

ARTFORUM

SEPTEMBER 2007

SAN FRANCISCO

Christian Maychack

GREGORY LIND GALLERY

Art, like nature, is subject to curious mutations. Christian Maychack, whose sculptures envision gooey, anthropomorphized objects and spaces, is clearly well aware of this parallel. His work is as much about transformation as it is about convention. In *Notes on Becoming*, 2007, for example, a standard pedestal column seamlessly merges with the wall, taking on beveled “geological” edges. The structure’s appearance is indebted as much to *Star Trek* sets as to the magisterial mountains of Aryan painting. Atop this pedestal are gray, phallic blobs that suggest Henry Moore sculptures subjected to Peter Saul heat lamps. Rigid modernism is thereby gleefully transformed into the spinelessly expressionistic equivalent of marshmallow foam. Here, falling apart and coalescing are equivalent conditions.

Maychack’s penchant for ooze is wonderfully apparent in *A Thinnest of Betweens*, 2006, in which what looks like an oversize Rorschach blot has been transformed into a billowy bas relief. Its Baroque-like form—parts of which resemble sagging biceps—appears to strain to hold its shape, seemingly bursting with fat rolls of gray matter. The reference to a personality test is fitting, as, like most of the works in the show, this allows for a range of possible meanings. Psychology plays out more explicitly in the show’s most perverse, not to say questionable, work, *Untitled*, 2007, a rather vaginal mound of modeled grassy landscape with a collapsing matrix of open white cubes sunk into its murky center. Maychack here imagines a fantasy soiree attended by Sol LeWitt, Sigmund Freud, and Marcel Duchamp.

More often, Maychack lends ungainly materials and forms a sinuous grace. *An Alternate Scenario for a 2x4, #9*, 2007, is a short length of Douglas fir that appears to grow from the wall, curl in on itself, and sprout a gummy gray appendage made of Magic Sculp, a recurrent Maychack material also favored by special-effects model makers. He connects beveled edges to create the illusion that the rigid, linear wood curves while the wood grain seems painted on, as the lines remain contiguous even as they twist. Maychack’s elevated craftsmanship and his penchant for trickster formalism thereby confuse the real with the artificial.

With demure bravado, Maychack frequently camouflages his sculptures’ sweet spots. *All Together Now or The Inherent Capacity of a Woodpile*, 2007, appears initially to be a bunch of tall lumber scraps and white ornamented moldings leaning in a prominent corner of the gallery. You have to get close and look to the floor, into the seemingly random tangle, to notice that the rigid building materials curl and grow Magic Sculp tendrils. As if they were participants in a paranormal mating ritual, four pieces of wood, of various thicknesses and industrially produced surfaces, merge at an energized central point where form and material shift.

The metamorphosing objects and architecture invoke a sorcery that extends to the clean plasticity of Maychack’s forms. These works are alluring simulacra, like fake rocks in theme park grottos. Functioning a little like Disney’s sanitized surfaces, the gallery context almost tempers the work’s aberrance via its seamless edges and squeaky-clean corners. But not completely. Maychack is sensitive to the resulting tensions between creation and collapse, inhabiting a productive middle zone by exhibiting a continued capacity for evolution.

—Glen Helfand



Christian Maychack, *A Thinnest of Betweens*, 2006, MDF, polystyrene foam, steel, aqua resin, Magic Sculp, and latex paint, 63 x 51 x 9”.