Americans have lost their agency to mass consumerism. 'That could be it,' Ronay says, 'but it's also like you ate too many burgers and you can't see your dick anymore.'

Los Angeles Times

Art: Matthew Ronay's Miniature Stage Sets

Miniature World: To step into Matthew Ronay's first solo show is to find yourself in a Lilliputian land where logic does a loop-the-loop. At Marc Foxx Gallery, the 25-year-old Brooklyn-based artist turns the world upside-down by transforming familiar things into miniature stage sets. An abundance of stories dance off in every direction. Some get your imagination to fly through the air with the greatest of ease. Others tug against its stick-in-the-mud stubbornness with a willfulness all their own.

Imagine what would happen if Rene Magritte and Joan Miro were hired to design a McDonald's Playland for cats or hamsters, and subcontracted the paint job to John Wesley. There's serious whimsy at work in Ronay's enchanting sculptures, all of which are handcrafted from various combinations of wood, paper, metal and string, then painted in a crayon palette.

All but five of his 22 multi-part pieces rest on the floor, rarely rising above your ankles. The exceptions are "Pipe trick," G "Peacock on cage cover," "Flaccid bee" and "Elephant on beach on overcast day," which include components mounted low on the wall. "Wig n' hoop" is a 3-D diptych that hangs from the rafters like a circus stunt frozen at its most suspenseful moment.

To stand in the gallery is to have a bird's-eye view of dozens of such scenarios, stop-action dramas in which a lot has already happened but the best is yet to come. For example, the teeter-totter-like structure of "Fable on faux art deco diving board" balances a fox's bushy tail against a plump cluster of purple grapes, playing both off against a bird's nest that rests on a Y-shaped branch, which would make any slingshot-coveting kid green with envy. In Ronay's hands, Aesop's fable about sour grapes becomes a springboard for metaphors that beget more and more metaphors, weaving a web of potentially infinite complexity.

People almost never appear. But plants, animals and inanimate objects are filled with enough loopy symbolism to amuse even the unimaginative. Ronay's works are also endowed with just the right touch of deadpan pathos to redeem the world-weary.

In "Magic trick," a houseplant sprouts a pair of hamburgers whose meat is cooked when a nearby boom-box plays rap songs. In "A boating incident," a crow perches on a tennis shoe's tip and stares intently at a slice of Wonder Bread, on which rests an upended picnic table's top and a big black dice. In others works, a hobo's sack acts as if it were Evel Knievel; a fluffy bunny tries its luck at a steeple chase; and a grasshopper escapes from the three musketeers (plus one sidekick) by leaping over a pond and three shamrock-shaped trees.

All is not fun and games in Ronay's vignettes, some of which depict the aftermath of an avalanche, a futility-inspired fit, the grim reaper's tiny scythe and an ice-cream cone that's fallen to the ground. His charming art feels as if its core has been formed by the silver linings he has found in rain clouds, after the storms have subsided and the sun has begun once again to shine.