

terra firma Hiroyuki Hamada at Lori Bookstein



#81, 2011-2013, painted resin, 24 x 54 x 25 in

Hiroyuki Hamada's new work, on exhibit at **Lori Bookstein** through November 9th, is a perfect amalgam of mutability and permanence. Pushing and pulling volume, surface, and line as if carving directly in space, Hamada finds a balance between the organic and the geometric -- the physical and the ethereal, if you will -- in a selection of works that are variously intimate, plastic, tactile and blithely unpredictable.

Associations run wild among angular plinths that are butt against spheres in a collision of flat and round. Henry Moore said that his viewers only needed to "*feel shape simply as shape, not as description or reminiscence.*" Similarly, Hamada intuits form, inviting it to morph between the humanistic and the industrial in a fusion of the body's curves, mastaba-like stacks, swollen balloon forms and architectural landscape. Infusing irony and tenderness, the works are at once intellectual, emotive and they possess a sort of aesthetic benevolence that is sensuous and wholly diverting.

Earlier this week, Hiroyuki and I shared some thoughts about work, life, and questioning authority:

Janet Goleas: *The anthropomorphism in the new work is luscious -- do the works relate to non-human form?*

Hiroyuki Hamada: Well...I started to make things in order to explore the mysterious quality of seeing the profoundness and the striking familiarity in the unfamiliar things, the part in "art" that I see as essential and special. I didn't start expressing because I had particular stories or issues. To me, what was interesting was getting to the depth and the richness of our direct relationship to our ability to sense the unknown and I believe that's the key to evolve and explore while very much grounded to "being human". It's our cutting edge way to feel the edges of possibilities and solutions. And it's about being connected to them -- the viewers -- through that mysterious place...sharing the attitude and the result as we live and feel the time and place we share.

JG: *You've moved from the iconic tablets, gumdrops and torpedoes to fleshy, bulbous forms. In some cases the work looks even fluid.*



#73, 2011-2013, painted resin, 46 x 70 x 25 in

HH: We are all human and we do have a root which we all can share and grow together. My approach has been to totally disregard the narrative elements, symbolic elements, or any other conscious efforts to tell stories, just to make sure that I stick to that special place. I'm theorizing -- as an afterthought -- that maybe I need more layers to express a complexity in matters as my life gets complicated with responsibilities of being an adult, living in a time of change, being a parent and so on. The shapes are more complex and they seem to have more directions.

But they are not made to be metaphors. They are made to be the experience.



Foreground, #72, 2011-2013, painted resin (in work), 28 x 53 x 29 in, mid-ground, the artist

JG: *In your earlier works, the surface treatment seemed almost language based -- like cuneiform tablets -- with subtle articulations that scored or striated the face and sculptural body. These are all but absent in the new sculpture. I'm interested in the way - at least to some extent -- that form here overwhelms surface here.*

HH: I think there is still a good amount of surface work in them. It's a way to incorporate an element of time and pulling and pushing of the surface by painting, texturing, shaping and etc. I have a painting background so it's something that comes natural to me. But you are absolutely right that I've been realizing the power of the 3D form. In a way, I am learning the very basic nature of "sculpture."



When I started to make sculptures, it was a great mystery why sculptors are so oblivious to the surface. It was almost unthinkable to me that they just cast things, expecting that pouring material in the mold would take care of the surface. Now I feel the strength of 3D forms in space.

One could argue that it is strong enough to carry the expressive burden while the material gives focus to the main event -- the "sculpture" -- the 3D form in space.



#74, 2011-2013, painted resin, 24 1/2 x 24 1/2 x 57 in



HH: There is an interesting mention about that in the *Wall Street Journal* review of the show. The text is extremely positive in general which I very much appreciate, but the reviewer sees my surface treatment as somewhat redundant. I am guessing this assessment comes from the tradition and the preconceived ideas about sculpture. To me, that's not really a consideration.

JG: *Some of the new work is held inside, or feels as though it's held within or stands on top of leather or steel casements. This is a whole new language for you, yes? Do you have thoughts about uniting pedestal and form?*



#75, 2011-2013, painted resin and painted plaster, 13 1/2 x 14 1/2 x 28 in



HH: Well, the ideas often go much faster and they can be quite adventurous. I do have many different directions in my sketch books but only the practical ones and promising ones come out to be actual pieces. Which is a shame.

I still quite haven't figured out how to incorporate more spontaneous process in the making. But dealing with the base for a piece like #78 has given me an opportunity to brainstorm a solution in a quite spontaneous manner. It was pretty immediate to have the idea of having a really angular, heavy looking bottom beneath the light, organic shape. And I think it went pretty smooth capturing the idea without damaging its essence during the process. I had a great time working with those pieces.

