



and American cultural intersections and race relations, his achievement is a mature and profound synthesis.

—Joan Pachner

NEW YORK

Carol Ross Rooster Gallery

Carol Ross's small but strong show featured a series of abstract paintings and three large relief sculptures, the latter acting, in some ways, as the center of the exhibition. Made of light- and dark-colored veneers, the organic quality of these works—evident in their general outlines and in the interlocking shapes of their interior compositions—belongs to a popular dialect of Modernism. Indeed, there is some connection between Ross's sculptures and the rounded, puzzle-pieced works of Jean Arp, though Ross's works are inevitably her own, with an emphasis on design qualities rather than three-dimensional surfaces. The contrast between dark and light shapes, their edges joining up with each other, emphasizes a feeling of graceful flow. Ross,

whose recent works have consisted of Minimalist aluminum sculptures, has returned to the warmer material of wood. As a group, the sculptures engage in a close conversation; while they present individual identities, their sequential relations and camaraderie are also clear, so that their effect is cumulative. Placed fairly high up on a single wall, the reliefs looked over the work in the rest of the gallery.

Ross belongs to a history of abstraction that goes back to the early years of the last century. But abstraction is no longer in a place of dominance; figuration in both two and three dimensions has made a comeback. Still, Ross watches the accomplishments of modernity closely, particularly the New York School, seeking an orientation to design and pattern in the differing colors of her veneers. This generates

Above: Carol Ross, *Jester 5*, 2014. Wood relief, 50 x 40 x 1.5 in. **Right:** Sui Jianguo, *Blind Portraits*, 2014. Bronze, dimensions variable.

interest in the surface, which is not rough or three-dimensional but smooth. The planar biomorphism of the three reliefs asserts a tie to simple, lyrical forms; there may even be a nod to Minimalism, despite Ross's use of wood rather than steel. The three sculptures appeared favorably in relation to the paintings, standing out because of their graphic boldness. Ross is an artist who has others construct her work for her, but she is present in all steps of the process. Collaboration, which is currently receiving considerable attention, allows her to conceive her forms freely while knowing that they will be perfectly executed.

All three sculptures were made in 2014. *Jester 5* consists of wavy ribbons resting on top of each other, with alternating dark and light colors. In *Jester 1*, three sharp intrusions extend from a bulbous center, which itself consists of a dark, hand-like image moving into a curved, light-colored shape. And *Jester 2* is composed of a snaking piece of

light-colored wood whose curves are infilled with darker forms that define an alternate shape. As the series name suggests, there is something playful about these works, both individually and as a group. Ross clearly knows that no art succeeds without giving enjoyment, but in the case of these sculptures, a strong sense of form keeps them engaging as well.

—Jonathan Goodman

NEW YORK

Sui Jianguo Doris C. Freedman Plaza, Central Park

Sui Jianguo, who is best known for his "Mao Jacket" and "Dinosaur" series, which figuratively and symbolically comment on China's Cultural Revolution, ventured into new territory with *Blind Portraits*. This monumental public meditation on blindness marked a dramatic shift in tone, point of view, style, and process. In addition, *Blind Portraits* does not conform to dominant





Left: Sui Jianguo, *Blind Portraits*, 2014. Bronze, dimensions variable. Below: Kathleen Montgomery, *Body Memory Architecture*, 2014. Mixed media, dimensions variable. From “Artists in Residence.”

public art trends; it is neither minimal, geometric, nor lifelike.

The four bronze works, scaled up to 17 feet tall, are “blind” in more than one sense. Sui created his clay models when he was blindfolded, so he could not see what he was doing. The dramatically gouged, lumpen forms, which somewhat resemble heads with misplaced eye sockets and mouth openings, may themselves be seen as “blind.” Not only are the heads misshapen, but the welds in the bronze form large seams that do not conform to a regular pattern. The construction either departs from or exaggerates the original clay models, drawing attention to the pieced-together quality of the heads. At night, the four abstracted, ovoid forms, lit only by ambient light, blended into the urban landscape and seemed rooted in Central Park, suggesting bodies sprung from the earth itself. This, in turn, offered a reminder that humans, too, have an unspoken connection to the earth—and are dependent on it in ways to which we may be blind.

