

# frieze

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## Rebecca Warren

### The Renaissance Society

Rebecca Warren's first museum show in the US explored precisely what makes sculpture 'sculpture': the process of giving shape to matter. The London-based artist anticipates the temptation to sweep these sculptural forms into a neat art-historical tradition; her emphasis is not on rationality but on the chaos of production and the unruly interpretations the works induce.

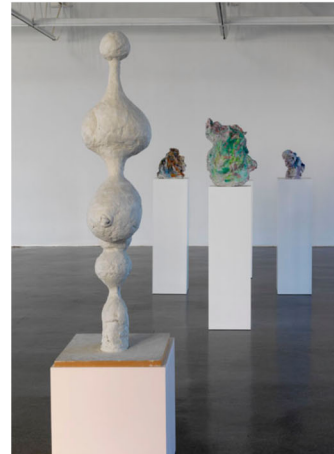
At first glance the space appeared divided between Warren's two materially distinct approaches to sculpture. On the right, three steel constructions composed of planks and blocks stood comfortably apart, accentuating their horizontal or vertical characteristics. To the left, eight plump, mangled and dizzily coloured unfired clay mounds sat on top of waist-height plinths that, while scattered in arrangement, remained harmonious with the grid of the linoleum floor. One steel work seemed to have drifted over to the left side: Reclining Figure (2010) was barely visible behind two plinths, lethargically propping itself up. Was this a stand-off between the soft feminine touch of handcrafted clay and aggressively masculine industrialized steel?

Far from delicate, Warren's heavy clay mounds carry the memory of being tugged, pulled, pressed and kneaded like dough. Hand-painted colours playfully dance around their raw curves and indentations, reminding us that these are not meteorite-like masses torn from a greater whole but embryonic sculpture holding 'the promise of shape'. Incomplete forms spur fanciful imaginings of plants, humans, clouds, insects and more. The colours are suggestive of a child in an arts and crafts class haphazardly applying a messy palette, as well as an artist steadfastly refusing to pleasure viewers' senses. Warren has said that when seeing a 'lovely surface' in her work she likes 'to interrupt that with a bit of ugly paint or tartan or a tail or a tit'. Ugliness is a qualitative device for the artist to make her aesthetics more awkward, less familiar. Warren believes all details to be integral: the classical geometric forms of her white plinths, for example, tame the 'madness' of her clay explosions. The artist uses turntables of almost exact dimensions to the plinths when producing the works, and presented at human height, the viewer can comfortably look at them at eye-level. In the steel works, Large Male and Vertical Composition III (both 2010), the parts match standard lumber sizes, including the 2x4 plank and the brick-sized building block, and are primarily joined together like scaffolding with wedges and bolts typical in woodwork rather than metal

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Published on 01/01/11

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## Galerie Max Hetzler Berlin | Paris

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Cooke, Erika: Rebecca Warren

January 1, 2011

welding. A single fluffy pom-pom sits on each piece. They have domestic echoes, most obvious in the white pom-pom that sits on Function V (2009) as a bowl would on a table. Finding formal resemblances to other artists' work is fruitful in pinning down Warren's peculiarities. Present in Large Male is both David Smith's strategy of reigning in abstraction with anthropomorphic titles, as well as the precarious balancing of four unattached lead plates in Richard Serra's 1969 One Ton Prop (House of Cards). Vertical Composition III features planar elements that echo Theo van Doesburg's architectural principles, as well as the possibility of expansion, contraction and collapse as seen in the nesting ovals of Alexander Rodchenko's Spatial Construction No. 12 (c.1920).

In the centre of the room was a bronze from 2003 entitled Cube. Earlier than any of the other works shown here, Cube was also singular in being the only piece that was mobile. Sitting on a wooden platform with over-sized industrial wheels, this stucco-textured sculpture, with irregular edges, unfixes itself from the potential purity of its geometric shape, instead playing with the possibility of irrational movement: workmanship on wheels.

In conjunction with this exhibition Warren produced three new site-specific bronzes for the roof of the Art Institute of Chicago: There's No Other Way (2010), Bow (2010) and The Main Feeling (2009–10). Totemic in shape, instead of figurative references she involves her immediate environment: the Chicago skyline. Always cognizant of maintaining a human scale in her works, Warren casted these sculptures from fibreboard constructions that she made by hand. Closer to the look of wet clay than bronze, the works seem to defy gravity – looking at them, the feeling is perhaps not so dissimilar from the public's reaction to the first skyscraper erected in Chicago in 1895.

**Erica Cooke**