

Long Live the New Flesh

— Art



January 16, 2019

Everyone seems to be thinking about their body —and how they could or should change it— around this time of year. Is it an act of destruction or creation to transform your own body? Perhaps you should take up a sport.

Sports are a microcosm of society: competitive within a framework of inescapable rules. Only the strong survive. Sports can sculpt the body and clear the mind. No single game is ever the exact same as another—it is constantly new. Game on.

The artists in Team (Gallery, Inc.)'s new show, *SportCult*, have made themselves into super-athletes—and the evidence of what they had to do to become these scions of physical perfection are what make up the meat of this fascinating show.

Text by John Martin Tilley



Jes Fan's disturbing use of flesh-toned silicone is marvelously literal—'Resistance Training,' a silicone cast of a typical plate weight found in a gym, is low-key brilliant: as if the weights, these lifeless lumps of shaped iron, yearn to be human, wishing for their Pinocchio moment. The artist has manifested the halfway point: something between iron and flesh, a reversal of the goal of going to a gym in the first place—to harden the body. 'Disposed to Add' is the companion piece—the bars to place the weights upon are usually so straight and heavy, but here are rendered into whimsical distress, toppled on the floor and cast in various skin tones, the soft faux flesh so corporeal and uncanny. Race, sexuality, the pursuit of beauty—all wrapped up in the tangled tubes of would-be skin like a den of snakes.

Ross Knight's sculptures are cryptically reminiscent of medical implants, prosthetic appendages, and physical therapy. It is strange how beauty and health are always connected—but here they've been wrenched apart. The strangely clinical plastics and foams that form these sculptures are twisted and manipulated, as if in their attempt to achieve beauty they instead only found a warped sense of obsessive chaos.

The artist who goes simply by L lends a twist of the paranormal, with beautiful glass jugs filled with mineral oil and objects suspended therein, with titles like 'Spell to receive the golden bough,' or 'Spell for the perfect body.' There is something vaguely magical about sports stars and our adulation of them—instead of pursuing our own perfect bodies, we project our wishes and dreams onto the sculpted forms of those who pursue it for us, and all while playing a game. One wonders how these spells are activated, and how to join the cult.

'Spell to receive the golden bough,' 2018, L (left) and 'Soft Goods II,' 2017, Jes Fan (right).

But the highlight of the show is the unexpected use of scent, with the help of fragrance house Maison Anonyme. Here I'll simply quote the gallery:

“Taking as its cue the transhuman condition in the imminent post-human environment, Maison Anonyme imagines an olfactive response to a future where the human body is transcended and the scents of physical exertion are purged from a world of smoothly-moving parts. To augment the odor of scorched lubricant that will eventually replace the carnal, the olfactive signs of human exertion—Testosterone, Sweat, Elastine, Rosin, Chlorine, Eucalyptus—are introduced into the gallery which, through its exclusion of extraneous sensory information, acts as a stand-in for our mechanized future.”

Ladies and gentleman: SportCult.

