

Peter Barbor

Artist Statement

I employ the figure as a vehicle to explore an imagined past as a means to problematize the present. Through a provisional application of plastic materials--clay, plaster, paper pulp, wax--I sculpt bodies suspended in a state of becoming or decomposition. I embrace impermanence. The tenuous lifespans of my sculptures point to the mortality of the histories and mythologies that support them. Slaked, slathered, stuck together, I rely on both physical and conceptual armatures.

As a general rule, I try to build everything from the inside out. I aim to resolve nothing in a surface. Instead, I start with a skeleton, often of scrap wood and wire, and build in layers, establishing gesture before stretching a skin. A figure remains open and riddled with holes, exploring porosities defined both formally and historically. Speed and intuition match the material reality of works that can change at the whim of environmental stressors and the passage of time. Leaving clay unfired, I sometimes like to pretend my figurative works are holding their breath. Upon exhale, the image they've sustained will slake down, blow away, or fall to pieces. Through courting risk and embodying vulnerability, my sculptures hope to assert that matter matters. The composition of my work both reinforces its ideas while simultaneously questioning its precursors.

Amalgamations of materials often echo how I conflate and complicate source imagery and ideas. I question what happens when established hierarchies are placed in reverse. A scarecrow may become a man of sorrows. The body is the site of individual experience, but the strangeness of inhabiting a body is a shared phenomenon. What is felt often translates to what is believed. I approach my work with equal parts irreverence and a sort of fervent faith. I frequently wonder what the afterlife of the mythic past is. Drawing from disparate time periods, as a scavenger, unremarkable archaeologist, and low-brow alchemist, my work is a theater in the round. Through the remixing of disparate narratives, I aim to assert that the present is composed of plural histories. Our identities are a smelting of many pasts, both familiar and not. The transformation and performance of my materials may ask for a suspension of disbelief. These bodies are either just mud and sticks or the real thing.