

Art in America

Reviews Aug 27, 2011

Daniel Weiner

New York

at Lesley Heller

by Douglas Manson



Daniel Wiener recently mounted his first large solo exhibition in over a decade, at Lesley Heller, in keeping with the gallery's program of highlighting underrepresented artists. In the past, Wiener's sculptures, composed of small, brightly colored shapes in Sculpy and other materials, made playful, oblique references to plant and animal forms. More recently, he has been making semi-functional works resembling vases, tables, chairs and benches, adding a utilitarian dimension that is barely sustained within baroque bursts of color and morphological asymmetry.

The Heller show, titled "Making is Thinking," after American philosopher Richard Sennett's idea of intuitive organization in art and design, included 13 sculptures: flat, circular or serpent-shaped wall-mounted pieces; tabletop objects that look suitable for a mantel or bookshelf; and freestanding furniture intended for use. While some of the sculptures incorporate details in blown glass, they are primarily made of Apoxie Sculpt, a relatively new resin that, after 24 hours, sets into a stable, claylike texture that preserves the saturated, wet look of acrylic paint. This weird stuff produces neither a painting nor a sculpture, but an amalgamation of the

two. Though they were all vividly colored, no two pieces in the exhibition shared the same palette, contours or patterning.

Wiener's amorphous shapes and swirling surfaces suggest a kind of psychedelic taffy, with laminar flows and brilliant chaotic topographies. It is a challenge to guess what piece of furniture or precise household fixture is being referred to, so distracting are the swirling colored surfaces and irregular appendages. The freestanding, Oldenburg-like, human-scale sculpture *Ruckus* (2008) looks like a bough dangling a chewed-up orange, or perhaps an old office chair recovered from the miasmatic pit of a hot plastics factory. Its overall burning, startling orange is streaked with painterly veins of creamy pink, red, rose and baby blue, with accents of yellow, cobalt and lime.

In all Wiener's surfaces, glowing and muted tones swirl freely in tandem or contract into dense cords, while the overall contours of the objects meander, bunch, grope, gape and spit with incomprehensible extensions, twists, knots, folds and hollows. The wall pieces are like thick, flat tabletops that have oozed upward in an evolutionary crawl.

While the question of what we are seeing is always before us, Wiener's sculpture eases our confusion with tactile, colorful pleasures, moving us from functional reference to sensuous immersion and back again.

Photo: Daniel Wiener: Pistil or Stamen, 2006, Apoxie Sculpt and glass, 5 by 8 by 8 inches; at Lesley Heller.