



Donald Locke, *Venus Seed II*, 2002, wax, artificial hair, tropical fruit, 6 by 6 by 15 inches (photo courtesy Solomon Projects).

tion rather than resisting it. Similarly, **Katherine Mitchell's** *Mandala I* (1999) uses the elements of process art (the grid, repetition, systematic use of color) but applied to Owara paper, whose parchment-like transparency and irregularity both accents and contradicts the grid imposed upon it. The result is what is suggested by the work's title: reverberation of a meditative, rather than purely intellectual, kind.

The show as a whole carries forward the Heath Gallery's mission to raise public awareness of what current art is and can be—and thereby, MOCA GA steps solidly into its own role in the contemporary art world.

Glenn Harper
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ATLANTA

If viewers of "From the Altars of El Dorado," **DONALD LOCKE's** 37-sculpture installation at Solomon Projects (June 28—August 3, 2002), felt lost in the aggregation of skittering, gesturing, pre- and trans-human figures filling the rooms, it wasn't from any lack of trustworthy guides. The invitations featured an essay from a prominent sculpture critic; the gallery provided further words from the artist and extra facts for the asking from well-informed staff. From these sources anyone could assemble the backstory of the show: how the work represented a turn towards outsider art from Locke's usual formalism; how Locke (an occasional contributor to this magazine and member of its advisory board) abandoned the full bronze casting process to privilege the muddy underlying waxwork; how the artist (African-American Southerner via Guyana and the UK) delved into the myths of his cultures of origin to invent the characters portrayed in the sculptures; how the theme was derived from Guyana's versions of

the El Dorado stories that lured the earliest colonizers; and how the sculptures were such an unsettling departure for Locke that he initially stored them in a closet, uncertain about their possible reception. This much and more could be determined by the viewer from all the easily available help. But Locke's work succeeded too well and too powerfully for the on-site explication to even begin to address everything the show was about, or diminish any of its deep-running potency.

The full reach of Locke's work far exceeds his ambitious stated intentions. By evoking his past haunts, Locke's sculptures call up flashes of stories going back to Creation, and perhaps farther. Scattered among the more anthropomorphic variations are pieces like *Venus Seed II*, a sperm-like creature with a dangerous-looking topwise mouth, sculpted from black-brown wax that looks like the stuff used to cobble together Adam and trailing a tail like the hair on a shrunken head. All silent presence and ominous potential, it seems to predate *Dreamtime*, emanating an unknowable but unforgettable prehistory, like a bear skull brooding on a cave altar. Stories more recent, not forgotten but silenced by history, seem to emanate from *Joe Potaro, Saga Boy*, a homunculus of fur, wax, wood, a plume of horsehair, and metal bars that might summarize captivity. The sculpture's face is sliced away and an animal skin (flashing the markings of its former owner) is stretched in its place like a drum head. The storyteller here has been nearly erased but what remains can still speak in more ancient ways. As a group, the sculptures catalog the information still available in the silence past the hearing of memory. Locomoted on roots and antlers, grimacing or smiling or messaging with masks, interacting with their kin, the works collect into a community of animated spirits, livelier and longer-lived (the objects seem as ancient as their inspirations) than the forces of suppression and forgetfulness.

REVIEWS Southeast

Our species can no longer remember when we became human, where we awoke, and all the ways we once understood ourselves in relation to the surrounding universe. Plumbing the depths of his own accumulated cultures, Locke brings up universally recognizable material from a universal prehistory, mined where our oldest stories blur back into the news we might have heard around the first campfire. The more you look, the more you hear first-hand from the original sources. A choral work, "Altars of El Dorado" gathers voices that can drown out whatever you remember from mere books about myth and ritual. Their music is audible in parts of the soul that our word-soaked minds usually hide.

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