

COSIMO CAVALLARO makes sculpture that resembles easily recognized natural forms, at least superficially. The sculpture establishes its own identity, however, creating an un-natural, almost magical presence. Color and form merge in Cavallaro's objects, to the point where their earthy humor gives way to ethereal spirit. They maintain an almost disembodied sensuousness, as if pure color could jell into simple – but provocative – shapes.

Cavallaro began this body of work in New York, but quickly recognized that this was the kind of sculpture best fabricated and best understood in California. He moved west to participate, philosophically and technologically, in the kind of artistic thinking now uniquely associated with Los Angeles. The Los Angeles art world has been responding appreciatively, recognizing that Cavallaro, with his sensuous, irreverent, and deeply intuitive approach, is reconfiguring the visual language of “light-and-space” into something that straddles the sexy and the sublime.

In the past year, the artist has worked with ferocious intensity at the Inglewood atelier and fabrication center of Jack Brogan, testing with Brogan a wide range of colors, conditions, fabrication methods and sizes. Surrounded by artifacts of finish/fetish innovation dating back to the early 1960s – some originally made by Brogan, others brought to him for repair – Cavallaro has been able at once to align his work with that of established California light-and-space artists and to establish the distinctive nature of his output. The “jelly bean” objects produced chez Brogan combine the exacting technical practices now afforded Cavallaro in California with the punch and wit of East Coast attitude – and with the sense of cockeyed scale and form and transformative charm that someone who is “not quite American” brings to his adopted land. Raised in Montréal by Calabrian immigrants, Cavallaro has access to a cosmopolitan, quasi-European sensibility, but manifests it south of the border in a surreal, gee-whiz manner, turning the familiar into the unfamiliar and vice versa. We have seen this aesthetic at work in the art of Claes Oldenburg (born in Chicago to the Swedish Consul); Cavallaro turns around and fuses Oldenburg's aesthetic with that of John McCracken.

The ready appeal of Cosimo Cavallaro's “jelly bean” and other sculptural works, appreciated by artists and general audiences alike, has been sparking strong interest toward the creation of public projects, and Cavallaro has begun to command scales and materials appropriate to this eventuality. This adds to the momentum of his career, already established by well received, and occasionally controversial, exhibitions and performances in New York and Europe. Gregarious and articulate, the artist is his own best public representative, and works conscientiously to maintain his following. Most important, however, Cavallaro – an artist practically from birth – is deeply dedicated to his vision. His re-positioning as a California artist with New York (and international) roots, bridges the artistic discourses of the two cultural capitals and puts his work in a prominent and durable position.

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