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My recent work explores the duality of beauty and the grotesque coexisting simultaneously within a singular sculptural form. I seek to make work that paradoxically seduces the viewer with the promise of beauty even as it repels in its cultivation of the unnatural and the perverse -- a sculptural elegance that takes its inspiration from the aversive feelings inspired by biological malformation. My work holds beauty and grotesqueness in uneasy balance.

GROTESQUE BEAUTY

by

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Approved by

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## GROTESQUE BEAUTY

My recent work explores the duality of beauty and the grotesque coexisting simultaneously within a singular sculptural form. I am attracted to the complex contradictions that arise at the crossing point at which the sensuous and the beautiful come into contact with the unruly and abject aspects of bodily forms and functions. I seek to make work that paradoxically seduces the viewer with the promise of beauty even as it repels in its cultivation of the unnatural and the perverse -- a sculptural elegance that takes its inspiration from the aversive feelings inspired by biological malformation.

Beauty and grotesqueness are held in uneasy balance. Deformation coexists with the cultivation of elegantly simple geometric shapes. My objects, endowed with membranous white colors made possible by ceramic glazes, simultaneously attract and repel the viewer by way of a compromised and genetically aberrant beauty ultimately derived from the ambivalence and repression originating in bodily experience.

My work takes its cue from the duality of the integrity of outward bodily form traversed by the fearful knowledge of inner biological processes of an unpredictable and involuntary nature. My formal decisions are often inspired by the ways in which this conjunction is depicted in contemporary popular culture (films, television, tabloids, etc.). My evocation of the deformed body translated into the language of abstract sculpture touches upon the most basic human mysteries of death and dissolution. The

primordial fear, fascination, and curiosity in the face of bodily vulnerability and mortality is the overarching subject of my work. I also seek to make contact with the fundamental strangeness of the workings of the human body as embodied in extraordinary sculptural objects.

My artistic practice engages with my understanding of the contemporary obsession in popular culture with artificial and impossible standards of physical beauty as promoted by the mass media (fashion, diet, plastic surgery, fitness programs, etc.). I am fascinated by the endless efforts made by many of us to control and transform our appearance through hairstyling, piercing, make-up, clothing, and accessories. The human body and our responses to it have become a hybrid construction of nature, medicine, industry, fashion, and mass marketing.

Physical attractiveness is a primary value and commodity in today's world. I seek to draw attention to the perversity and unnaturalness of this aspect of our daily experience. At the same time, my work integrates industrial and organic form, seeking an impossible and unnatural merger of the two. It conjoins the erotics of bodily forms such as the sensuous roundedness of the female breast with the standard oval shapes of industrial products (e.g. plumbing supplies and kitchen utensils) in order to produce a sculptural object that is neither one nor the other yet refers uneasily and poignantly to both. An important source in this endeavor is the Japanese fascination with the robot and the cyborg as represented in various forms of contemporary animation wherein the duality of mechanical fabrication and sensuous figurative beauty achieve a consummately marketed presence. These hybrid forms seamlessly conflate the messiness

of bodily organs and fluids with the elegance, cleanliness and predictability of advanced, computer technology. The conjoining of formal elegance and ugliness in my work brings these contradictions to awareness as aesthetic and conceptual issues.

I have chosen clay as my medium because of its rich cross-cultural history and its unlimited formal possibilities. My own technical expertise derives from a long apprenticeship in ceramics as a utilitarian craft. As an artist, I have now adapted these skills to serve more open-ended and distinctly non-functional sculptural agenda. I have become increasingly attuned to the analogy between ceramic surfaces and the human skin, between the clay vessel and the human body in terms of their complex interplay between inside and outside. My work combines slip-casting techniques that use mechanical and industrial components as templates and hand building in order to create more organic shapes. The diversity of my technical methods corresponds to the mixing of the biological and artificial as the content of my work. I build up my sculptures by way of the accretion of smaller cast and hand-built forms to form a larger, composite, one-of-a-kind, and perversely idiosyncratic and useless object.

I work on a small scale in order to evoke the domain of children's toys. More specifically, I am influenced by the current vogue for cyborg logic in Japanese animation. Like toys, my sculptures can be picked up and arranged by hand. I use organic forms for the main body structure. Their shapes evoke the sensuality and seductiveness of the human body. In *Knobby Blob* (fig. 1), the organic forms, reminiscent of internal body parts, project out into space. Small joints imply industrial features as they support the main structure. In *Feed Me* (fig. 3), the particular

configuration of body parts, industrial materials and organic form was deployed in a more narrative mode to create a more literal rendition of the cyborg. Industrial plumbing joints combine with an organic body to which is attached a facsimile of a baby doll's head. The end result is a strange, hybrid object meant to evoke feelings of the uncanny. *Boys Will Be Boys* (fig. 4) and *Boomer* (fig. 5) are endowed with more playful associations with children's toys. *Boys Will Be Boys* is intended to give the viewer pause since it doesn't have a head. There is a comical implausibility about the whole arrangement. *Boy Meets Girl* (fig. 7) is more mechanical in nature. Two pipe-derived forms compose the main structure. However these too take on aspects of bodily existence and conform to my interest in the industrialization of human experience. This work also connotes sexual activity in the sensual and seductive mode yet without any explicit indication of specific acts or body parts.

In all of my works, I used white low-fired clay. The resulting surface texture is fine and smooth allowing associations with youthful human skin. I applied a transparent matt glaze to further evoke the delicacy, elegance, and seductiveness of the outer membrane of the human body.

Eva Hesse has been an enduring influence on my development as an artist. Her legendary manipulation of materials and her conjoining of the industrial with the organic provide a guide and inspiration to my present explorations. I am also indebted to the contemporary Korean artist, Lee Bul, whose work, like mine, takes many of its cues from a contemporary Japanese sensibility as embodied in karaoke, animation, and comic books.

Whether my work takes its cue from dualities of beauty and grotesque, industrial and the organic, or seduction and repulsion, I seek to create uneasiness in the viewer's visual experience.

## CATALOGUE

Ryono, Izumi. *Knobby Blob*. Ceramics. 2007.

Ryono, Izumi. *Extracurricular Activity*. Ceramics. 2007.

Ryono, Izumi. *Feed Me*. Ceramics. 2007.

Ryono, Izumi. *Boys will be boys*. Ceramics. 2007.

Ryono, Izumi. *Boomer*. Ceramics. 2007.

Ryono, Izumi. *Feed yourself*. Ceramics. 2007.

Ryono, Izumi. *Boy meets Girl*. Ceramics. 2007.

Ryono, Izumi. *Did you take a shower?* Ceramics. 2007.

Ryono, Izumi. *Hit Parade*. Ceramics. 2007.