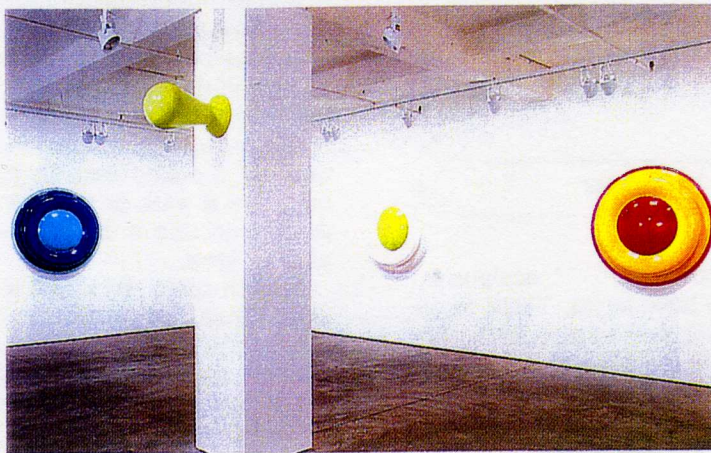


Art in America

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John Monti: Installation view of exhibition, 2000; at Elizabeth Harris.



John Monti at Elizabeth Harris

The Life Savers that are candy and the ones that float on water both seem godparents of John Monti's new sculptures, which have the gleaming, citrus-colored surfaces and the clean, round, smooth-sucked shapes of slow-savored candies, and look buoyant and sturdy enough to save the life of any storm-tossed soul. A fair amount of lip service has been paid in the past few seasons to visual pleasure as art's most pressing concern. But to see works as irrepressibly gleeful as Monti's—they look as if they would soar into the atmosphere if they weren't stuck to the walls—is to recognize how many artists merely illustrate a commercialized nostalgia for good times.

By contrast, Monti's new work is decidedly in and of the material present. For one thing, it is made of a variety of up-to-the-minute synthetics—fiberglass, resin and rubber—with surfaces that range from high gloss to a slightly pebbled gleam to rubbery translucence. It is this last that characterizes the slender ring bordering each of these symmetrical, wall-mounted sculptures, seeming (it's an illusion only) to suction them to the wall like a rubber dart. Six of the works on view, which the artist calls "Rondos," are composed of 2-foot-diameter raised rings surrounding small circular depressions. The rest—

the "Rondos-Grandes" (these are 49 inches in diameter)—have rings around big, convex centers. All the Rondos are two-toned, the color pairings including orange and crimson, Nile green and bright yellow, aqua and dark blue.

There are at least two sculptures that openly evoke body parts: *Jelly Smile: Red* suggests the wax clown lips sold at novelty shops, and *Innie: Pale Buff* resembles an oversized, android-perfect belly button. And, lastly, there is the lime-colored *Green Nubi*, which, alone among the work shown, projects aggressively into space, its shape a cross between a pert little punching bag and colossal pacifier.

Monti's early sculptures were elegant, discrete mechanomorphic wooden structures, but for several years he has produced objects and installations whose softly flowing forms tend to lap viewers' feet, surging outward with a graceful symmetry that belies a savage appetite for space. The new work, by comparison, operates with faultless spatial propriety. Perfectly polished and self-contained, it has the iconicity of Kenneth Noland's target paintings—or of certain commercial logos. The previous work was sweetly menacing; with the new sculpture, Monti has boiled his forms down to a deliciously tart pucker.

—Nancy Princenthal