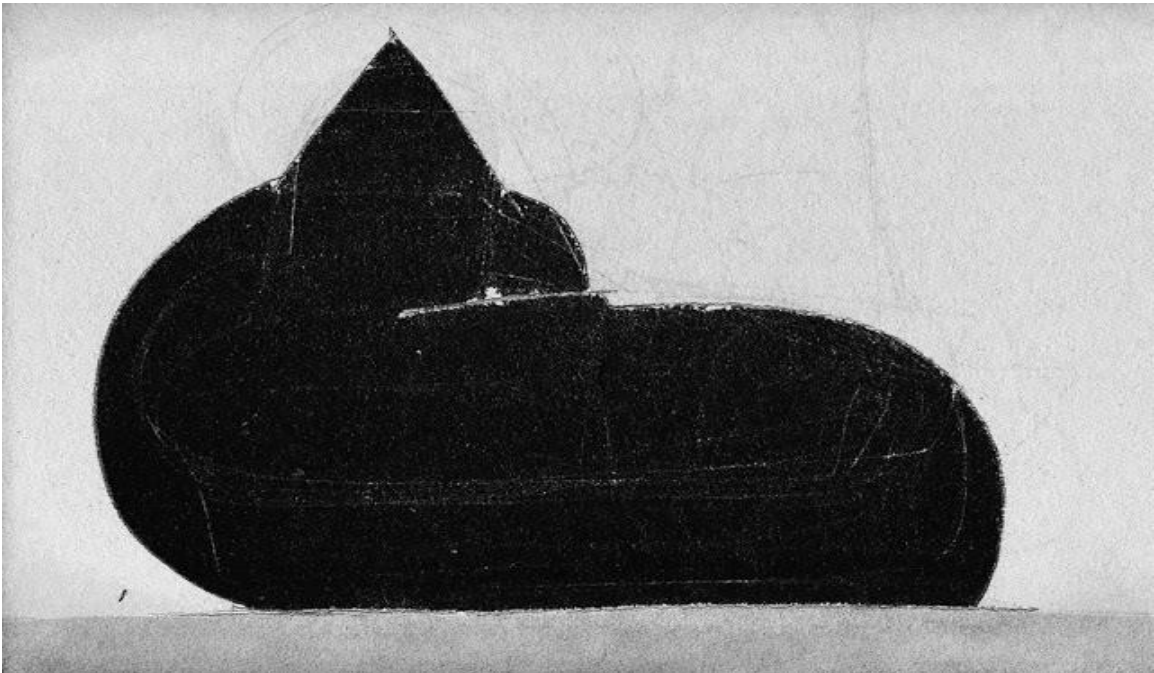
And in terms of steel parts, I learned about it from my friend artist Kim Matthew. She was painting her sculptures with this acrylic paint which had metal powder suspended in it. So when you apply activator, you can give it a real oxidized surface. It's really a versatile surface perfect in some of my current pieces.



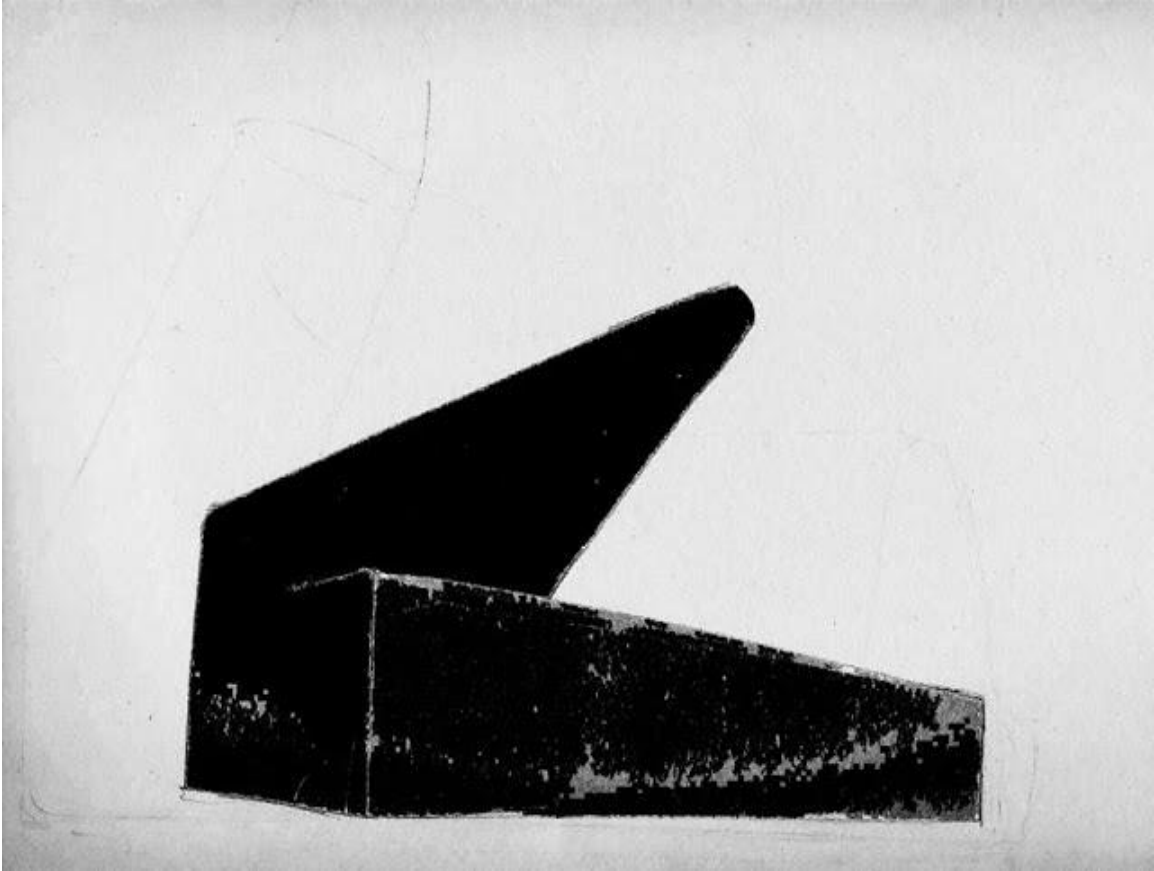
#79, 2011-2012, painted resin, 26 x 35 x 20 in

