Michael Rees: Large and Moving

Works in the Exhibition
All dimensions h x w x d in inches unless otherwise noted

Putto 4 over 4, 2004
Luminore iron on fiberglass over styrofoam with a steel tube armature
145 x 87 x 138
Courtesy of the artist and bitforms gallery, New York

Putto 4 over 4 Vector Animation, 2003-2004
Dimensions variable
Special thanks to Seong-Joon Lee
Courtesy of the artist and bitforms gallery, New York
A2, 1999
Stainless steel, graphite, epox resin
5 3/16 x 22 1/2 x 1/2
Courtesy of the artist and bitforms gallery, New York
Putto, 1993-98
PVC and polyurethane with casein paint
14 x 10 x 7
Courtesy of the artist
Zappled, 1992
Plastic skull, plaster/cine, pencil
8 1/2 x 9 1/2 x 7
Courtesy of the artist

Education
Vassar College, 1976-78
BFA, Kansas City Art Institute, 1979-1982
MA, Yale University, 1991

Selected One Person Exhibitions
Sculpture Large, Small, and Moving, bitforms gallery, New York, 2003
Project Room, Gorney Bravin + Lee, New York, 2002
Ten, Universal Concepts Unlimited, New York, 2002
Artificial v.s, The Henry Block Space, Kansas City, MI, 2000
Artificial Sculpture, Forum for Contemporary Art, St. Louis, MI, 1999

Selected Recent Group Exhibitions
Byre, Nissan County Museum of Art, Key West, FL, 2004
The Domino Effect, Santa Fe Art Institute, NM, 2004
Consciousness and Process in the Work of Michael Rees and Michael Somoroff, K59, Cologne, Germany, 2003
in Media Res, Exit Art, New York, 2003
Beyt Komban Fine Art, Istanbul, Turkey, 2002

look. look again.

The Aldrich Contemporary Art Museum
258 Main Street, Ridgefield, CT 06877
Tel 203.438.6179, Fax 203.438.0198, www.aldrichart.org

It is the mission of The Aldrich Contemporary Art Museum to be a national leader in the exhibition of significant and challenging contemporary art with an emphasis on emerging and mid-career artists, a world-class innovator of museum education programs, and a vital cultural resource for our community.

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Michael Rees: Large and Moving
September 19, 2004 – January 5, 2005
The Aldrich Contemporary Art Museum

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The following interview between the artist and Richard Klein, The Aldrich's director of exhibitions, was conducted via email in August 2004.

R.K.: You’ve always been interested in how process-driven your sculpture is. What series of steps led to the creation of Patto 4 over 4?

M.R.: Yes. Process... One is always a little reluctant to focus on process for fear that it marks the work: it might be all that’s there. At the same time, process adds layers of meaning and suggests them too. Real work can no more ignore the content that process offers any more than it can be wholly conceptual. And process is sensual.

R.K.: Of steps led to the creation of Patto 4 over 4?

M.R.: Years back, when I was fed up with showing in galleries (this was at a time of crisis in creative practice for me, I didn’t feel supported by the system in any way) I thought I was making a transition towards industrial design. During that time I did an inordinate amount of research into automatic fabrication technologies. Partly I would imagine ways to use this stuff creatively and I would publish these things in engineering magazines. It was fun to be an artist in some other world and it reflected the burgeoning aspect of multiple practices: where people would be many things in a day.

To that end, I wrote an article about the uses of automatic manufacture in the film industry. I laid out a scenario where from animation files of the Batmobile, and the virtual body, and finally, for the large sculpture, choose a series of “frames” of steps led to the creation of Patto 4 over 4.

R.K.: Your recent work, besides exhibiting a change of scale, is involved with both the science of animal locomotion and the poetry of choreography. What led to this change in direction?

M.R.: I once heard a lecture by the noted scientist Robert Full. He studies the locomotion of land animals and insects. It opened up a world of possibility about how to animate things that were stuck in a clumsy sedentary state. It was one of the important stops as I began my climb into this new work. He showed his high-speed films of cockroaches navigating obstacle courses and picking up objects, on clear Plexiglas, and the motion simulations of possible and impossible animals he is an updated Maybridge project. The poetry part came in as we worked to interpret the models. Typically, I assembled dozens of parts in dozens of pieces looking for the right piece. At that point my animator, Seong Joon Lee, and I pass it back and forth. He interprets the pieces and I respond. Joon and I don’t speak the same language except when it comes to form and motion. This situation becomes less linguistic, because I can’t explain it to him, and more performative. I’m often hopping around the room to demonstrate movements that I want. I imagine that this is a lot more like the process of music and performing.

R.K.: Your work looks to the future, and contains both visionary and cautionary undertones concerning science. What role has science fiction played in your practice so far?

M.R.: Science fiction is a great touchstone in my practice. I am a science fiction special effects freak (isn’t everyone?). The interesting thing about working with the Hollywood technologies is the issues that arise. Should artists stay out of it because they can’t get the budgets? Or should they dive into the fray? Hollywood is reinventing academic sculpture. The animators and modellers take their work very seriously and it’s amazingly accomplished. Bay Raitt is a Hollywood special effects guy who is the most talented modeler I’ve ever seen. His work is completely distinctive and I feel that I can pick it out in Lord of the Rings. I think my work can converse within the science fiction genre and also speak to a tradition that includes Phillip Guston and Carroll Dunham.

Although you cannot easily detect this, the pieces are intuitively derived. They are developed in a way that is similar to an animated process such as drawing, that we all know I draw in 3-D within the animation programs. My sketchbook is direct 3-D. We do not work by storyboarding our project, like typical animators. Instead, we find our way.... It creates great technical problems, but increases intimacy, vulnerability, and intuition within the sculptures—both the virtual ones and the physical ones. I think the next generation’s culture will see this in the work where adults above the age of thirty currently cannot, or have a harder time discerning it. As I said, I feel that I can tell which work is Bay Raitt’s and which isn’t.

R.K.: Now that you are making large-scale figurative work your sculpture enters a continuum from Egyptian, Indian, and Classical art, through Michelangelo and the Renaissance, to Henry Moore. What are your thoughts on this?

M.R.: My work is not a classical, perceptual, description. It’s about 3-D sampling, a bit like music sampling: about the construction of parts and pieces that are digitally mandant, not about the observation of the real and its reetermination. My sculptures are constructions and reconstructions of parts that I’ve made and that other people have made, or scanned. And they are pruning and forth through various optical interactions that are much more like sharing files or music or energy or shit than about the academic aspect of modeling. At the same time, having grown up in postmodernism, history has always been an available material. I am smitten by Benini. And it is equally true that I am smitten by classical Hindu sculpture, notably the Shiva Nataraja bronzes. In some ways this work is a way of coming to grips with visionary sculptures in the Hindu tradition, sur-realism in the 1920s European sense, and hyper surrealism of the present. This has been a consistent interest of mine going back to the Aja Spin Series (some of which were exhibited at The Aldrich), and to my finger pieces from 1993-95.

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