

Baker, Kenneth "End of the Century Art: Production in Los Angeles", essay from "Panza: The Panza di Biumo Collection at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles" catalog, 1999

Found objects figure in quite a few works in Panza's recent gift to MOCA, but in Ross Rudel's sculpture we cannot tell whether what we see is found, industrially fabricated or handcrafted. Some of Rudel's wall pieces are intended to be hung at a height that puts them out of reach. The sensory information that might tell us what kind of thing we are seeing is deliberately withheld, as if the sculpture were abstract icons of the fact that human knowledge has limited reach. Paradoxically, Rudel's sculptures evoke organic forms: heads, polyps, the jointed thoraxes of ants, or chains of complex molecules. The scale of objects such as Untitled No. 107 and Untitled No. 115 (White) makes it hard to decide whether they are meant to be read. Are they models of things normally unavailable to the senses or idealizations of familiar forms? In any case we cannot rest easy with the notion that they are merely abstract. They are disquieting presences that hover between surrealism and a nostalgic ideal of formal asperity. (Some seem indebted to the early plastic pieces of Robert Irwin.) Like the work of Therrien, Carroll, and Lere, Rudel's suggests that there is no longer any distance to which forms can withdraw to be "pure", that is, free of all reference.