JG: Your new drawings are wonderful -- they're a little like found objects.

HH: I constantly draw. It's my way of brainstorming visual ideas. This has been an important part of the making process. I get lots of spontaneous ideas, and I use drawing to refine existing ideas.



The digital drawings in the current show are a new development for me. I would start as I always do--a 2B pencil and a sketch book. Then I scan it to continue drawing in my computer. It's very low tech though -- more like working with a black and white enlarger, which I also used to do.



JG: *Do you listen to music when you work?*

HH: Music really used to be a crucial thing in the studio but lately I am spending more time stopping, seeking different perspectives on the work, contemplating and so on without going with the flow of the music on a long stretch. But when I do listen, I opt for milder, contemplative music as oppose to aggressive, dynamic types. I think I use music to get myself in the mood to focus. But I do love uplifting, exciting sort of music which I grew up on as well. Also, for the past years, since the internet has replaced TV and radio about current issues and things that matter...

I am really finding reading and contemplating as a very important process in grounding myself in the context of the time and the space.



I often let my phone read--there are apps that read texts for you--articles, essays -- or I listen to pod casts, radio shows and so on while I sort of look at the pieces and try to see what they need.

JG: *Tell me something about your process. You've spoken so much about focus and contemplation -- is this something you learned or is it something that comes with being an artist?*

HH: Making things is really a non linear process for me. I really think some children who have learning difficulties -- kids with ADHD and the like -- are born with natural tendency to be artists. Making a piece with a cohesive presence that encompasses the harmony of matters that are relevant to our real lives is extremely hard.

You can't miss any clues that the elements are emanating to you. In the making process, anything else becomes secondary.

So when I hear about kids not paying attention to the teacher that's telling them to sit down, stop talking, do this or do that, it really hurts to feel that for those kids those orders are just absolute bullshit compared to what they have to attend to. And many of the things we learn at schools are in fact useless for us but very useful for people who try to control us. Anyway, that wasn't the topic here.



JG: *Maybe the idea of surrendering to the creative process comes naturally to young people with certain learning disabilities. Maybe there is greater flexibility there.*

HH: I often think that it would be great if the schools could teach about the process since it is crucial in any creative endeavor. I feel the whole educational system needs to shift toward self reliance, creative solutions, cooperation and sharing away from obedience, following instructions, authoritative structure, competitions, and so on. Our kids need to cultivate the skills and knowledge to guide us and contribute to a healthy democratic process. We really can't keep creating the mass which keeps allowing the powerful few to exploit and subjugate on a global scale.

JG: *You're so so right. On another note, you mentioned having some visitors to your studio in advance of the show at Lori Bookstein -- Jack Youngerman, Bill King and Connie Fox -- all very seasoned and revered artists. Tell me about those visits.*

HH: Well the very special thing is that the creative process is very slow and personal yet it is very much universal and timeless. We do have a huge generation gap and the cultural differences, but as soon as we talk about art, we are standing on the same ground. We are just people talking about something we feel passionate about. I feel that to be the essence of humanity.

JG: *Thank you Hiroyuki. This has been thoroughly enjoyable.*



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