ARTFORUM
NOVEMBER 2008 INTERNATIONAL

CHANTAL AKERMAN
CENTER FOR LAND USE INTERPRETATION
BUCKMINSTER FULLER

and formations that seemed to have come from other worlds. Multicolored miniature heads (human, animal, and hybrid) topped glass canopic-style jars. Oversize mushroom sculptures sprouted between cantilevered plinths. Roughly molded figurines stood precariously on gangly legs, or sat in self-contained rapture, hands raised and eyes closed as if in mystic reverie.

The initial impression was of a wistfully romantic idyll, as Upritchard has described some of her earlier works. This "rainwob" community seemed as nostalgic for a mythic past as it was a fantastical future vision—an intriguing mix of Alice's Wonderland, early Paul McCarthy, and the Hobbitty hidey-hole theme parks on which New Zealand's tourist industry has come to rely (the country served as the film location of Peter Jackson's *Lord of the Rings* trilogy). At the same time, this mild utopianism was tempered by decidedly postapocalyptic inflections. The figurines were set apart from each other, atomized, or, at best, connected only through a shared spatial narrative of isolation. Moreover, the figures' outstretched arms, bowed legs, and distorted bodies harked back to well-known images of survivors and victims of war, such as Margaret Bourke-White's photographs of emaciated Jewish corpses at the end of World War II or the plaintive appeal to Huýnh Công Út's camera by Kim Phuc after a napalm attack in South Vietnam. Reminders of death were never far away from this world at the end of a New Age rainbow.

Suspended between the Apocalypse and a hippie afterlife, *rainwob ii* rejected any easy resolution of its mix of historical referents. Instead, Upritchard insisted on keeping the installation's narrative possibilities in tension, catering to cultural pessimist and mystical spiritualist alike. Though hardly as biting or confrontational as her earlier sculptures, *rainwob ii* nonetheless delicately extended Upritchard's interest in the diverse histories and cultural memories that inform contemporary imaginings.

