



REVIEW - 10 JAN 2017

Kelly Akashi

François Ghebaly Gallery, Los Angeles, USA

BY EVAN MOFFITT

'Now I am ready to tell how bodies are changed into other bodies,' Ovid famously wrote in *Metamorphoses*. Like the bard I found myself bewitched by bodies in transformation when I visited Kelly Akashi's show at François Ghebaly, 'Being as a Thing'. A singular alchemist, Akashi seems to smelt her sculptures in a furnace much older than mankind.

The show centres around four blonde-lacquered shelving units, *Arrangement I-III* and *Activity Table* (all works 2016), dripping with candle wax and gooey glass sculptures, like altars for some New Age religion. *Arrangement I* is laden with lumpy glass balloons in brown, blue and pink; I imagined Akashi inflating their molten cores like Jean Simeon Chardin's *Boy Blowing Bubbles* (ca. 1734). The table's legs break its surface, extending up several feet, where they are garlanded with candles – some lit – like bunches of drying herbs. On *Activity Table*, the candles assume even wilder forms, twisting like hideously gnarled tubers or cascading over corners like skeins of silken hair. The glass balloons reappear here, one resembling a burnt-out Edison bulb, resting atop a rye-dark purple cake of

soapy wax. Other, more even forms lend the arrangement their placid presence; one, a ribbed glass cucumber, glistens like a brand-new dildo.



Kelly Akashi, 'Being as a Thing', 2016, exhibition view, François Ghebaly, Los Angeles. Courtesy: François Ghebaly, Los Angeles; photograph: Marten Elder

At sundown each night, the candles are lit, and Akashi's precious craft begins to liquefy. By the time I visited the gallery, two weeks into the run of the show, table legs were caked with drips of hardened wax. The air was filled with a sweet, organic fragrance. The ice blue core of *Wax Candle (North)* had burnt a mottled purple, difficult to distinguish from the bronze cast candle that held it in place – two coiled, nesting turds. As *Wax Candle's* flame snaked up towards the ceiling, an ashy bruise grew on the white gallery wall, and I imagined for a moment that its scorched plaster might embalm me there alive.

Two large cracks in the gallery floor have sprouted bronze-cast weeds, covered in hand-cut and etched copper leaves. *Tall Weed* and *Hairy Weed* are meticulously finished works, but like the melting candle wax they refer to an entropic drive in Akashi's work. What is a weed but a maligned imperfection? These sculptures celebrate the beautiful chaos of the wild – those parts of the natural world that art, for most of its history, has tried to pacify. A series of ghostly chromogenic photograms, resembling the wormhole in Stanley Kubrick's *2001: A Space Odyssey*,

are like microscopic cross-sections of these unruly organisms. Akashi revels in nature's asymmetry. Her small labours reveal a deep love not for part, but for whole. She worships not just the flower, but its entire messy ecosystem.



Kelly Akashi, *Hairy Weed*, 2016,
bronze, copper and plant ash, 8 x 8 x
69 cm. Courtesy: the artist and
François Ghebaly, Los Angeles;
photograph: Marten Elder

In its title, 'Being as a Thing' at once recalls Martin Heidegger and the mind-body problems of cognitive philosophy. What would it be like to exist as an unconscious object, a mute mineral or fruit? Akashi's sculptures hint at the answer. Her passion for materials imbues each with a kind of soul, animating their forms. *Be Me (Japanese-Californian Citrus)*, a stainless steel cast of a pockmarked orange with a jolly top-knot, sits in a square window cut in one of the gallery's walls like a kind of self-portrait, its title referring to the artist's Japanese-American heritage and upbringing in California. Two loosely-packed stacks of bricks, *ways of being (arched, extended)* and *ways of being (figure)*, offer small votive objects in wax and iridescent molten lead, dripping between the cracks, quietly thriving in small spaces. Animal, vegetable, mineral – each malformed in different ways, each beautifully and uniquely imperfect, each in a state of continual transformation.