Blindness has been a recurring theme in literature, addressed by Milton, Borges, and Anthony Doerr, among others. In these and other cases, the authors discuss things that sighted people may not feel or observe to the same degree. Sui’s

heads show the results of blindness. They let viewers touch their surfaces, enter the spaces between them, and otherwise interact consciously as well as subconsciously. *Blind Portraits* achieves something rare: encountering these forms is like walking through an experience about difference that does not draw attention to itself. Sui’s humanism, using the metaphor of blindness, opens an important new direction for public art.

—Jan Garden Castro

PITTSBURGH
“Artists in Residence,”
Pittsburgh Biennial 2014
Mattress Factory

The Pittsburgh Biennial was inaugurated in 1994, when Murray Horne, curator of the Pittsburgh Center for the Arts, aspired to showcase diverse local and regional talent. The 2014 Biennial was the ninth and largest iteration to date, with eight organizations participating, including the Carnegie Museum of Art, the Andy Warhol Museum, the Mattress Factory, Pittsburgh Filmmakers, the Pittsburgh Center for the Arts, the Pittsburgh Glass Center, Space Gallery, and the Miller Gallery at Carnegie Mellon.

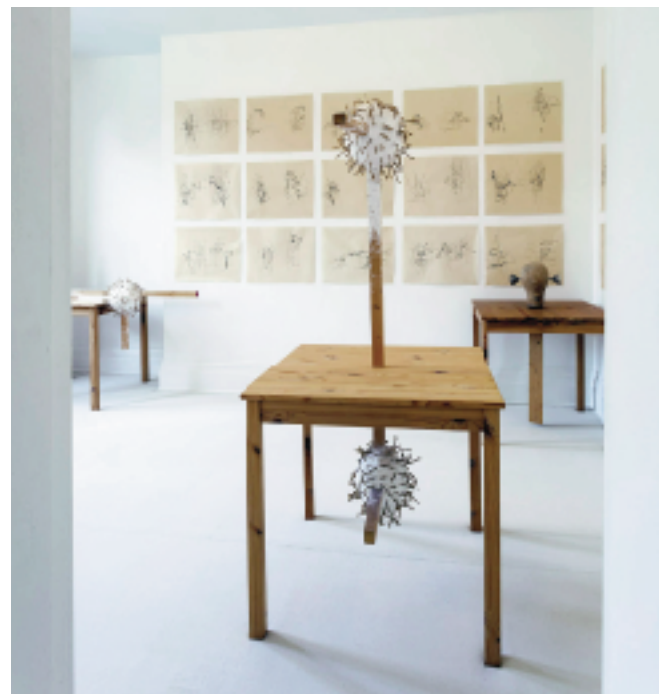
As with most biennials, the work was incredibly uneven; “Artists in

Residence” at the Mattress Factory was undoubtedly the most significant contribution. Barbara Luderski, museum president, and co-director Michael Olijnyk invited Danny Bracken, Ryder Henry, Kathleen Montgomery, John Peña, and Benjamin Sota to create new installations, giving each a large, distinct area in which to work.

Bracken’s *What Does It Mean?* filled the dark, cavernous basement of the main MF building with water,

stone, and soil elements interwoven with video projections, digital sound, and a live video feed. This uncanny and ingenious installation was both beautiful and daunting, blurring the boundaries between the physical and the digital, the actual and the virtual. Real grass was juxtaposed with a simulated projection, a projected crater appeared next to an illusory rainbow, and the top of a tangible stone wall glimmered, evoking a volcanic mound.

Playfulness and seriousness coexisted in John Peña’s two-part *Word Balloons* and Ryder Henry’s *Diaspora*, a dazzling three-room configuration. Peña’s giant egg shapes use the power of language to query life’s uncertainties. In a stark site, two hefty, three-dimensional white word bubbles propped up on tenuous wooden plank-legs commanded attention and framed Peña’s simple



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