

LOS ANGELES

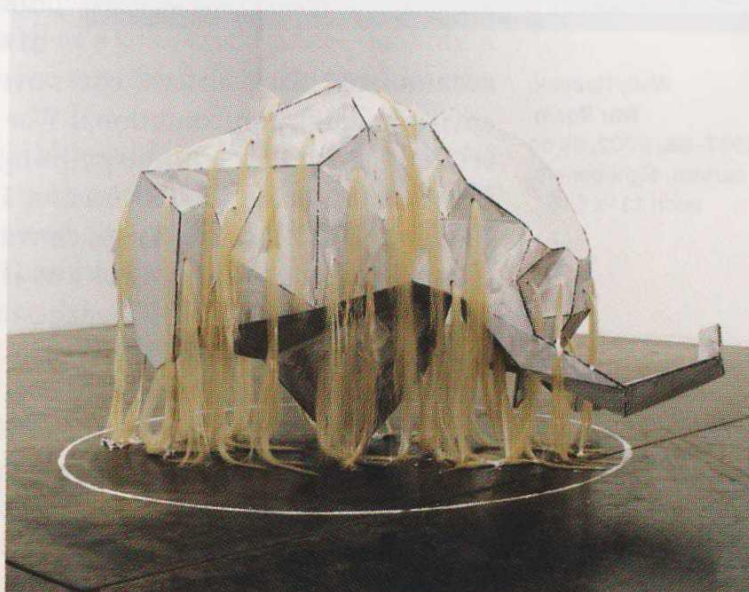
Toby Ziegler

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Hovering before visitors to British artist Toby Ziegler's recent US solo debut was *True North* (all works 2007), one of several sculptures made by joining planes of corrugated cardboard into faceted, volumetric forms. Painted white and suspended from the ceiling, *True North* seems abstract at first glance, but eventually yields to a figurative read. Its combination of geodesically domed buttocks and cleanly severed thighs and waist suggest both a fragment of classical statuary and the harshly truncated torso of a Brancusi. But if one rotates the object in space, one finds that its provocatively specific pose mimics that of the female figure in Gustave Courbet's *Origine du Monde*, 1866. The chopping of the sculpture duplicates the cropping that gives Courbet's painting the combination of intimacy and confrontational punch that characterizes what we would call, in modern terms, a crotch shot.

True North is indicative of a tendency evinced in the show's paintings and sculptures to hedge figuration and abstraction, and to fuse contemporary materials and styles with traditional forms and historical references. It also contained the most explicit references seen here, not just sexually but simply informationally. For instance, one would have to take a much longer long look (and from the right angle, and armed with the relevant background information) at the seven- and eight-foot-monoliths that comprise *The Liberals* before even beginning to make out traces of the haunches, paws, and snouts of the sitting-dog figurines whose greatly enlarged forms define the work's architecture.

But even when the references that sparked his works are lost, Ziegler's talent for generating forms that evoke a specific character or presence endures. He has a special penchant for embedding a sense of contradiction; the forms of *The Liberals*, for example, are suggestive of a certain precision and complexity—via their tectonic



Toby Ziegler,
Pathetic Fallacy,
2007, cardboard,
glue, gesso, and
horsehair, 49¼ x
82⅝ x 35⅜".

surfaces—and also imply receptivity by way of the saucerlike smaller forms that cover them. *Pathetic Fallacy* (the title comes from John Ruskin's dismissal of the assignment of emotion to nature) is a cardboard form riddled with piercings that sprout long tufts of horsehair. The hair both honors and rebuffs Ruskin's idea, allowing us to identify the otherwise abstractly elephantine form as a woolly mammoth but also, more subtly, conspiring with the work's crumpled look to generate unexpected pathos and humor.

Given such inclinations, it's unsurprising that Ziegler also has a thing for clouds. Like Constable, Ziegler derives inspiration from the vaporous forms, using their shifting shapes to evoke various associations in several paintings. Here, atmosphere becomes apparition, horizon substitutes for stripe, lightning bolts do-si-do with gestural marks, and weather patterns are interwoven with decorative designs. Smart and witty and sophisticated in his critical relation to history, Ziegler is, it would seem, above all a romantic.

—*Christopher Miles*