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VIKAS HARISH

SOFT DISEASES AN INTERVIEW WITH MATTHEW RONAY

RAJESH PUNJ

CURATION IN THE ABSENCE OF ART CRITICISM

RAHUL BHATTACHARYA

MONUMENTAL TERRACOTTA

SANJAY DAS

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Corrigendum: In Art & Deal, Issue No-119, August 2018, the name 'Jean-Michael Othoniel' was wrongly printed in the Cover page and page no. 14. It should be Jean-Michel Othoniel

Cover Detail: Matthew Ronay, Humming Tubes, 2015, Basswood, plastic, steel, dye, and gouache, 32 x 7 x 31 inches, Courtesy the artist; Andrea Rosen Gallery, New York; Mark Foxx, Los Angeles; and Nils Staerk, Copenhagen

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SOFT DISEASES

MATTHEW RONAY INTERVIEW

RAJESH PUNJ

For years I use to talk a lot about 'muscle memory'. There is a thing inside my body that makes me do certain kinds of lines, that leads to a certain kind of vocabulary. Which I still think is true, but the goal, the journey of drawing for me, is to be in a place where I am not really thinking about any (goals). That I almost become a vehicle for what happens.



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Portrait of the artist, Photo: Claire Dorn

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Matthew Ronay
(Background): *Midnight Ascent*, 2017
Basswood, dye, gouache, canvas, flocking, plastic, steel, 55 × 47 × 3 1/2 inches
(Front): *Terra/Firmament*, 2017
Basswood, dye, gouache, flocking, plastic, steel, 27 1/2 × 23 3/4 × 21 inches
View of the exhibition "Ramus" by Matthew Ronay at Perrotin, Paris
(March 17 – May 26, 2018)
Photo: Claire Dorn / Courtesy Perrotin

Entering into an exhibition of works by American artist Matthew Ronay can be likened to walking through a deserted kindergarten, as his ice-cream coloured sculptures resemble the assemblages of a children's activity area. Pieced together play things that could equally pass as cultured cuisine on plinth like plates. And as an artist unsure of how to go about discussing his work, Ronay sees his creative configurations in much the same way as an audience new to his work might; with a genuine curiosity. As Ronay concurs, there is certainly a childlike approach to how he sees everything, in light of his acute colour-blindness. Whereby his limited cognition of colouration has led to his conceiving of a unique way of working, involving the practical influence and attention of his wife. Initially hesitant becoming more self-assured, Ronay explains the origins of his art as involving an insistence on scribbling things down. Less words and more organic outlines, these pencilled patterns become the intuitive templates for his heavier charcoal drawings, and further the blueprint for his sculpted forms. Citing how "It is important to understand that the sculptures almost always start as drawings, which are done automatically. So I draw all the time, never on assignment." Insisting there is no clear intention to his drawings, Ronay sees them more as explorations of his mind, as by the process of applying himself to the action it becomes entirely involuntary. Likening his approach to drawing, to that of eating or having sex, as an exercise that



has become entirely habitual. Intended, by the artist's hand, to trigger a series of automatic inventions that once fleshed out in wood and plastic, coloured, and pieced together as complete sculptures, become the basis for an unconscious cannon of objects as art.

Physical forms that for the audience, as Ronay understands it, play with notions of attraction and repulsion, of figuration and abstraction, as they begin in the mind's eye as recognizable forms, 'stylish gastronomy' 'sterilised body parts', or 'soft diseases'; before losing themselves to their otherworldly quality. Suggesting, "It is often the area that I like the most, the area right between things." A critical juncture that for Ronay becomes a breeding ground for all of his doubts and desires, to create works that are based on reality, but born of deeper ruminants. Explaining his motives as meditative, "I am also a meditation practitioner so for me the goal, if there is a goal, is to get to a place where I am not really attached to any sort of will" His creativity is just as candid, "When I think of my work, for me it has a non-duality, in the sense that it is part celebration, and part dealing with darkness, sadness even, because there is evidence of growth and decomposition - of a balance and imbalance."

