

**NEW YORK****John Monti****Grace Building**

The works in John Monti's recent series "Beauties," or more casually "flower clusters," touch on elements of Surrealism associated with Kurt Seligmann or Joan Miró. With their heightened organic levity, these unique individuals might be seen as intertwined flora and fauna—plant-like entities given over to a spontaneous bursting forth into quizzical, unexpected forms with an alien presence. Less humanoid than cunningly eerie inhabitants of another world, their weird organs remain isolated, as if discovered in a lost spacecraft hovering between turbulent galaxies. Their roguish color binaries hold a tempo between intensely pinkish and yellowish hues, calling to mind a Flash Gordon time machine miraculously forged in foam and resin-coated fiberglass and spray-painted with fluorescent color. Flourishing trinkets, cast resin flowers, gorgeous amputations, these ponderous, ironically pathetic creatures are born of a coy, yet sensible, if not solicitous imagination.

I have not followed every step of Monti's investigation into these self-mediated, hyper-extensive forms, but I was curious enough—and impressed

enough by his earlier work—to make my way across midtown to the Grace Building, where the "Beauties" found an unexpected habitat. As a showcase for contemporary art, the lobby is so-so, though I can guess why Monti liked the transparent interior, with its views from the sidewalk outside. To some extent, the installation competed visually with Caio Fonseca's painting over the reception desk, so, in order to see the seven "Beauties" as a total installation, one had to stand below it. It was clear that Monti's forms needed space and separation, which he generously gave them, and that the individual placements were far from arbitrary.

Monti's "Beauties" may be a far cry from Minimalism, but I sense that such leanings played some role in his earlier work. Slowly over time, however, something different came into view—the clear understanding that for sculpture to fit into a space, it requires some degree of difference. Separation is important to sense the rhythm of a space, and thus, sculpture has a role to play in adapting our consciousness. What I am suggesting is something other than conformity. When I look at the "Beauties," I do not see them as conforming to anything other than Monti's need

John Monti, installation view of "Beauties," 2016, with *Beauties: Single Head*, 2016, urethane foam, aqua resin, urethane plastic, pigment, and glitter, 43 x 24 x 22.5 in.

to separate his forms from the humdrum of the failed International Style. His sculpture offers another point of reference, a renewed notion of surprise and pleasure.

—Robert C. Morgan