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Peter Soriano

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Art in America

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Peter Soriano at Lennon, Weinberg

Working mostly with polyester resin, Peter Soriano has created a series of crypto-functional biomorphs that thrive on category confusion: you're as likely to wonder what they do as what they mean. Cheerful and buoyant, Soriano's hypnotically unstable new sculptures all have appendages that resemble handles or finger rests, and in some cases nascent facial features or body organs as well.

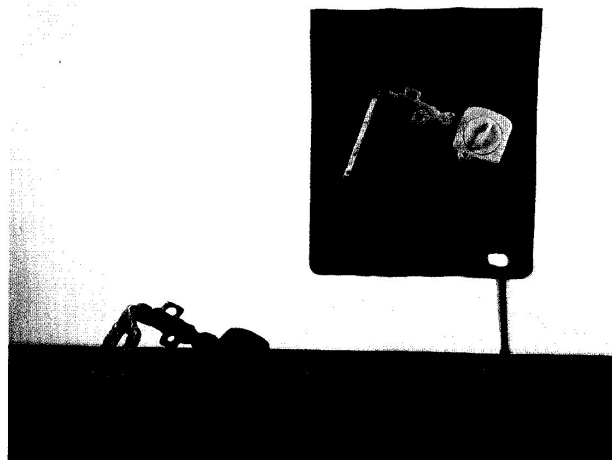
The smallest are two fist-sized, roundish yellow objects together called *Left/Right 80 cm apart*; they suggest fetal organisms, or planets on which the continents are adrift. The bigger, translucent, ruby-colored *Wax Annually with Paper Towels* (even the titles tend to be instructions for use rather than clues to interpretation) rests on the floor, but provisionally: it could easily be tipped another way. Various protuberances—all bright red—offer themselves as grips, though some are tongue-like, or labial. Incipiently perverse, *Wax Annually* also has a rosy, jolly wobble that suggests nothing so much as the proverbial laughing Santa's jelly belly.

In an untitled work, indeterminacy about form and function extends to the identities of pedestal and sculpture. Here, a self-effacing, chalky-gray mound

is given indentations and struts that support a segmented, slightly pearled pink object—in a different color, it might resemble an automatic gun, dismantled and bent. Viewed another way, the pink form could be a handle for manipulating the gray one, placing further doubt on which is the sculpture's working end. The equally ambiguous *Wood Is Cozy* features a variant of the pink form, this time in two casts, one turquoise and resting on the floor, the other bright yellow and strapped to a spanking-new mover's blanket hung on the wall. Is the blanket a kind of backdrop or frame? A self-wrapping accessory? Or are the sculptural parts instruments for supporting the blanket/painting? All are possible.

With the exception of *Mission Mobile*—a happy-looking heap of bright orange, pudgy-fingered forms that have handles on the back, like flotation devices—Soriano's new work is less toylike than his earlier sculpture. Also a departure is work in two new mediums. *Sled*, an anomalous sculpture inspired by the equipment used in luge, is made of aluminum and plastic. Skeletal and ghostly, it is hung upside down in the perilous headfirst orientation of a luge runner, though there is also something invincibly cartoony in its big-footed, loose-limbed linear simplification of the human body. Similarly pale but obdurate is a series of bone-white porcelain sculptures Soriano made while in residency in Limoges, France. These table-

top sculptures are graced with fingerholds and palm rests as well as the occasional letter or word in pastel-colored raised type—"right," "gauche," a directional arrow or two. The series is called *Late Submissions to the Hand-Ax Club*, an allusion to paleolithic objects of Soriano's interest, and to the whole absorbingly vexing question of how to tell purpose from pleasure. —Nancy Princenthal



Peter Soriano: *Wood Is Cozy*, 2002, blanket, polyester resin, nylon strap, dimensions variable; at Lennon, Weinberg. (Review on p. 141.)