For his inaugural exhibition at Galerie Perrotin, Paris, Matthew Ronay considered the gallery as akin to a human organs laboratory, in which his sculptures as species are placed on plinths closer to the gallery floor. Citing how "For me this show is almost scientific,

For me the object is to continually draw so that I am not waiting for inspiration. It is almost like a river, I get into the river and it goes where it goes, and I get out of the river, to do things like produce or do whatever. But in the end circuitously, we were talking initially about the installation (of the works), for me in my studio I have this kind of set-up of a big platform, where I place works on to look at and to photograph.

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Matthew Ronay, *Trophallaxis*, 2017
Basswood, dye, gouache, flocking, plastic, steel, leather, shellac-based primer, 15 1/2 x 22 1/4 x 15 3/4 in
View of the exhibition "Ramus" by Matthew Ronay at Perrotin Paris (March 17 - May 26, 2018),
Photo: Claire Dorn / Courtesy Perrotin

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Matthew Ronay, *Penetration Regression*, 2015
Basswood, dye, and steel, 31 x 36 x 8 inches
Courtesy the artist; Andrea Rosen Gallery, New York; Mark Foxx, Los Angeles; and Nils Staerk, Copenhagen

as if the individual sculptures are specimens from a family of creatures that are cybernetic. So they appear part natural, part unnatural. And for that reason I think it applies nicely that the show would have this quiet and ordered, and a set-up that is conducive to examination."

Which is as much to do with his preoccupation with notions of beauty, as it is about the nature of the gaze. The idea that when we look at ourselves, we are subject to the influences of magazines and media outlets, as to what is perceived of as normal. For its ordinariness it proves less interesting for the artist, than the internal, by the adventure of our organs, and externally, by virtue of birthmarks and abrasions, makes each of us devastatingly unique. In his own words explaining how there is a fantastic fatalism to how we should see ourselves; "Number one, it is not internal. It is like we are afraid of what is going to happen to us, unless we practice mindfulness or something that allows us to be comfortable with the fact that we are deteriorating. And two, the other side of that coin, the body is funny, it makes weird noises, and it does all these weird things that are unique to everyone." And out of that unease of the unknown Matthew Ronay seeks to cultivate a beauty that is closer in truth to the order of things as he sees them.

Interview

Rajesh Punj: *This exhibition appears to be a real departure for you. Can we begin by exploring that?*

Matthew Ronay: When I first visited the spaces, when I arrived, I understood immediately what I wanted to do.

RP: *Did you work with a maquette of the gallery initially to decide everything?*

MR: We had a sketch-up, yeah, but in Queens (New York) where I work, I have one room that is like a 'clean-room' that acts as a viewing room. I don't do installation photography, but I do do all of my own photography. It is important to understand that the sculptures almost always start as drawings that are done automatically. So I draw all the time, never on assignment. There is an essay about this that a sculpture almost always starts as a two dimensional image, and then it gets passed on to another person of me. I do everything myself; but the two people are different - one is drawing, the other making.

RP: *So you are effectively in dialogue with yourself. One that draws with the other that designs.*

MR: Yes.

RP: *Is it that there are moments that you concentrate on drawings exclusively?*

MR: No I draw all the time. I think of it like, you know there are particular sea creatures like sponges or bottom-feeders that feed on the waste. So for me I realise my strength comes from my ability to relax and filter my unconscious, which includes my own personal psychology, universal psychology, or science, or any of these things.

RP: *And with the automatic action of drawing is it about arriving at a point in which you are free of your initial inhibitions of it as an exercise or an act?*



MR: I am also a meditation practitioner so for me the goal, if there is a goal, is to get to a place where I am not really attached to any sort of will. For years I used to talk a lot about 'muscle memory'. There is a thing inside my body that makes me do certain kinds of lines, that leads to a certain kind of vocabulary. Which I still think is true, but the goal, the journey of drawing for me, is to be in a place where I am not really thinking about any (goals). That I almost become a vehicle for what happens.

