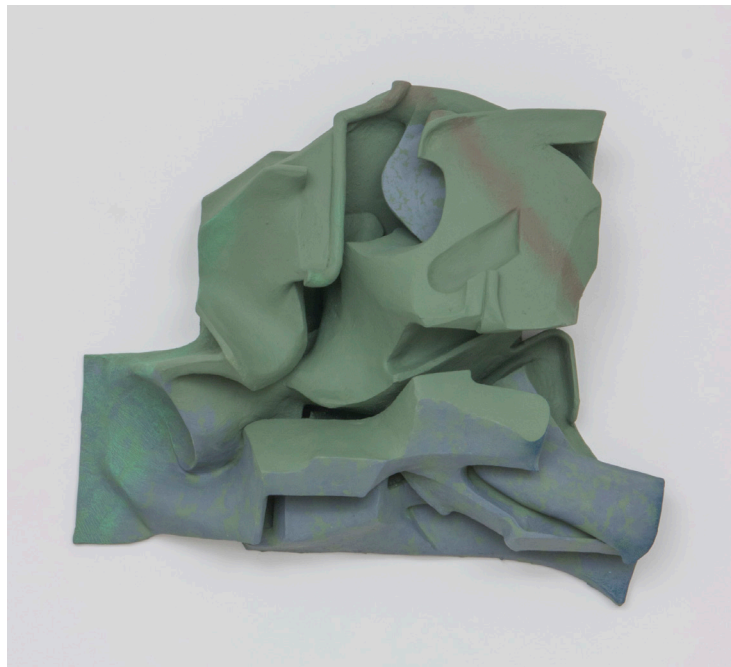


ARTFORUM



Vincent Fecteau,
Untitled, 2014, resin
clay, acrylic paint,
24 × 26 × 8".

Vincent Fecteau

MATTHEW MARKS GALLERY

“My continuing struggle is that I want to express this cheesy emotion that I know isn’t cheesy,” said Vincent Fecteau in 1995. “And I don’t know how to do it.” Such a mission is difficult, but if the solution is elusive, the struggle has been generative. Almost twenty years later, he’s still going at it. In the press release for this recent show, Fecteau states: “I feel like I’m always trying to figure out the same thing. . . . I can’t define what that *thing* is. It’s a feeling or a sound or a song. Maybe it’s a kind of mood.”

At Matthew Marks, Fecteau’s attempts to home in on the nameless emotion encompassed five sculptures and seven collages. The sculptures, roughly two feet by two feet and bulging anthropomorphically from the wall, are topologically complex, distinguished by odd contours, a dearth of right angles, and complicated pockets and folds that commingle the organic and the inorganic, the abstract and the representational, the industrial and the handmade. They induce a certain delirium, containing forms that seem calibrated to ping those deep, dark, pattern-seeking parts of the brain that say, Hey, I *know* this, but then subvert those flashes of recognition as soon as they arrive. A particular chamber could be a car’s curved cupholder or the interior of a seashell, and while the tube running diagonally across the top of one work is pretty obviously modeled after the kind of pipe used for plumbing—the tube’s scale tips us off, as do its two symmetrical curves—the rest of the sculpture has seemingly crumpled and fragmented into forms at once unlocatable and strange. In some cases, semicontained parts appear to have drifted apart, Pangaea-like, and the satisfying way in which they could fit together

broadcasts a possibility of touch you can practically feel.

All of the sculptures are made from resin clay, a hobbyist’s material Fecteau has painted a subdued range of grays, greens, light blues, and purples. In many places, he has lightly brushed the sculpture with an additional color or colors as if to highlight certain ridges and curves, this detailing giving the impression of an emanating aura or—better yet—a subcutaneous blush. Importantly, these works don’t just hang on the wall; they are set three to six inches into it, so that their pockets and folds can be deeper than they might at first appear. On my first walk through the gallery, only once did I notice a cavity that seemed impossibly deep—that *must* have extended beyond the plane of the wall—but even then I had to confirm that fact with the gallery attendant, so trippily complex was the sculpture’s shape. Elsewhere, the works were set back only a few inches, with interiors that curve inward in such a way that we are prompted to get really, really close to try to see—always unsuccessfully—just how deep the hole goes; it’s like peering into an ear. These are not the fathomless voids of, say, Lucio Fontana, but some kind of unsettlingly organic orifice.

If Fecteau’s struggle is that of expressing an intangible affect through abstraction, it is not one that is particularly new. But in contrast to the ardent heroism of classic AbEx, say, Fecteau’s formally complex work stands out for its mellow slowness. It exudes not heat and flash but a vibe of introversion and melancholy, the nostalgia-inflected tone of a weird private world reluctantly opened up.

—Lloyd Wise