

Ross Rudel at Angles

Usually we think of arousal in an erotic context, though it actually denotes any state of heightened awareness and attention. In such a state, we might find ourselves holding our breaths, fixed on the moment, then releasing tension and breath with a sigh of relief as the moment passes. That process of bodily tension and release has been exploited to good effect in two recent exhibitions in which a palpable sense of inner pressure is embodied through different formal means. In both, spheres and curved surfaces are pushed into intriguing metaphoric territory, bringing together an elegant sense of construction with insights into bodily experience.

Ross Rudel's recent sculptures at Angles continue the artist's ongoing exploration of sensuous protuberances and orifices, in which an apparently deadpan formalism belies an almost menacing subtlety. These elegant works appear to draw upon tropes that are among the cornerstones of Modernism, such as the appropriation of "primitive" cultures, as well as postmodernism's body consciousness. The crafted bundles of membranous folds and bulbous curves suggest the body, of course—swollen forms that seem to be in various states of excitation, tissues tumescent with internal pressure and almost

ready to burst—but there is much more at work in the sheer tactile appeal of surfaces that appear moist and resilient, and in the clear temptation, on the part of the viewer, to explore the hidden places toward which those curves lead.

Boasting weird little skin horns, *Untitled No. 180* (1995) almost pulses with its wine-red color and distended membrane. The myriad striations of the stained rawhide in *Untitled No. 195* (1995-96) draw the viewer closer, the better to see the skeins of color and its luscious, inviting surface. This is work about an inner pressure born of desire and yearning, a visceral effulgence about to sigh with release. The spherical forms carry the body theme well, though the largest piece in the exhibition is something of a weak point: *Untitled No. 199* (1996) bulges floridly, as though to moon the viewer, a pigskin simulacra of some unknown bodily protuberance which, despite its sinuous cleavage, looks like nothing so much as an ottoman on the wall.



Ross Rudel, *Untitled No. 187*, 1995, stained wood, carion blossom, 4" dia. x 3-1/2", at Angles Gallery, Santa Monica. (Photo: Brian Forrest.)