RP: *And does that take an incredible amount of time, for the action to become entirely involuntary?*

MR: I used to only really draw with pencil in a tiny book, so I was using a particular kind of muscle, which required being very precise, and for that the drawings happened very quickly. The paper was so small there is zero risk. You turned the page, and sometimes they take 30 seconds. But for me the object is to continually draw so that I am not waiting for inspiration. It is almost like a river, I get into the river and it goes where it goes, and I get out of the river, to do things like produce or do whatever. But in the end circuitously, we were talking initially about the installation (of the works), for me in my studio I have this kind of set-up of a big platform, where I place works on to look at and to photograph. And so for my exhibitions I normally work on a series of objects and then also unify those objects; (placing the sculptures) on a piece of fabric, a series of pedestals, or coming away from the wall for a more immersive experience. So not only are you asked to consider the sculpture discretely, but also to see it in relationship to everything else.

But for me when I went into each of these rooms (at Galerie Perrotin, Paris), there was an opportunity to have a quieter, more contemplative set-up, with each gallery featuring a series of three works. So when I came to this space, as I said, I immediately knew that this was how I wanted to do it.

This was an opportunity that I hadn't really had before of just pedestal bound works, or opportunities around works that I didn't decide to just show pedestals. Yet there is still a relationship, of a stage and an audience, or whatever your metaphor is, it could be actors or audience, or it could be judge and financier, or whatever. There is a triangulation that happens in every room, and so it is a much more subtle way in which I organise objects. I have previously laid works out in a long line, as in a procession, with some sort of implied order, or rationality, something like that.

RP: *So you are as interested in the anatomy of a show, of how and where works are exhibited.*

MR: This is a very quite version of presentation for me, and then there are others (that have a greater presence). In previous exhibitions I created whole installations, which if I recall in Los Angeles resembled a Buddhist temple. So you had the four golden gates on the outside with four directions inside, and a main

point of power, that resembles a stupa. For another exhibition at the Pérez Museum Miami, all the sculptures in the exhibition were in one place, so it became more like a procession, with a specific order. But also there are larger projects where everything was presented again like a procession, moving towards an end wall; where everything was placed on fabric, and the choice of material mimicked the body.

RP: *So they become these 'soft play areas' for want of a better description, that an audience cannot engage with directly, but can observe as children might an adventure playground. Dreamed up settings that appear to be as much about the individual works, as the landscape you leave them in.*

MR: It is very intuitive (of what happens in a particular space). As I was explaining when I arrived here (at Galerie Perrotin, Paris), I didn't understand the content of the show, but I had a flash almost, that it would be like this.

RP: *So for this particular exhibition you were determined by a vision, as opposed to a sensation in Los Angeles and Miami?*

MR: I just had a feeling that is not necessarily about a stubbornness on my part. Sometimes I am not sure, I explore the vision I have for a space, and often I arrive at a point where my initial intuition is right. For Miami I had already chosen most of the works that I wanted to make, but then all at once it came to me that I wanted a system of islands of fabric, that were layered. So there were several layers of fabric, and then once I imagined this drawing, I realised the whole thing was a schematic of the body. With a head, and other elements, like respiration and digestion; or something like that. But with this show I wanted something less specific. The details are only really what I educate myself with, and then they also perform as examples to a viewer, if they want to think of it in that way.

For me this show is almost scientific, as if the individual sculptures are specimens from a family of creatures that are cybernetic. So they appear part natural, part unnatural. And for that reason I think it applies nicely that the show would have this quiet and ordered, and a set-up that is conducive to examination. So there is nothing in-between you and contemplating the sculpture; only allowing for something unobtrusive like a pedestal.

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Matthew Ronay
Double Orbing Fields, 2015
Basswood, plastic, steel, dye, flocking, and shellac-based primer
28 x 24 x 13 inches
Courtesy the artist; Andrea Rosen Gallery, New York; Mark Foxx, Los Angeles; and Nils Staerk, Copenhagen





RP: *Of the pedestals, what is intriguing is the height of the works; regarding that is it important we look down at your sculptures?*

MR: I am never sure with my works.

RP: *The general sense is of it being at eye-level.*

MR: In other shows the works have been placed directly onto the floor. With my earliest I showed them on the gallery floor, with no pedestal, no fabric... nothing. And part of it is that it forces the viewer to consider how they react to things. There is something I like about this being the kind of thing that happens, and you (the viewer) have to react or you can choose not to; and if you ignore that, then possibly you are not willing to want to engage with them.

