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sculpture

SARATOGA SPRINGS, NEW YORK

Dean Snyder

Tang Teaching Museum and Art Gallery, Skidmore College

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Timothy Cahill

Dean Snyder's brightly colored works are a stark departure from his earlier constructions of leather, tree branches, and annotative drawings. In *Almost Blue*, he abandoned organic materials for polymers, synthetic resins, and high-gloss hot-rod paint. This "garage technology," as Snyder terms it, imposed labor-intensive processes on the formation of his playful new sculptures, including shaping Styrofoam, laminating fiberglass, and applying epoxy gel and automotive paint laced with flaked metal glitter. For each piece, the application of paint alone-multiple layers of primer, base coat, top coat, and clear coat, each cured and meticulously sanded-occupied some three days' work. The result: "kandy-kolored" skins of yellows, reds, and greens on biomorphic forms that combine animal, vegetable, and mineral.

In one, a dead tree, limb sprouts from an enormous polyp. Another resembles a chunk of space rock dripping intergalactic gore. Though functioning as discrete pieces, the nine works were displayed as an ensemble, like some trippy bestiary or garden of other-earthly delights, punctuated with dollops of eros. A funhouse note was added by a giant, stainless-steel cobweb hung in a corner of the entrance, fair warning to all who entered. Inside, with walls painted cave-brown, the sculptures were presented in tight pools of light, like celebrities in a supernatural cabinet of wonder.

The pantomime strangeness of the objects gains deeper meaning through Snyder's titles, which fuse whimsy with classical mythopoetics. The eight-foot *Nepenthe*, a variegated yellow-red tuber with a black snaky stem that terminates in a gaping, acid-green pitcher plant flower, is named for the genus of carnivorous plant and for a Homeric drug that makes the user forget sorrow. *Amnesia* is a puddle of orange ooze sprouting a crop of glassy-eyed, Lucy-in-the-Sky poppies. And Snyder reinterprets *Khronos*, the Greek creator of the universe, as a glittering nugget with a crust that shifts color from orange to yellow, broken at one end to reveal a glistening, meat-red core.

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Almost Blue 2008, urethane auto enamel over epoxy and carbon fiber, cast optical resin, 8.5 x 128 x 58 inches

Almost Blue presents another oozy pool, this time recalling the gassy surface of a geothermal spring. Bubbles frozen in mid-burst and the symmetrical bloom of droplets exploding on impact echo stopaction photography, recalling Snyder's artistic origins as a photographer; similarly, the work's resemblance to the messy flop of a cow pie evokes his childhood on a Pennsylvania farm and adds to the work's biographical allusions. A sense of memoir pervaded the installation, from the humid immediacy of rural life to the carnival dream of the Jersey Shore, where Snyder summered as a boy. In this regard, his new sculptures are no departure, but a continuation of his previous work: meditations on influences that go back to his source, and on the rewards of not fully growing up.