



Cobus Haupt



Art, like any other human language, is a form of representation. As it attempts to articulate our experiences of the world it is subject to certain conventions, limits and possibilities and, even though its parameters are continuously shifting, we still expect of it to remain true in its reflection of our world. Of course, we also realize that any form of representation is marred by hidden relations of power, making of the dream of faithful representation a self-contradictory fiction. Figure studies, like documentary photography, occupy an ambivalent position in this polemic: they seem to furnish us with conclusive evidence of a bygone moment in time and, in doing so, also implicitly argue for their own objectivity. But ultimately art, or any form of representation for that matter, can only satisfy our desire for truth by drawing our attention away from its inherent flaws.

Cobus Haupt' beautiful figure studies of ordinary people cast in bronze and cement, is a perfect example of the ambivalent relationship that exists in art between reality and representation. His subjects are culled from everyday acquaintances and, in the classic tradition of western figurative sculpture, are first made into scale-accurate clay renditions of the model – flaws and all. From here, Haupt's work diverges from the conventions of the western tradition of figurative sculpture and follows its own path.

For Haupt, the casting process (and its various stages such as moulding, drawing waxes and even the welding on the final bronze) is not just a form of replication but an intrinsic part of the final artwork. And so each new process leaves its mark on the sculpture – cracks in the original clay model, a casting line here, and even miscast sections remain as they are. Finally, the sculpture shows itself for what it is: a representation. Nonetheless, Haupt's uncanny ability to capture the human form in clay still manages to convince the viewer of the veracity of these 'images' – that his subjects exist and that his sculptures faithfully resemble them.

Haupt's work trudges the difficult space between reality and representation and, unlike his predecessors like Rodin, he does not favour either but instead opts for a transparent approach towards his materials, artistic process and final product. This approach manifests itself in his sculptures as a de-constructive form of self-reflexivity that finds meaning in its ambivalence, as if to suggest that even something as concrete, respectable and 'real' as traditional figurative sculpture is also playful and open. And, finally, that the lines between representation and reality are never clearly drawn.

Images: Work in progress, 2005
Dimensions: Variable
Medium: Bronze

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