



SEBASTIAN DI MAURO  
FLOAT

OPENING 18.03.06  
SATURDAY 3:00-5:00PM

IN SEBASTIAN DI MAURO'S SCULPTURES THE PHYSICAL WORLD CONSTITUTES AN OPTIC THROUGH WHICH THE AESTHETIC FOUNDATIONS OF OUR PARTICULAR HUMANITY CAN BE APPROACHED. HIS WORK HAS ALWAYS BEEN MINUTELY ATTENTIVE TO THE WAYS OUR HUMANITY IS BOUND UP WITH BOTH THE FABRICATION OF THE WORLD AND ITS POETIC MYSTIFICATION. THROUGH ITS CONCERN WITH RITUAL AND HABITUAL ACTS AND INTERACTIONS WITH THINGS, AND IN ITS INSISTENT USE OF EVERYDAY MATERIALS – THEMSELVES REPLETE WITH EVERYDAY EXPERIENCES, WITH QUOTIDIAN HUMANITY – MATERIALS THEMSELVES BECOME THINGS, OBJECTS, DEMANDING TOUCH, ARTICULATING TACTILITY. DI MAURO'S INTEREST IN THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THINGS FURTHER TAKES THE FORM OF AN ENGAGEMENT WITH THE OVERLAPS THAT MIGHT BE FORGED AND THE DISTINCTIONS THAT MIGHT BE MADE BETWEEN DOMESTIC AND INDUSTRIAL OBJECTS AND PRACTICES, AND THE WAYS THEY CONSTITUTE THE REACH AND LIMITS OF OUR HUMAN WORLD.

In its elaboration of the worlds of work and rest, Di Mauro's sculptural practice explores the dynamics of warmth, of proximity and tactility. Returning us to the domain of the object, even to the thing itself, his sculptural installations have sketched lines of continuity between substances and materials - olive oil, lead, sugar, carpet underlay and astroturf - that are at once archaic, elemental and resolutely modern, contingent, fabricated. These lines are drawn through each specific work's particular invocation of our measured and profligate use of materials, and in the process they come to bespeak our vast experience of them; in broad terms they express our utter familiarity with things. Refashioned into new forms the materials remind us of their particular aesthetics, they break us out of our habitual engagements and connect us anew to the world of objects.

The material utilised in Float draws on these conceptual threads and returns us to Di Mauro's constant preoccupation with the nature of culture, to the tensions and overlaps between what is highly wrought, artificial and what we barely notice in the familiar world around us. Neoprene is both a lifestyle material – most commonly seen in wet suits – and a piece of science, a miracle technology. Developed last century by the inventor of nylon as an oil-resistant alternative to natural rubber, neoprene is a complex polymer formed in the modernist crucibles of chemistry and industrial demand. Boasting qualities of resistance, robustness, flexibility and versatility of application (from liquid to solid forms, from wetsuits to electrical insulation and car fan belts), it seals and resists noise, corrosion and extremes of temperature. In this way its compliance and ubiquity articulate modernity's promise of a secure and protected environment, safe from the elements while at the same time reminding us of our technological dexterity, our skills in refashioning the world according to our needs.



In daily life neoprene ties us to things while protecting us from them. In its most familiar use in wetsuits it indulges and extends our coastal fantasy of aquatic liberation, casting us adrift into the elements. Drawing on the technological comforts of modern materials that are safely suburban and yet astonishingly space-age, neoprene makes other ways of life possible and keeps us afloat. Like Di Mauro's early work that fashioned banal everyday substances into new forms and uses, neoprene carries a particular history of familiarity, but reminds us at the same time that even every-day materials have fantastical properties that draw us out, away from the coast.

To make the works the neoprene is machine-cut into precise lengths, which are then threaded or hooked painstakingly through a gridded mesh in a practice reminiscent of cottage industry in its labour-intensive and repetitive nature. The multiplicity of the finished work – the tiny cityscapes, the tentacles, the uneven pile – bears witness to the time of its careful, meditative construction, recalling the obsessive making-do aesthetic of rag rugs or quilts. The visible construction alerts us further to the ways each sculpture layers another, earlier level of work in the fabrication of neoprene itself. Like other functional base materials – from rope to linoleum to vinyl – neoprene bears its own history, the story of its fabrication, functions and applications. As a highly technological material, neoprene's construction narrative happens at a chemical, a molecular level, and as such signals both artifice and magic, the making of new substances.

Float's forms recall Di Mauro's earlier hybrid objects – organic, touching forms composed of industrial materials tucked and folded, pressed into service. Once again in Float we have a series of objects that seem familiar both in their components and their forms, their intimate crossings of nature and culture. The bounded humility of the soft dome shapes combines with the gridded core of their construction and with neoprene's always surprising blue/black iridescence, and in the process the putative contradiction of nature and culture – the apparent terms of this aesthetic dialogue – are transformed, with culture now seen to be yearning for nature, aspiring to its forms and abstract principles, the shelter of its domes, the softness of its tentacles. Looking more closely – trying not to touch – we note a further geometry in the square cut edges of each strip, a precision that belies the squashy softness of neoprene, which, when squeezed, we remember, seems to be full of water, a substance somewhere in between sponge and kelp. This jagged kind of boundary between hard and soft, animate and machine-made is marked insistently in the works, drawing us to a sense of the edges of things, to the hard-edged geometry that marks the crash and tessellation of cliffs, the point where the land breaks down into the sea. This is the terrain of division and limits, as well as of the rock pool with its shifting but contained familiarity, and as such takes us back to Di Mauro's reiterated articulation of the impossible boundaries of home and factory, of work and play, and the aesthetic investments we have in their interconnection.

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## BIOGRAPHICAL DETAILS

Sebastian Di Mauro is a Senior Lecturer at the Queensland College of Art, Griffith University. Since 1987 he has held over 35 solo exhibitions. His work has been included in excess of 90 group exhibitions and has been exhibited in Australia and overseas. His sculptures, installations, paintings, and artist books are featured in the collections of many of Australia's key art institutions, including the Queensland Art Gallery, the Art Gallery of Western Australia, McClelland Gallery and Sculpture Park Victoria, Museum of Brisbane and Artbank, Sydney. He was awarded the Logan Art Award for painting (1990) and the Aberdere Art Prize from Ipswich Regional Gallery (Global Arts Link) in 1991. In September 1998, *Between Material*, an account of his work to date, was launched and his work was exhibited in Enjoin in Manila. Di Mauro received a 'New Work' grant in 1999 from the Australia Council to develop an installation of sculpture for Brisbane City Gallery in 2000. He won the Inaugural Woollahra Sculpture Prize and his work was selected for the National Sculpture Prize and Exhibition at the National Gallery of Australia in 2001. In 2003 and 2005 his work was selected for the Helen Lempriere National Sculpture Award and Exhibition. And was a finalist in The McClelland Survey and Award 2003, McClelland Gallery, Langwarrin, Victoria. He won the 2003 Montalto Sculpture Prize (Mornington Peninsular, Victoria). Di Mauro was awarded a residency with Parks Victoria, Melbourne in 2002, 2003 through the Conrad Jupiters Art Prize, Gold Coast City Gallery, and received a residency at the British School, Rome through the Australia Council in 2002. His first public art commission was for 175 Eagle Street, Brisbane in 2002. He has recently completed a major public art work for 33 Charlotte Street, Brisbane titled *Drift and Blur Between* for the Brisbane Magistrates Court, Queensland.

