

Ross Knight

TEAM GALLERY | GRAND STREET

One of my favorite Instagram feeds, going by the handle @techappeal, sifts for pictorial gold among athletic, medical, and technological product photography. Featuring such psychoactive eye candy as space-age sneaker soles set against ethereal gradients, flawless limbs sporting latex prophylaxes in antiseptic-blue environments, and spotless anatomical teaching aids shot against pastel infinity screens, its imagery is routinely airless and otherworldly yet grounded in an ineluctable mortality. The feed catalogues a nascent zone of our collective digital imagination, a creepy realm of artificial perfection that artfully pits narcotic sterility against corporeal apprehension.

A similar dynamic lurks at the heart of Ross Knight's latest exhibition at Team Gallery. Titled "Human Stuff," the show comprised nine relatively compact, self-contained sculptures—one floor-bound, two freestanding, the rest perched atop spindly custom plinths—adroitly dispersed throughout the space. A cohesive arrangement by virtue of reasonably consistent scale, related materials, and a muted, predominantly bone-and-skin-tone palette, the cluster of works came across as part gallery display, part medical-industry trade show. Once the viewer zeroed in on individual pieces, this impression was confirmed by an apparent tension between abstracted bodily form—fashioned in the studio by fairly conventional sculptural means—and a somewhat mystifying functionality, courtesy a variety of amalgamated readymades. Calling to mind flesh, prostheses, and hospital apparatuses, the overall effect of this elegant, if a little icky, ensemble was one of torqued seduction and somatic unease. Helmut Newton, Matthew Barney, J. G. Ballard, and David Cronenberg began to crowd my consciousness.

Most of the plinth-mounted works center on a core component (the sculptural, bodily aspect) crafted from solid white urethane, machined and carved into odd, softly geometric masses. These are augmented by evocative objects and materials (the quasi-functional aspect): either handmade, faux-biotic forms or depurposed found elements, such as the clear-acrylic backbone of a therapeutic device designed to provide relief from spinal pain; a large block of yellowing, machine-cut foam rubber (studded with plastic suction cups); and the mangled innards of an underarm-deodorant applicator. Take Precision Bearing (. . .) Brace, 2015, which consists primarily of a slightly cumbersome, wedge-like form, the thin edge of which is propped gracefully upward by the presence of a fist-size ball bearing embedded in one side. Girding the upper half of this balancing act is an elasticized knee guard, whose top half extends into midair, arching backward at the hinge to reveal the tip of the wedge through the kneehole. The specter of physical injury is brought to bear on the cold refinement of the classical ideal.

Wading deeper into abjection is Peg (Skin Replacement) Stem, 2015. A short, thick urethane column bearing a semispherical divot at the top rises up from a flesh-colored silicone base, which is, in turn, fastened by a small, brown, larva-like plastic pellet to a translucent sack whose frothy interior harbors more pellets. The sack looks like parasite-infested cat puke or a quiescent chrysalis teeming with slithering pupae. It's an arresting element, charged with X-Filesian foreboding, and when tethered to its machinic, phallic counterpart, tilts toward cyborgian futurism. But perhaps the most emblematic work in the show is the simplest one, (Greaseproof) Floor Mat-Hide, 2015—a creamy-beige animal hide, stiffened and curled up at the edges to cradle a casually folded nonslip red rubber floor mat. Both components represent barriers to the sticky stuff, within and without bodies, respectively. And, as with many @techappeal posts, the collision of synthetic protectant and organic matter produces a spellbinding affect that oscillates between reassurance and fear. These are productively scary sculptures, cutting to the quick of their classical heritage to reveal its anxious underpinnings—that messy biological ooze that, in our increasingly cosmetic and virtual worlds, we would, more than ever, prefer to deny.

— Jeff Gibson



Ross Knight, *Peg (Skin Replacement) Stem*, 2015, urethane, silicone, 12 × 5 1/2 × 12".