RP: *Possibly it goes back to your point about these works resembling 'specimens', which leads me to consider the behavioural pattern of one going to a museum, as opposed to entering into a gallery. Whereby it is there, and you are invited to look at it behind glass – the science of something appears to require much more.*

MR: These works are specific to this show. And your mentioning science, for me nature and science are a huge part of my work. It was not something that was exactly there in that way, but my earliest work was presentational, and over the years I have moved further, and further, and further away from representation towards abstraction. In the very beginning the way

For me this show is almost scientific, as if the individual sculptures are specimens from a family of creatures that are cybernetic. So they appear part natural, part unnatural. And for that reason I think it applies nicely that the show would have this quiet and ordered, and a set-up that is conducive to examination.

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Matthew Ronay
Red Imperishable, 2015
Basswood, dye, and gouache, 12 x 15 x 7 inches, Courtesy the artist; Andrea Rosen Gallery, New York; Mark Foxx, Los Angeles; and Nils Staerk, Copenhagen

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Matthew Ronay
Yellow Imperishable, 2015, Basswood, dye, and gouache
12 x 15 x 7 inches, Courtesy the artist; Andrea Rosen Gallery, New York; Mark Foxx, Los Angeles; and Nils Staerk, Copenhagen

that I talked about my work was in terms of narrative. Because I used narrative to exemplify that disparate objects could conform narratively. I would call it a forensic interpretation. In the same way that fictionally when Sherlock Holmes arrives onto the scene, noticing the scratch on the wall with a particular kind of boot, he triangulates it with something else, and manages to solve the mystery.

My earliest work was done automatically, but because it was representational, it lent itself more to narrative, so as I moved away from representation I found myself in this area of trying to understand 'how do I talk about the content?' or 'how do I understand the content?' What I have come to realise through a weird series of happenings was that, and we can talk about how I arrived there, was that the unconscious actually understands science or nature, in a way that it is not didactic or empirical, but may come from all of the evolutions, of whatever life was before it was life, to where we are now.

Which maybe to do with our DNA, or be buried in our unconscious - the history or the memory we have of our past incarnations. So in that sense not only do we understand the universe, because we come from its material, the stars; but as we evolved into walking, and thinking, of people with a conscience, we also became aware of microscopics as well. And maybe what we call biomorphic abstraction is based on a series of people, who had relaxed enough to understand their relationship to their past forms or mutations. So that discounts part of an idea that, and of course I am

looking at imagery and science, as a person from the modern world, is that there are certain things that I understand, but what it doesn't explain to me is how when I am drawing, and when I am sculpting, over the period of the drawing and sculpture being produced (eighty or a hundred hours for a sculpture), during all that time I am trying to figure out what is this thing? Where did it come from?

I am also very interested in language, so when I go, for a title, researching on the internet, I have seen nine times out of ten, I find certain shapes relate to things that are empirical. Meaning tumours, molecular structures, static systems, all sorts of things that actually exist; and then I go backwards and see all these processes have a psychological counterpart. So for any particular work when it comes close to completion, I am trying to figure out a title for it; I really love titling works. Poetry, and reading is probably close to being my primary source for inspiration. So I understand language in a very different way, almost as a dilettante. I am not an expert writer or anything like that. I don't claim to be an academic, but intuitively I love language and where it comes from. I like to try to find words, especially in science, where they are very specific. The title of one of my works 'Trophallaxis', explains the process by which an older animal eats something and regurgitates it for a younger animal. And for me when I drew this thing there was this incredible energy of the negative space between these two things.

It is often the area that I like. It's the area right between things, so I am investigating this space, and somehow I



arrive at this word that explains this thing. I think that actually, its relationship physiologically is so deep; like a love between, a physical, a necessity, or bond, between a mother and a progeny, or maybe a father and a progeny, whatever. But there is this weird link, and the psychology of that is what's really interesting.

