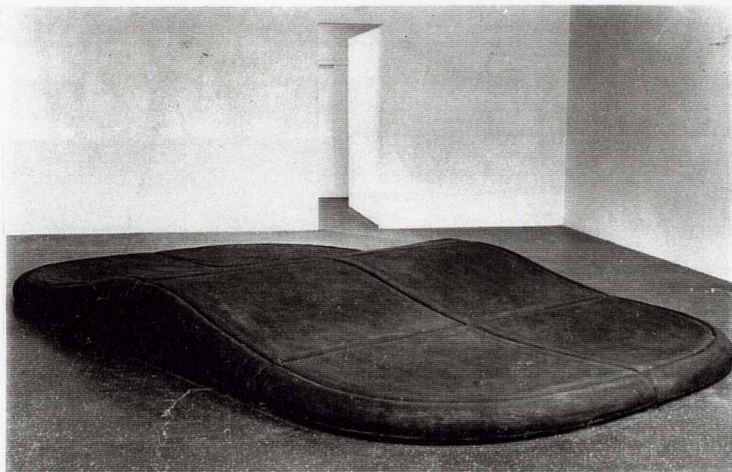


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John Monti: *Untitled (Container Series #7, Black)*, 1993, mixed mediums, 1½ by 9½ by 17 feet; at the Sculpture Center.

John Monti at the Sculpture Center

John Monti's sculptures of the '80s, in which volumes were implied by intricately intersecting planes of plywood, were like Constructivist skeletons of fanciful biomorphic creatures. Recently Monti has fleshed out the wood with darkened concrete to create dense, floor-bound objects. These are also biomorphically suggestive, but they are formally much simpler. And while the exposed skeletal structure of the earlier works suggested a kind of rationalistic transparency, the new works are enigmatically opaque.

For this show, Monti presented just three of these dark, heavy objects. They were arranged in a row down the center of the gallery and spotlighted in the otherwise dim space, which created a solemnly fantastical atmosphere wherein you might imagine them serving some ritualistic function. Two pieces were each about the size of a small suitcase. *Untitled (Container Series #2, Black)*, the simplest, has the appearance of a flat cushion carved from stone. Approximately rectangular but with rounded corners and

bulging ends, it has a satiny, dark-gray finish, and near its ends the edges of the gray-stained plywood ribs that determine its internal structure are exposed. *Untitled (Container Series #1, Black)* has a more complex, lumpy form: an oval mound is topped by a double-armed turret and both are divided into quadrants by plywood bands. The whole vaguely resembles a toy submarine. Like things that might come to your attention in a dream, these curious objects tease your psyche, inviting yet eluding identification and summoning up various intuitive associations. At the same time, their sensually engaging physicality grounds them in the real world.

The smaller pieces, neither exceeding 30½ inches in any dimension, were dwarfed—indeed, somewhat problematically overpowered—by *Untitled (Container Series #7, Black)*, a massive, low-lying pad that covered an approximately 15-by-10-foot floor area. This piece is like a great mattress with a big hump in it. Rectangular in overall shape, it is divided into eight sections by plywood bands. Its

four corners are rounded and it has a thick, convex outer rim. The contours give it a rubbery appearance, and the way it heaves up in the middle (rising from about 8 inches in height at the ends to 16 inches at center) gives it an animated and incipiently erotic quality. Invisible supports hold the whole thing up about an inch off the floor, so that it seems to hover slightly. (The other two pieces are similarly elevated.)

Like the works of Martin Puryear, Tony Cragg or Richard Deacon—sculptors to whom he is clearly indebted—Monti's sculpture playfully subverts habitual patterns of cognition. Conflating arresting sensual form and enchanting poetic mystery, it occupies a gray area where abstraction, representation and metaphor meet.

—Ken Johnson