

Movements in Plaster

A Note on Stefanie Mayer's Sculptures

Sculptors and painters have long been struggling with the depiction of motion. One of the most famous solutions was French-American artist Marcel Duchamp's *Nude Descending a Staircase* from 1912. The seemingly fragmented figure appears to either dissolve or multiply on the way down the staircase. The painting brings together a series of different moments in a single image. In the preceding century, French sculptor Auguste Rodin would also use displacements and distortions as means of creating movement. Quoting Rodin, the French philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty described this "internal discordance" as a method for artists to create an illusion of movement in visual art. Artists like Rodin, wrote Merleau-Ponty, would display for example the arms, the trunk, and the head in different moments in time thereby portraying the body in a pose it would never hold in real life. Merleau-Ponty uses a painting by French artist Théodore Géricault as an example. In Géricault's unrealistic painting of horses at Epsom Derby, horses are depicted with their four legs extended outwards. A photograph of a running horse appears to leaping in one place, writes Merleau-Ponty, while "(...) Géricault's horses really run on canvas (...)" (Merleau-Ponty, "Eye and Mind" p. 145). They have a foot (or a hoof) in each instant. These impossible arrangements impose a fictive link, according to Merleau-Ponty, that would allow "(...) transition and duration to arise in bronze and on canvas." (Ibid.). Perhaps plaster should be added to this list of matter in motion. Stefanie Mayer's sculptures are also – in a sense – impossible arrangements. They seem to linger in-between different states. They are graceful and rough at the same time. It is difficult to decide whether they are elegant or clumsy, heavy or light, or perhaps spinning outward or inward. They are simultaneously in motion and motionless. Each sculpture seems to be on the verge of something else. This immediacy allows audiences to image the sculpture as part of a prolonged moment extending backwards as well as forwards in time. They are caught in a momentary pose before either tipping over or continuing their centripetal and centrifugal movements outwards, inwards and upwards.

To pose is usually associated with live performances, but the pose could also be understood as an artwork's ability to capture a series of movements in matter. Stefanie Mayer's poses portray motion as material matter.

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