So maybe when you are looking at a particular sculpture you don't have to get all that, but you understand that that space between these two sculpted objects, is where something might happen. A kiss, it could be sex; it could be anything - there is something.

RP: *So there is the potential for something, an energy that attracts these inanimate elements together, that also has them finely balanced apart, 'together apart'.*

MR: For me I think what is interesting is how does the mind, when it doesn't intend to create an example of something magical, create something magical? So for me that is how drawing functions, I try to relax; sometimes I am even distracted by something else. Watching 'Buffy the Vampire Slayer' or something, and I am just drawing, I am not asking for anything. In the same way you need to eat, or have sex, or itch, or whatever.

RP: *When I think of drawing you are in your own way almost redefining the premise of drawing. At art school and art historically it has always been regarded as a preliminary exercise to creating something more complete. The notion of it serving a purpose, having a function, and of it leading to a more accomplished final 'product', dare I use that word.*

MR: Yes.

RP: *And of the notion with writing, you can suffer from 'writer's block', and with drawing you are conscious of everything leading to something. Of everything on paper having bore witness to your actions. But then there is this situation of drawing being and becoming a problem, whereby you achieve nothing, and put nothing down onto paper, because it doesn't function as a representation of anything. And for all of that, you appear to apply pencil to paper as though registering your presence, of making yourself be known. So it becomes, as you say, like eating or sex; of doing it so much that it becomes necessary and automatic.*

MR: Also with drawing there is not so much refining, as with writing. A poet can spend months, one year, on one stanza, reorganising, shifting it around. For me there are certain images and vocabularies that I repeat. I have a strange relationship to repetition as a very disciplined person, that there is a part of me that gains strength from repetition - of my routines, and of my language. And then there is part of me that is not satisfied and needs invention; that needs something new. So my practice is really like that, of the way in which those two things don't quite fit together. That imbalance is what I think makes creativity. Balance

does not always encourage a creative moment, because it (the sculpture) is not moving, it doesn't fall over. But that imbalance, the way two things don't fit together creates the tension that allows for greater creativity. So for me when I am drawing I am in a state of searching. But saying that sometimes I find myself drawing the same thing.

I call myself a 'tuba' from tubes, because when I am drawing there are a lot of tubes, and I think it is because when you draw you apply one line, and then you put down another line right next to it, you have 'the tube'; and it is not something that I am proud of. If I was an artist that willed myself, and chose what I was going to be; I wouldn't choose this person, but it is what happens. When I draw, I draw tubes, a lot. So I actually find comfort somehow (in what I am doing). But at the same time I feel like I don't want to do tubes all the time.

RP: *Does drawing succeed for you when it becomes that involuntary act? And if you were to explain the anatomy of your work, as we look at it, are you trying to create and colour forms that can become sculptures, or are you intending something else - of occupying space with new forms as sculptures?*

MR: Often if I think about it as space, it is to do with negative space, because it is based on a drawing. Sculpture can obviously work that way too, but for me it is about negative spaces, and in particular spaces where forms are barely touching. The interesting thing about this show, and in particular with drawing, is that when I was working last summer, I started making bigger sketches; because most of my drawings are smaller (and more self contained).

RP: *Have you exhibited any of your drawings with your sculptures, as a measure of one against the other? I ask because it is interesting how much attention and dedication you give to them, and as a consequence it becomes interesting to understand how much of the whole process of making is available to the audience?*

MR: No, not usually - every now and then I do.

RP: *I am always curious to understand what is private and public of art?*

MR: For the purposes of our conversation, I think it is really interesting to show a drawing when you see the sculpture. But essentially I think when they are in the same space it kind of becomes about that relationship. I think for me for the drawing to be taken seriously it needs to be its own end point.

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*Matthew Ronay, Humming Tubes, 2015
Basswood, plastic, steel, dye, and gouache, 32 x 7 x 31 inches
Courtesy the artist; Andrea Rosen Gallery, New York; Mark Foxx, Los Angeles; and Nils Staerk, Copenhagen*





RP: That leads to my second question regarding your drawings, of whether you have shown them independently?

