

Oh, Hard, Happy Day

by Eve Wood

Ross Rudel, "Heads and Clubs," May 9-June 14, 2003, at Angles Gallery, 2230 Main Street, Santa Monica, Ca. 90405

Ross Rudel is a devotee of the god of elegance. In his most recent show at Angles Gallery in Los Angeles, he once again, as is his way, confounds with beauty, all the while riding the undercurrent of dissent.

These sculptures, finely carved wands mounted on the wall, are quite obviously hard but not happy, though viewers who continue looking, strangely, feel at peace, perhaps even happy. Inspired by "the symbolically charged clubs of antiquity," Rudel's sculptures are majestic and ethereal, a difficult combination to pull off in any art practice. As the title "Heads" suggests, these pieces are indeed bats and bludgeons. However, they beat against the unconscious with soft, subtle blows.

In *# 366 Brain*, Rudel has forged a human spine from a piece of stained wood, which extends out from the wall, and up, transmogrifying at its end into the likeness of a human brain. The piece is complicated in that it is a literal representation of that ineffable "gray matter," yet it also implies the notion that violence is encoded in the genes. Before we bustled through cities, we carried clubs, and now, we use our brains in place of them.

Rudel's homage to human anatomy is haunting. In *#364 Heart*, yet another club extends up, a human heart grown out of the wood. Again that disturbing disjunction between the fragility of the human body and a hard, utopian order. *#367 Cell* fuses in wood the complex marriage of the double helix (DNA) culminating at the top in a white blood cell. Again, the soft, supple body is extracted from the stringency of the wood. Oh, hard, happy day!



Ross Rudel
#366 Brain
2003

at Angles Gallery, Los Angeles



#364 Heart

EVE WOOD is a poet whose new book, *Love's Funeral*, is published