

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, 2:18, 2003-2004

Dimensions variable

Special thanks to Seong Joon Lee

Courtesy of the artist and bitforms gallery, New York

AS, 1999

Stereolithograph, epoxy resin

5 3/4 x 22 x 5 1/2

Courtesy of the artist and bitforms gallery, New York

Putto, 1993-94

PVC and polyurethane with casein paint

14 x 10 x 78

Courtesy of the artist

Exploded, 1992

Plastic skull, plastiscene, 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

MFA, Yale University, 1989

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.5, The Henry Block Art Space, Kansas City, MI, 2000

Artificial Sculpture, Forum for Contemporary Art, St. Louis, MI, 1999

Selected Recent Group Exhibitions

Byte, Nassau County Museum of Art, New York, 2004

The Domino Effect, Santa Fe Art Institute, NM, 2004

Consciousness and Process in the Work of Michael Rees and Michael

Somoroff, K99, Kologne West, Germany, 2003

In Media Res, Exit Art, New York, 2003

From Code to Commodity: Genetics in Visual Art, The New York Academy of

Sciences, New York, 2003

Fetish Human Fantastic, Boursein Gallery, Istanbul, Turkey, 2002

BitStreams, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, 2001



look. look again.

The Aldrich Contemporary Art Museum

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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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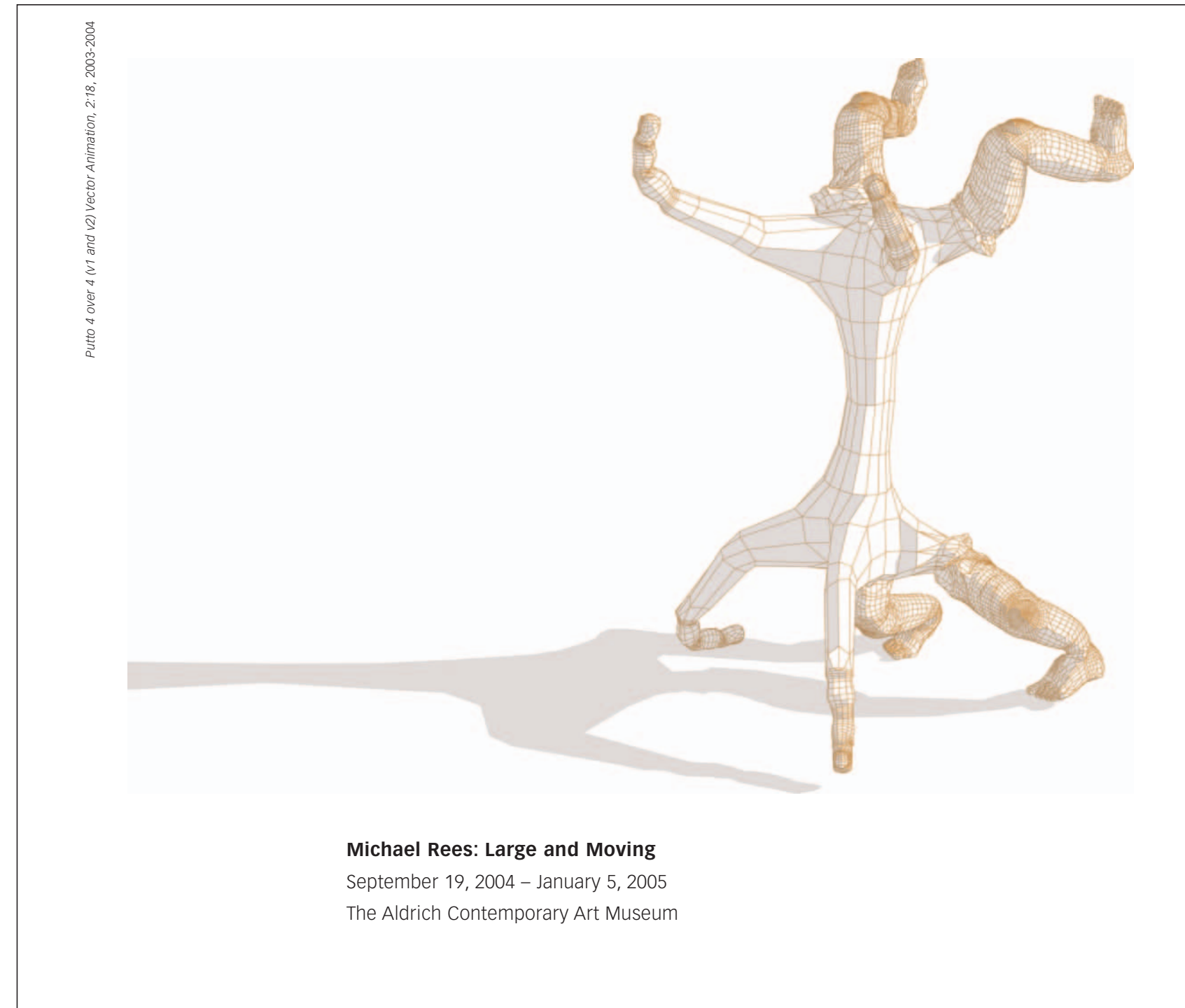
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Michael Rees: Large and Moving

September 19, 2004 – January 5, 2005

The Aldrich Contemporary Art Museum

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

R.K.: I've always been interested in how process-driven your sculpture is. What series of steps led to the creation of *Putto 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.

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 data they created, one could manufacture the toy prototypes, the molds for making the final plastic injection part, and the life-size car body to be used in the movie. This reflects the fluid interaction of information that is the computer: the same data is routinely repurposed to different modes as determined by the author's intent.

In my work I build the virtual bodies, rig them up like puppets, animate the rig (and the virtual body), and finally, for the large sculpture, choose a series of "frames" of the animation. Those frames are three-dimensional, and can be exported to rapid

prototyping or CNC (computer numerical control) milling. Rapid prototyping is an automatic additive construction technique while the CNC milling is subtractive: it carves away at a block of material.

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 geckos climbing on clear Plexiglas, and the motion simulations of possible and impossible animals: his is an updated Muybridge 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 undercurrents 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 modelers 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 art 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



Left to right: *Exploded*, 1992; *Ajna Spine Series 5p* (detail), 1998

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.

I really marvel at some of the things I see in films nowadays, however ridiculous. And I marvel at the older myths, the golems and the sphinxes. It's sort of all mixed up now and impossible to untangle. We constantly create new images and metaphors to describe reality. Everyone from Donald Rumsfeld and his multi-headed terrorist hydras to *Alien* and *Predator*, the ultimate psycho-symbolic threat to all of humanity. They've made it such a huge threat that in the new version, *Alien vs. Predator*, humans aren't even the subject anymore; we're just caught in the middle. Our imaginations are bigger than ourselves and bigger than our reality. Why not troll around in there?

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 manifest, not about the observation of the real and its reinterpretation. My sculptures are constructions and reconstructions of parts that I've made and that other people have made, or scanned. And they are passed back and forth through various software iterations that are much more like sharing files or music or energy or chi 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 Bernini. 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, surrealism in the 1920s European sense, and hyper surrealism of the present. This has been a consistent interest of mine going back to the *Ajna Spine Series* (some of which were exhibited at The Aldrich), and to my finger pieces from 1993-95.

I might also add that at an important point in my development I was influenced by the writings of Stella Kramrisch about classical Indian sculpture. I guess I'm as much interested in the Indranet as the Internet.



Putto 4 over 4, construction view at the CNC mill