MR: I use gouache as well, which people call drawing. I don't know why but they do, and I did have a show of those, but they are more related to my meditative practice, as drawings that I use to concentrate or meditate on. But then there are larger charcoal drawings that take a lot longer, and because of their medium they are more resolved. This allows me to create all these new textures, and new ways to express myself, even though it is still automatic. I don't set out to do something. What I want is to experiment.

RP: I see your drawings as elastic exercises of your mind - in so few marks you appear to capture exactly what you want of a sculpture.

MR: That is the crazy thing, the reason my practice and approach includes extreme loyalty to what I draw, and this is the amazing thing about charcoal, is that it creates all these textures, and ways in which you can do things, that leads itself to sculpting in basswood. So sometimes I will have a texture of charcoal that I will replicate on wood. Rubbing, and also by erasing. I don't always know how to translate those textures, but I try and do it. And also what I like about drawing, which is difficult when you are just sculpting, is that a blemish of any kind is actually really difficult to reproduce. When you are sculpting it is much easier to have the planes smooth, for practical reasons you can sand or texturise more easily. But when you have a bump you have to work around it.

My earliest work was presentational, and over the years I have moved further, and further, and further away from representation towards abstraction. In the very beginning the way that I talked about my work was in terms of narrative. Because I used narrative to exemplify that disparate objects could conform narratively. I would call it a forensic interpretation.

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Matthew Ronay, *Couplings*, 2017
Basswood, dye, gouache, flocking, plastic, steel polycarbonate
26 1/2 x 18 x 16 1/2 inches and *Sexual Trimorphism*, 2017
Basswood, dye, gouache, cotton, flocking, steel, plastic,
polycarbonate, 21 1/2 x 24 1/2 x 21 1/4 inches
View of the exhibition "Ramus" by Matthew Ronay at Perrotin
Paris (March 17 - May 26, 2018)
Photo: Claire Dorn / Courtesy Perrotin

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Matthew Ronay
View of the exhibition "Ramus" by Matthew Ronay at Perrotin
Paris (March 17 - May 26, 2018)
Photo: Claire Dorn / Courtesy Perrotin

RP: So a minor detail can become a major factor in the creative process.

MR: You can become very dedicated to it because it is special. So for me what drawing does, which I found hard with sculpting, is that it preserves all these eccentricities. And it is these eccentricities that define the individuality of all natural shapes. Trees have abnormal growths, or your ear has a little bump, and your face is not symmetrical. And all these things I find really exciting about nature, as much as I find them slightly disturbing. For example we think of growth as a positive, as a function of nature, but sometimes growth goes haywire and you have something like cancer or tumours, something really serious.

When I think of my work, for me it has a non-duality, in the sense that it is part celebration, and part dealing with darkness, sadness even, because there is evidence of growth and decomposition - of a balance and imbalance. And with this show (at Galerie Perrotin), there is an odd thing that is happening, that makes this show different to the previous shows I have done. In that there is also this weird element of syntheticity, this kind of cybernetic thing, whereby you have a natural shape and then another corresponding part that becomes machine like, and they are dependent, and they govern together. One element is alive, and another possibly isn't alive. So how is it? Is it a filtering system? Is it a kidney, bile or something else?

RP: And I assume for the audience are they deliberately drawn to the notion that these works are

all referencing the body in some way; or is that too literal an understanding of what you are doing?

MR: For me I am educated, I went to graduate school at Yale (USA), I am not a big theory person, but I know how to do all this stuff; and what resonates with me most about viewing, and this is not a judgement on anyone else's work, but for me what I appreciate most about making is that I feel that the object remains an area of art communication that can be extremely irresponsible. So when you are writing an essay, the agreement is that you have to make sense of it, and I have to do due diligence to be a good reader. But I think what is great about art is, possibly the last remaining qualities about art, is that it is asking us to be irresponsible. It is literally asking us to 'take a chance', of not communicate or consume economically. To make a mistake, if it is possible, and to go out on a limb and see something; but that being said those are intellectual concepts, and I do think also that some of the best experiences happen right there. When you are looking at one of the works and you may unconsciously be getting 'body', and maybe that makes you uncomfortable, so you say 'oh I don't want to look at this'. That is the great thing that can happen when you are looking at art, and people forget that the body contains all these different avenues that can be used for interpretation.

