

Susan Hobbs

feelers

27 June to 15 August 2009

organized by Jen Hutton

feelers presents a selection of works that explore, using varying modes of production, articulations of foreign bodies. Defined as sensory or tactile organs that probe their surroundings, these eponymous appendages appear in and visually connect the works by these three artists. Similarly, in another, more obvious sense, feelers indicate a certain sensitivity or intuitive approach to the making of the work. Their formal affinities arise from anomalous—and undeniably comic—anatomies that, more or less, hang in empty spaces. Within these voids, the bodies toss out feelers of their own—testing the water with tentative suggestions.

Sandra Meigs' ever-changing output from the recent past and present—including a selection from her *Ride* series, which was first exhibited at Susan Hobbs Gallery in 2004—is reexamined in this context. In *Ride*, Meigs literally sculpted her conjoined hybrids on the canvas: successive layers of gesso were built up on the surface and repeatedly incised with a tool to delineate the forms. Side by side, the vivid chimeric silhouettes of *Boy with a Rabbit on his Head* and *Girl Kissing Ducks* pop to the foreground, defining the archetypal Gestalt illusion in positive. Like this old optical trick, Meigs has created a mock multistable image by doodling additional faces and figures within the stark background, their presences swelling to consume the interstitial voids.

Similarly, Arlene Shechet's ceramic forms also probe the potential of negative space. It is clear that the purpose of a container is to contain: by creating a separation between inside and outside it implies a void or an empty volume. Her bloated and distended vessels, with trunk-like spouts acting as ineffective endoscopes to what lies within, assume a variety of amorphous forms, strange but not completely foreign. While this new work could be viewed as iconoclastic—her practice has long focused on Eastern philosophy and religion—these forms are expressions of the sacred in the Batailleian sense of the term, manifesting as the exhalations of the abject body.

The untethered figures in Sarah Masecar's drawings also refer to the corporeal, appearing as disemboweled innards from a larger beast. In truth, they are individual studies of push puppets—small, plastic toys whose articulated limbs collapse with the press of a spring-loaded button—that the artist has remade, using the same lengths of thread originally strung through them. In their haphazard state, these delightful yet unsettling objects are deconstructed further in her blind contour drawings—where the eyes remain on the subject of the drawing and do not drift to the paper. This strategy is not unlike Masecar's meticulous deconstruction and remaking of readymade objects in other parts of her practice. It is a conscious attempt to insert herself into an industrialized manufacturing process, as well as a tactile understanding of the object by picking apart the parts that make up the whole. Here Masecar relies more on intuition, positioning the eye, the hand and the mind in a relationship of trust to trace the physical object poised in a state of collapse.

On the second floor, a brand-new architectural interior by Meigs presents a body of a different sort. Her monochromatic painting of a vacant architectural interior on display beside Shechet's swollen grey form poised atop structural timber is an apt visual and thematic pairing. It is a relationship that reemphasizes how these empty spaces can be hollow yet "heavy", as it is there—along with the doodles, semi-automatic marks, and other manipulations within these vacancies—that slippages are activated between their physical counterparts, alluding to what may be repressed.

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