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Delicacies

Michelle Carla Handel

Claremont Graduate University

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Michelle Carla Handel

Statement

February 22, 2011

My work initiates a conversation about corporeal strangeness by creating ambiguity or mystery where simultaneous qualities of sensuality, vulnerability, and disgust exist. I create contradictions, subverting pleasing or friendly forms with uncomfortable qualities to elicit a sort of visceral consternation. Cues pointing in different directions can remain simply experiential or they can refer to the complexity of the body and raise questions about human attitudes towards it. Abstraction is used as a visual shorthand or entry point to the body in an effort to describe commonality among humans rather than emphasizing their differences. In this way, there is more freedom to relate to the objects in an individualized manner. I want these forms to occupy space in a similar way that a body or a body's parts can, and I embrace the humor and awkwardness of the objects as they sit, hang or droop. This work celebrates the body's myriad functions and purposes, exploring the overlap between flesh that is idealized, scorned, adorned and protected.

The exaggeration and repetition of forms in some of the pieces suggests an absurd obsessiveness about the body. These distended forms seem at once infant-like and hyper sexualized but also possess a comic or cartoonish quality. The repeated swollen forms and mounds evoke ideas of mutation or an out-of-control body, but also genetic modification, bioengineering, or other efforts to control or 'perfect' the body. Skin-like textiles wrapped around forms allude to both surgical alteration and garments designed to push or constrict flesh. Harness-type apparatuses and fabric constraints are stretched around or used to suspend fleshy forms that need to be protected or contained while simultaneously emphasizing or hiding specific parts. I exaggerate ideas of the body's natural condition in order to draw attention back to its fragility and unpredictability.

The shiny, rubbery, surfaces of these pieces often give them a living quality which can elicit a sort of uneasiness while simultaneously playing up a sensual artifice. The tactile nature is significant: rubbers that emulate skin or muscle, textiles that cover, decorate and protect flesh, materials that simulate the stretchy, malleable quality of living tissue and respond to the physical properties of our world the same way the body does. Sometimes a rigid substrate of plaster or wood functions like bone to support outer layers of other material. I elaborate on this idea of artifice masquerading as flesh, wanting the objects to exist for the viewer in an area that is simultaneously familiar and foreign. Ultimately my aim for these objects is that they offer some kind of immediate visceral appeal or beauty which acts as an entry point into more demanding ideas about the body's various conditions.