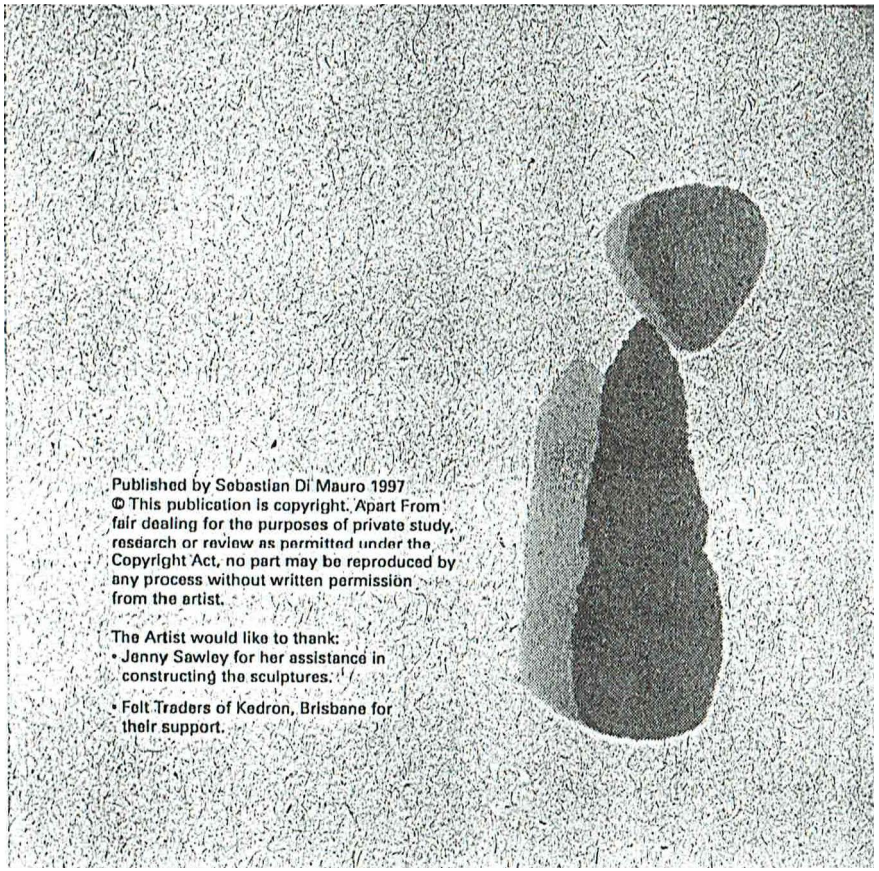
Manifestations

an exhibition by

Sebastian Di Mauro

Beatty Gallery
9 - 27 September



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Manifestation

Sebastian Di Mauro's latest 'manifestations' offer a new incarnation of his favourite media, carpet underlay. In a previous work Di Mauro has used underlay as a metaphor for the revealed, the hidden now exposed, with sculptural pieces that sought to critique space but more specifically form. With these new underlay forms Di Mauro develops the possibilities for this seemingly unassuming medium even further, and comes even closer to something we might call immaterial sculpture, or perhaps more precisely sculpture in transformation. Indeed, the underlay forms which sit on the floor and the wall would seem to be in the process of transforming, literally taking on their prescribed forms in the temporal relationship to the viewer. Di Mauro has caught these little creatures in the act of manifesting their shape. Some of the forms might be animal or human, hovering between a distinct anthropomorphism and a minimal abstraction. We might see these suggestive forms more clearly in comparison with the sculpture of the German artist Joseph Beuys, for whom everything, art included, was in a constant state of change. Beuys declared:

My objects are to be seen as stimulants for the transformation of the idea of sculpture, or of art in general. They should provoke thoughts about what sculpture can be and how the concept of sculpting can be extended to the invisible materials used by everyone:

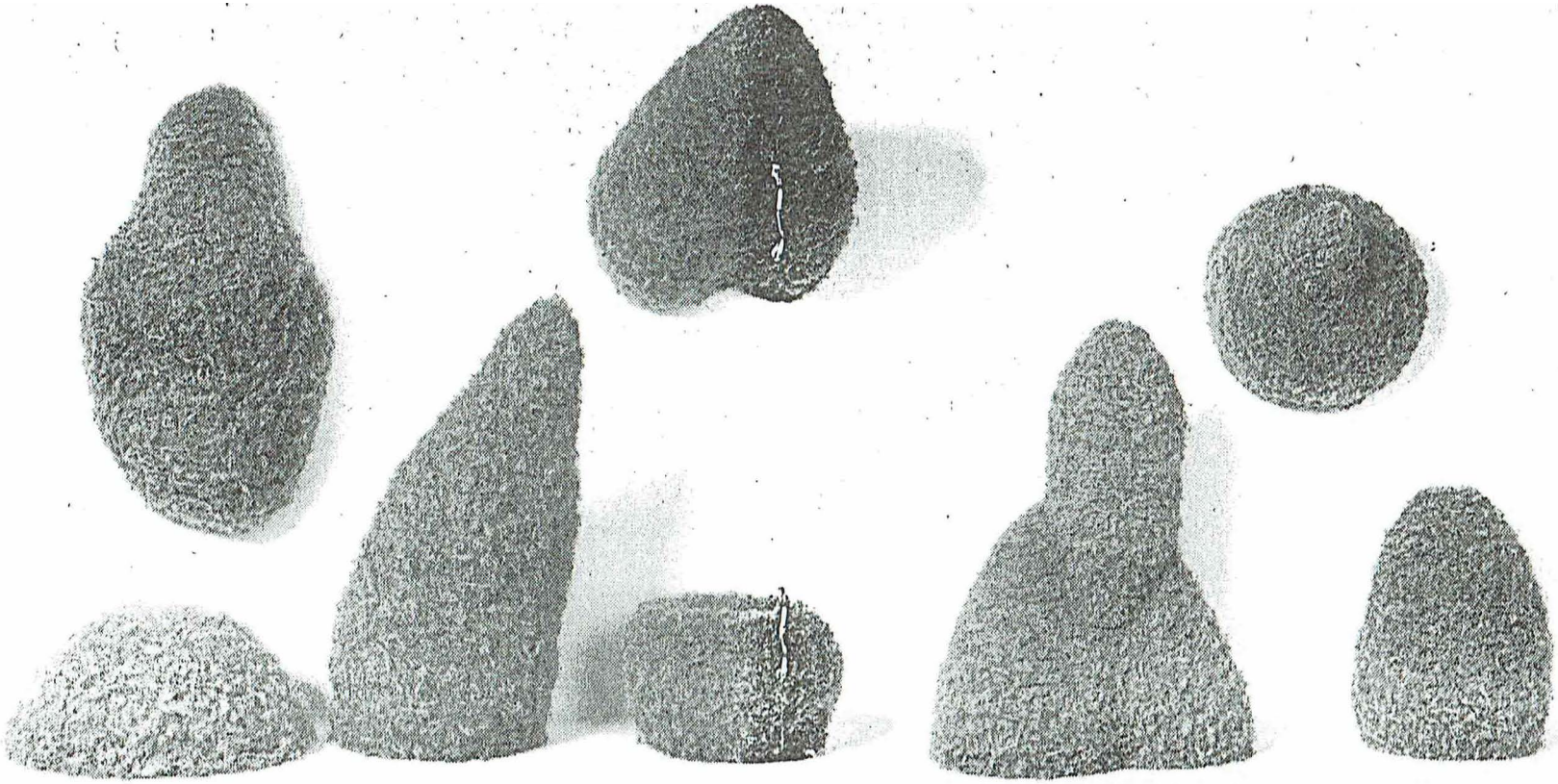
Thinking forms - how we mould our thoughts or
Spoken forms - how we mould and shape the world in which we live
SOCIAL STRUCTURE - how we mould and shape the world in which we live: Sculpture as an evolutionary process; everyone as artist.

That is why the nature of my sculpture is not fixed and finished. Processes continue in most of them: chemical reactions, fermentations, colour changes, decay drying up. Everything is in a state of change.[1]

1 Joseph Bueys, Untitled Statement, c. 1973, Caroline Tisdall, Joseph Beuys

We could say that this Beuysian analogy for sculpture is given form in Di Mauro's monochromatic manifestations which offer similar thoughts on what sculpture might be. Whilst we might also make analogies to minimalism, Di Mauro's underlay animal/plants have abandoned the gestalt in favour of randomness, and in favour of theatricality which was so frowned upon by the formalist critic of minimalism, Michael Fried who reasoned that the phenomenological theatricality of minimalism threatened the negation of art. Di Mauro's works demand a phenomenological appreciation while their energy lies precisely in their power for a theatrical, seemingly alchemical transformation, in their ability transcend sculpture. Redolent with humour and wit, some of the underlay forms hover between phallic icons, and sinister, organic anomalies; others offer vulvic metaphors which echo the body in its absence. One of the most startling wall pieces resembles some kind of massive, extended tongue, which is at once the familiar furry tongue of a dreadful hangover, and a sexually threatening protrusion which begs to be touched. The familiarity of recognition is heightened by the musty smell of the underlay which evokes random memories. Inevitably, the viewer feels compelled to feel the softness of the cleft underneath, participating in the all too familiar abject ritual of attraction and repulsion, drawn by a desire to want to covert these seemingly innocuous, not-so innocent objects. Yet another of the manifesting sculptures resembles a nurturing bird's nest waiting for an occupant.

At their heart, these objects exist in the space between the ludicrous and the embodiment of process art itself. We might see them as post-minimal in their rhetoric, thus reminiscent of not only Beuys, but the extremely tactile work of Eva Hesse. But where Hesse favoured repetition, seriality, and process over the gestalt there is the sense that these objects are offering something even *more* ephemeral and random. Di Mauro's capable handling of the underlay itself lends it a particularly aesthetic appeal, evoking Beuys' own use of felt. Felt, along with fat, were privileged in his work as natural, energy giving materials, possessing of a life force, a



material which might thus be used to suggest a state that was not 'fixed and finished'. In the same way, Di Mauro's sculptures/manifestations offer undecided possibilities, existing as random accidents beautifully and painstakingly realised. Their monochromatic exteriors belie the complex structures which make up the sculptural framework.

In conjunction with these post-grunge, minimal sculptures, Di Mauro has installed a series of small monochromes which form a neat foil to the hairy randomness of the manifestations. With these abstractions Di Mauro pays homage to French conceptual artist Yves Klein, and his famous International Klein Blue (IKB) to create individual meditations on Klein's definition of the 'void'. For Klein, IKB allowed him to create the immaterial within the material, to investigate the immanence of the artwork and thus invest it with a specific spirituality. Significantly, Klein used the monochrome as the vehicle for transformative change, as the state or space for an alchemical reaction. He intended the monochrome to be the focus for cosmic energies travelling through space, emphasising that the emphasis of the work always remains in the 'state of matter', the immateriality of the art object. Di Mauro creates a tableau of monochromes which share the tactile quality of Klein's IKB and extends on his conceptual framework. The seriality of their installation again echoes the minimalist obsession with order. With 'Manifestations' Di Mauro brings something to both the fields of painting and sculpture, and together the work exists as it manifests.

Alison Kubler