—*Anthony Gardner*

MUMBAI

Peter Buggenhout

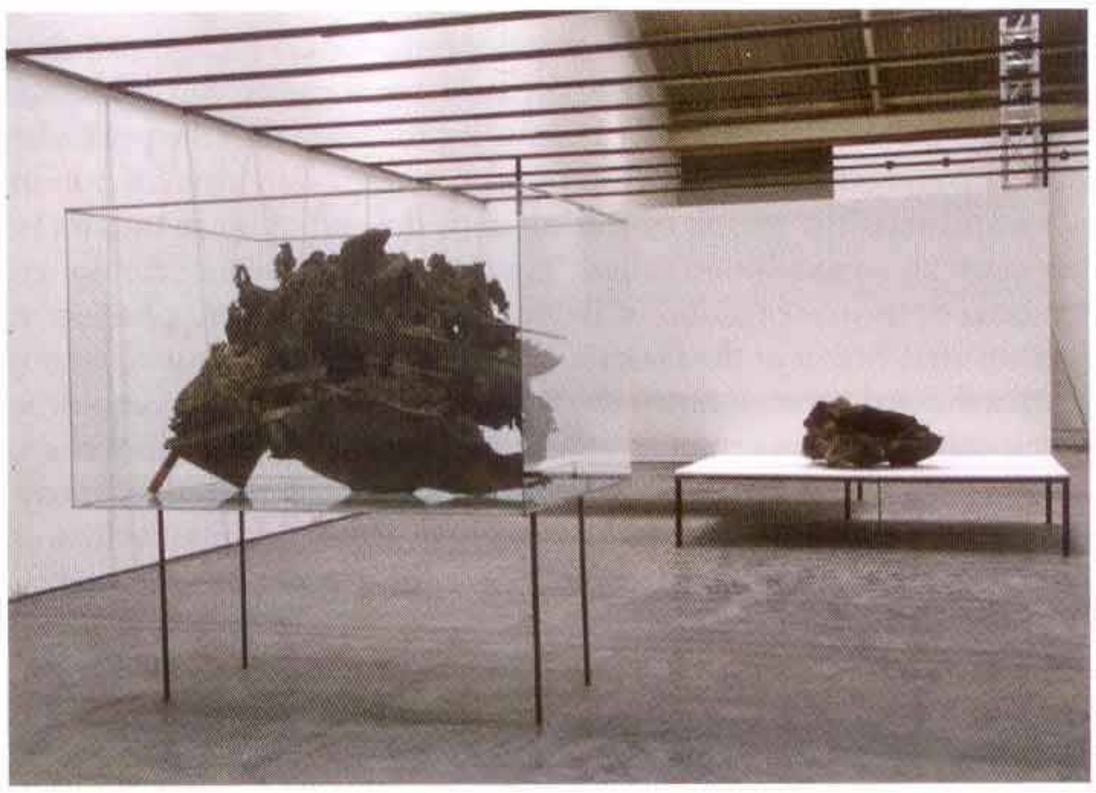
GALLERY MASKARA

Visiting a gallery in Mumbai is generally gratifying, if for no other reason than that the air-conditioned white cube provides a welcome respite from the heat and dust of the city's streets. But not this time. For his first show in India, "*Res Derelictae II*," Belgian artist Peter Buggenhout was determined that we should encounter at least one of the things we were fleeing from: dust.

Buggenhout's show, curated by Sofie Van Loo and gallery owner Abhay Maskara, comprised four large, lumpy objects, each made of waste material. Iron slag, polystyrene, polyester, and cardboard were thickly coated with the dust the artist purchased from professional cleaning companies in Belgium. These "dust sculptures" (as Buggenhout dubs them) were not specifically created for his Mumbai debut, but they were selected because of the aptness of their medium. Presenting dust as art was meant to make Mumbaikars scrutinize afresh this all-too-familiar irritant. The almost clinical setting of pristine white walls and gleaming glass formed a deliberate contrast to the grubbiness of the art and the conditions outside.

From a distance, the four sculptures looked remarkably alike—each resembling a rough-edged, brownish-gray rock. Yet the longer one wandered around the gallery, which had been turned into a sort of labyrinth by temporary white walls, the more the differences among them emerged. The two larger sculptures were placed in glass vitrines. The deep green glass and the gallery's soft lighting imbued them with an underwater glow and the patina of rusty metal, momentarily suggesting the romantic tale of a shipwreck: Aren't the curved bottoms of the structures, come to think of it, something like hulls of boats?

Buggenhout has been making dust sculptures since 2003. They are all given the same name: *The Blind Leading the Blind*, a reference to Pieter Brueghel the Elder's painting *Parable of the Blind*, 1568. Blindness—a metaphor for the limits of logical investigation—is central to Buggenhout's art. He is beginning to be well known in Europe for his sculptures and installations fashioned from abject materials—blood, hair, and animal intestines—that are influenced by Georges Bataille's concept of *l'informe*, formless waste or excess that evades categorization. In "*Res Derelictae II*," bands of shadow produced by iron beams fell across the lumpy objects. From certain angles, the shadows converged to construct a prisonlike enclosure. However, as viewers moved around the gallery, the shadows moved too, so that artworks invariably escaped containment.



View of "Peter Buggenhout," 2008. Foreground: *The Blind Leading the Blind #24*, 2008. Background: *The Blind Leading the Blind #15*, 2007.

Surrealism has often been accused of romanticizing non-Western cultures for their supposed spirituality, usually treated as a foil for Western rationalism. (Arguably, Bataille's Primitivist musings on African magic do just this.) Initially, it is tempting to ascribe such motives to Buggenhout's art as well. In the catalogue for his 2006 exhibition in Belgium, *Sincerely, A Friend*, Buggenhout's photographs of Hindu icons—such as a weathered statue of Ganesh, shot when the artist visited India in 1995—were placed among images of his similarly misshapen sculptures, some of which have obvious references to Hinduism, such as *Lingam*, 2003. Is this visual correspondence meant to suggest that the spirituality of the icons is echoed in the art? In fact, "*Res Derelictae II*" sidestepped such accusations of exoticism because it was so attuned to Mumbai's multifaceted reality: Gallery Maskara is situated in Colaba, a scruffy neighborhood that has become home to the city's most cutting-edge galleries, and the exhibition's disturbing appeal lay precisely in its ability to mirror these contradictions.

—*Zehra Jumabhoy*