

BODY OBJECTS

Body Objects tend to be laboriously made things that register a separateness from their makers. They are witty, chilly, lecherous, warm, inviting, grotesque, and distant. The contrary values they present neutralize each other, clearing space for an emergent autonomy—they haven't yet decided what they are. Whether they are composed of sleekly refined industrial materials, like Daniel Widrig's satin sandblasted aluminum chair, or grown in nutrient baths, like Jennifer Sirey's bacterial sculptures, Body Objects often convey organicism and artificiality at once. This speaks to something specific in our technological moment—bio-engineering, artificial intelligence, and generative design software are all corroding categorical clarities around “the grown” and “the made.”

It can be difficult to concisely describe the conceptual background radiation that silhouettes Body Objects. For instance, bifurcating “the grown” and “the made” touches on the way that we perceive animacy to arise, subside, and pass between matter. Which can't be fully probed without becoming involved with the perennially contested divides between the mind and the body, a being and a thing. Which can hardly be mentioned, today, without checking the hourly consensus on whether AI has achieved personhood yet. This unwieldy conceptual interplay is precisely what Body Objects announce—they mark out the place where ontological streams collide, roil, and froth.

Artificial Intelligence brings us to the question of how a material substance, mere silicone and electricity, can render something with which we can meaningfully

communicate. That seems to me to be exactly what art objects do. Just as artificial intelligence is inscrutable in its cogitations even to the programmers who write its code, when we encounter an innovative artwork we must attempt to decipher an unfamiliar grammar, the formal and conceptual orientation around which its form has congealed. Art appreciation takes as a first premise what AI is just prompting technologists to debate: objects can speak, they can reach out to us, and we can attempt to learn their language.

The “beinghood” of Body Objects is often expressed as a throttled, explosively unsettled energy—an energy that is resisting categorical containment. In Serban Ionescu’s *Ducty #2*, a torso of weathered wood functions in the manner of a storage chest. From this, an air duct shaped neck cranes upward and outward until it terminates in the bifurcated halves of a playfully sinister face. Each of *Ducty #2*’s face-halves swing open on hinges, revealing a gaping portal—a vacuous emptiness. It is at once leering, wounded, playful, menacing, precisely assembled, and sloppily arranged. It enjoys the tension of uncertainty, the potency of potentiality—its contradictory composition summoning to mind John Gray’s definition of a human being as “a civil war on legs.” The lavish vitalism rubs against the mundanity of the domestic typology. This civil war could be something to store socks in.

In *Germinal*, his novel dealing with the brutalizing conditions of coal mining in 19th century France, Zola observes that upturned coal bins exhibit, “the mute dejection of mere things.” But this phrase is contradictory. “Mute dejection” is not mute—but resonant and vivid. In so far as we read the world to ourselves, it communicates with us. Art Objects concentrate our attention on the strangeness of this—of attempting to unspool streams of non-verbal language from “mere things.” Body Objects make this strangeness, the eerie

sense of the art-object looking out at us, or looking away from us, central. In Sam Stewart's *Sleepyhead*, two dormers emerge like hooded eyes from an angled panel coated in asphalt shingling. Scaled somewhere between an actual house and an oversized dollhouse, the work is playfully anthropomorphic. It looks out at the traffic of the art gallery with unconcealed disinterest. What we make of it it could care less—it is preoccupied with its own interiority.

-Brecht Wright Gander

The Body Objects exhibit includes the work of: Ivana Basic, Jake Couri, Kim Farkas, Brecht Wright Gander, Keely Golden, Duyi Han, Serban Ionescu, Dae Uk Kim, Minjae Kim, Nik Kosmas, Leo Orta, Harrison Pearce, Jennier Sirey, Zelda & Georgia b. Smith, Sam Stewart, Daniel Widrig