

POSTMASTERS

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MONICA COOK VOLLEY

Postmasters presents Monica Cook's animation *Volley*, along with new sculptures on view for the first time. Her stop-motion animation fully exploits the uncanny potential of the medium. Cook's laser-like attention to every millimeter of surface was developed during her years as a painter, rendering meticulous depictions of flesh. Her sculptural sensibility is attuned to surface texture, opacity and luminosity. These sculptures have the extra duty of performance in creating her animated work.

Volley is a love story, a beautiful and painfully honest one. Its protagonists are candy-colored primates who dwell in otherworldly crystal caves. This environment, and the bodies of its inhabitants, are colored, adorned, and vivified by powerful fantasies. Wordless yet eloquent, the monkeys dream of love. A skull-faced monkey seduces his darling in a blacklit reverie of efflorescent fluid. A beloved mother-monkey is envisioned as a levitating goddess. Here, love is the power to ennoble and elevate the beloved.

But the illusions of sentiment are not completely convincing. The stark workings of physical necessity are ever-present, revealed in the mechanistic pumpings and ejaculations of breast milk, the eruptions of diseased skin, the exaggerated sexual organs. The monkeys are 'visible,' as are anatomical diagrams. Bones, musculature, and reproductive systems are exposed, re-inscribing our childhood experiences of shock upon learning that our own bodies are stuffed full blood and squirming tubes. The creatures' crude innards – ribcages constructed of telephone cording, inflatable plastic stomach membranes – stand in contrast to their rigorously lifelike faces, with their soulful eyes and perfectly modeled teeth.

Paradoxically, for all the visibility of their artifice, Cook's sculptures are unmistakably alive. Painstakingly constructed from scraps of skin and fur, complete skeletons and organ systems, the figures have all the marks of an organic origin. They exhibit all the unexpected plasticities of having lived and been affected by life, growing, acquiring idiosyncrasies: scars and pustules, preferences, mannerisms. The creatures aren't slick representations of a species or an idea, and they refuse to be reduced to mere sigils. They are particular, individual beings, animated through a deeply evocative process. Cook has an unconditional regard for her creations, and she gives them secrets, hidden interiors, unnecessary mechanisms that constitute a sort of private life. In all their tenderness and grotesquerie, their imperfection is perfectly human.

Like we humans, these monkey-creatures are incomplete, deluded, faintly ridiculous. The squeamish feelings aroused by Cook's work may be the anxiety of recognition. They show us how our very make-up is a leashing-together of implacable oppositions: Violence and desire, sweetness and aggression, devouring lust and untiring devotion. They show us, as well, how lovely and how fragile is the tissue that holds us together.