

Matthew RONAY

Artforum,
Matthew Ronay

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CRITICS' PICKS



Matthew Ronay, *The Crack, the Swell, an Earth, an Ode* (detail), 2022, basswood, dye, gouache, flocking, plastic, steel, cotton, epoxy, and hot mix asphalt, 3' 1 3/4" × 23' 8" × 1' 1".

DALLAS

Matthew Ronay

NASHER SCULPTURE CENTER
2001 Flora Street

October 22, 2022–January 15, 2023

Matthew Ronay's 2022 sculpture, *The Crack, the Swell, an Earth, an Ode*, is a polychromed puzzle of cut and textured wood.

The roughly twenty-four-foot-long arrangement is segmented and cleverly linked together. One notices plenty of cheeky references to the human body, including breasts, lungs, googly eyes, tongues, splayed hands, and bean-like heads. Yet despite the simple gratification of recognizing these various appendages and organs, the most captivating moments are when Ronay's vaguely coral-like objects only hint at more familiar things, such as gravity-weighted pillows, schools of swaying fish, or even illegibly scribbled words. When the forms are less overt the viewer begins to feel like a co-creator of the work, ensnared by a trap of interpretation that the artist has adeptly set and sprung.

All references aside, the irregular silhouettes are modulated by shifting hues, which produce narrative vignettes that draw the viewer in deeper to Ronay's enticing universe. The color-saturated wood, dyed and painted in pale purples, variegated reds, and an occasional shock of blue, green, or yellow, also confirms the artist's nuanced understanding of painting. The kinship to David Smith, Henry Moore, Cycladic art, and even Dr. Seuss is strongly felt in his work—indeed, the artist's sinuous carvings sit at a crossroads between lightheartedness and unequivocal rigor. The sophisticated notching together of complex formal structures evokes Martin Puryear's sobering carefulness, but shot through with a homespun comedic sensibility. The shadows cast from

the sculpture's enumerable rounded and spindly components are another seduction—like projected film, transforming Ronay's cast of characters into a disembodied echo. In its entirety, *The Crack* reads as a nonsensical Rube Goldberg machine yet to be activated, a cavalcade of imagery that promises to take us out of this world and into another.

— *Matthew Bourbon*