

Untitled #122, 1993
Wood, fabric and glue, 12 × 13 × 10 in.
Gift of the Richard H. Mumper Estate
1994.149



Ross Rudel

Born Billings, Montana, 1960. Lives and works in Los Angeles.

THE CRAFTSMANSHIP CENTRAL TO THE sculptural work of Ross Rudel—most conspicuously the facility and elegance of his woodcarving technique—can sometimes overshadow the other formal and conceptual subtleties at play, a fact that is not lost on the artist. His bulbous, biomorphic abstractions are rooted in minimalist geometric ideals and material specificity, but they deliberately impede their easy absorption as reductionist archetypes by making tactile and metaphorical allusions to the human body, as well as to other organic phenomena such as vegetables, clouds, sea anemones, and paranormal geological formations.

Untitled #122 comes from Rudel's most emphatic period of visceral subversion, a period during which a few works in a series would emphasize an almost lewd corporeality that skewed the reading of the less confrontational works. This particular piece is a prime example. In spite of its gourd-like outline and hues, it possesses what the artist refers to as "a wet tee-shirt quality" deriving from its distinctly orificial contours,

its slick-looking surface, the explosive cascade of yellowish carpenter's glue drizzles, and the manner of its presentation—hung just above eye level to ensure a literal "in your face" attitude. But the single most erotically insinuating formal device of #122 is Rudel's use of tightly stretched material that covers the form to simulate skin, a common feature in his work of the early 1990s. Rudel approached this technique as an aspect of his artistic process, as a form of personal ritual. When the material was rawhide this process would sometimes take many hours of sustained physical exertion. In other instances the faux-skin possessed hermetic personal associations—as is the case for #122, which is encased in a section of discarded bed sheet.—DOUG HARVEY