Number one, it is not internal. It is like we are afraid of what is going to happen to us, unless we practice mindfulness or something that allows us to be comfortable with the fact that we are deteriorating.



And two, the other side of that coin, the body is funny, it makes weird noises, and it does all these weird things that are unique to everyone. The physiological of how things happen, is funny and weird. When people have sex, or when they sneeze, or fart, or their stomach makes a crazy noise, whatever... even the organs on their own have this weird and festive quality. Some of them have a disgusting quality, and I think what is interesting is our relationship to what is funny verses what is disgusting. And I think it is parallel to the functional thing. So a liver for example is filtering and creating bile, it looks disgusting. It has an odd colour, and an even odder shape. It is glossy. So I think what is interesting is that I believe that there is an unconscious language of nature on that level of art, or at least our interpretation of it. So it is like when you see a tree that has a crazy growth, it looks dark and weird, but it is an apparition actually. It is not bad necessarily even though you might have a weird reaction to it. Same thing if you have a crazy mole with hair sticking out, I like that stuff. I try to erase the value so I can celebrate the hairy mole, because it is so fun to look at.

RP: *What you speak about abnormalities, I think of the extreme opposite of that, of a machine aesthetic. Whereby everything is the same, and of the notion that we live in a moment in which we all want the same things. Are we guilty of being afraid of genuinely celebrate difference or individual and psychological diversity, even if our 'social activity' might suggest we are much more inclusive?*

MR: I think it is interesting because for me like those things diverge out of the same place. If we think of minimalism and of a James Turrell, for me there is a great bravery to making it so incredibly silent; whereby you are not really seeing very much at all. For me I love that, but it is not my will. I want to celebrate the opposite of that, of the maximal, tactile nature of objectness; whether it is machine made, whatever. Also for me working is a huge part of it. Like I really, really, really enjoy working, and of the time it takes to do something.

RP: *From what you have already said, your approach appears to conduce a trance like state in you, when you are in the process of making. Is that as evident in the transformation of cut and coloured forms, as it is in the object as art? And as evidence of your creativity process, is there something of 'self' in your sculptures?*

MR: For example this work, Move, Swallow, Breathe 2017, if you stand to the side of it, you can see the edges of the wood of the tree, because the whole work was conceived of one piece of wood originally. A lot of works are done in that way, and part of what I realise with drawing is that in nature often the way things grow creates a situation in which there is no space between things; for example your liver, pancreas, and spleen, have no space between them because its anatomically impossible to. Similarly knots tend to grow out from a tree, where there isn't any space between the branch

and the trunk); and obviously there can't be, otherwise as a structure it would collapse.

So for me the way that I work is that I often glue wood together, more than two or three pieces as one. And so what I think is interesting is I use a bandsaw to cut the wood, cutting wood away from wood etc; then I have the parts that already fit together perfectly. Then I am able to sculpt each part, and colour the pieces in a particular dye, in a way that still allows you to see the grain of the wood, and make out all of the hand made qualities. It is a very special process because the different pieces of wood take to the dye in different ways, which is a lot to do with how the tree has grown; and when you cut a tree the cells of the wood continue to grow vertically. But obviously when you cut or scratch the wood, you are breaking the cellular structures; and when you apply the dye it is immediately absorbed into the cells. But on the side of the wood, especially if it is very smooth, the cellular walls are never broken. This makes it possible to sand it exactly to the wall of the cells. No light bounces off of it (to disturb your vision); and so for that reason it doesn't take the dye so well. The interesting thing about wood and dying wood, it that it is not something that is done entirely, more that it is stained. But staining is normally related to trying to make one kind of wood look like another kind, and this in not about the natural colour of wood (it is about altering the appearance of the material).

> *Matthew Ronay
Cairn Column Wand, 2015
Basswood, plastic, dye, flocking, and shellac-based primer
43 x 10 x 10 inches
Courtesy the artist; Andrea Rosen Gallery, New York; Mark Foxx,
Los Angeles; and Nils Staerk, Copenhagen*

