

Frank Benson
Vitamin 3-D: New Perspectives in Sculpture and Installation

Frank Benson casts a potent spell on the items in his source pool. Banal, sometimes déclassé articles undergo acts of artful suspension: chocolate fountains halt mid-flow; bowling balls poise in columns; CD players, Styro-foam cups and plastic dishware melt, invert and contort into strange variations on standard-unit themes. The process by which these characteristically ephemeral commodities transform into art objects is precisely what engages their sculptural potential. Subtracted from consumer culture, they become the material remainders central to Benson's formal poetry.

Rather than work with readymades, Benson often fabricates his sculptures with the exact materials of the items that have inspired them. In *MDF (A)* and *MDF (B)* (both 2008), for example, two 2.5 centimetre thick pieces of Medium Density Fibreboard (MDF) seem to suffer from random warping but have been actually painstakingly assembled from 0.5 centimetre thick MDF sheets. Benson's professed interest 'in backtracking through the manufacturing and distribution process and intervening one or two steps before the object would become available to the public' here comes into play, as the commodified narrative halts and the residual objects accrue a minimalist air

For *Chocolate Fountain #1* and *#2* (both 2008), Benson reconstructs a party staple in stainless steel (its original material), including the liquid chocolate, which covers the structure's tiers and basin with startling realism. Constantin Brancusi comes to mind, the fountains achieving a marriage of his *Endless Column* and steel pieces, and the heavy-lift table supports perpetuating their phallic sequencing. Rather than bringing the sculptures in line with his forebear's metaphysical formalism, however, Benson's allusion only draws the contemporary conditions of production into greater relief. His fountains' polished-steel facades lack none of Brancusi's material depth, but as re-enactments of present-day commodities, they incline towards the far side of the symbolic economy, where pure spectacle devolves into spectacular form.

By depriving his source objects of mobile positions in capitalistic flux, Benson also foregrounds the psychic charge subtending their market appeal. *Human Statue* (2005) dips deeper into the uncanny valley than anything concocted by the artist's former professor and employer Charles Ray, its hyper-real manufacture and gauche referent coalescing to produce an alternatively disquieting and repulsing viewing experience. Smearing in silver paint and set atop a small pedestal, this life-size *David* poses a simple, material riddle, the solution to which does nothing to alleviate our suspicions about his verisimilitude. In fact, during the 2006-07 'Red Eye' exhibition of works from the Rubell Collection, certain visitors left money before the pedestal base, meeting *Human Statue*' viewing contract with comparable ambiguity. As conventions of art spectatorship and consumer engagement double back upon each other, it becomes clear that the unstable status of this and other Benson works is no less than a mirror of our own. [Tyler Coburn]

01





01 from left:

- *Chocolate Fountain #1*, 2008
Polished stainless steel,
paint and powder-coated aluminium
Fountain 117 × 51 × 51 cm
Plinth 58 × 61 × 91 cm
- *Chocolate Fountain #2*, 2008
Polished stainless steel,
paint and powder-coated aluminium
Fountain 117 × 51 × 51 cm
Plinth 58 × 61 × 91 cm

02 *MDF(A)*, 2008
MDF
50 × 104 × 244 cm

03 *Human Statue*, 2005
Forton MG, oil and
acrylic paint, wood
Figure 175 × 56 × 51 cm
Base 51 × 51 × 51 cm