

Notes:

1. Allucquere Rosanne Stone, "Will the Real Body Please Stand Up?" in *The Cybercultures Reader*, Eds. David Bell and Barbara Kennedy (London: Routledge, 2000), pp.517-23.
2. The linguistic origin of "monster" is found in the Greek word "teras," which means an object of fright and wonder, or abhorrence and admiration. The word "teratology" also comes from the same origin. Historically speaking, it was Aristotle who drew a connection between the female being and the monster. Defining the male body as the standard norm for the human body, the Greek philosopher maintained that a female baby is produced when the processes of reproduction and growth deviate from the norm. He thus originated the longstanding historical definition of woman as abnormality, monster and other. See Rosi Braidotti, "Signs of Wonder and Traces of Doubt: On Teratology and Embodied Differences" in *Between Monster, Goddesses and Cyborgs: Feminist Confrontations with Science, Medicine and Cyberspace*, Eds. Braidotti and Nina Lykke (New York: Zone Books, 1996), pp.135-52.
3. Lee Bul in interview with Hans-Ulrich Obrist, "Cyborg and Silicone: Lee Bul and Her Art" in *Lee Bul* exhibition catalog (Seoul: Artsonje Center, 1998), unpaginated.
4. Inspired by a 1970s feminist science fiction based on a certain research on brain transplant, "A Cyborg Manifesto" posits the hybrid-form cyborg as a model for the post-gender mythology in the era of new technologies, or as a political metaphor. Haraway's theory counters masculinist reason and universalism as well as all dualistic thinking. The image of cyborg derives pleasure from blurring the boundaries of the binaries, such as human/animal, organism/machine and matter/non-matter, and ultimately operates to destroy them. Donna Haraway, "A Cyborg Manifesto," *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature* (Free Association Books, 1991), pp.149-82.
5. *Sargasso* is an area in the north Atlantic inhabited by massive quantities of marine plant lives, was feared by sailors because of the hazardous condition. *Amaryllis*, the name of a flower in the lily family, means both a shepherdess and a succubus. *Chrysalis*, the larva before its metamorphosis into a butterfly or moth, was thought to be related to witches and alchemy. *Siren* is the half-human female, half-bird sea fairy in Greek mythology, which seduced seafarers to their death. *Supernova*, a star that emanates the most energy at the moment of its disappearance, was the title of a 2000 sci-fi film. In the film, the title specifically refers to a mysterious object which provides youth and immortality.
6. The cyberpunks, who are leading contemporary culture, are mostly adolescent males, and the cyberimages produced and consumed by them are extremely gendered and stereotypical, focusing on and reinforcing the male/female, rather than human/machine, distinction. See Judith Squires, "Fabulous Feminist Futures and the Lure of Cyberculture" in *The Cybercultures Reader*, pp.360-71.
7. Anne Balsamo, *Technologies of the Gendered Body: Reading Cyborg Women* (Duke University Press, 1996), pp.3-31.
8. Anita Hagerman-Young and Kerry Wilks, "The Theater of the World" in Ed. Larry Norman, *The Theatrical Baroque* (University of Chicago, 2001), pp.36-45.

(translated by Doryun M. Chong)

Editor's Note:

The following publications have been referenced for works by Hieronymus Bosch and Peter Paul Rubens:

- Peter Beagle, *The Garden of Earthly Delights* (Viking, 1982)
- Julius Held and Donald Posner, *17th and 18th Century Art* (Prentice Hall, 1972)

Les deux corps de l'artiste
An interview with Lee Bul

Kim Seung-duk (KS): The most salient aspect of your more recent sculptural practice is the exploration of ideas and manifestations of the "monstrous." Can you talk about how this fits into the overall concerns of your artistic production?

Lee Bul (LB): As you know, I was trained in art school at a time when the dominant modes in Korean sculpture were either abstract-minimal or figurative-realist. Despite the apparent opposition between the two, both were, in my view, dead languages that closed off the possibility of saying anything new. Also, there was the constraint on form imposed by materials like stone and steel—materials that were connected to dubious notions of permanence and invulnerability.

Of course, when I first turned to "unconventional" materials like fabric, foam rubber, and sequins, I wasn't trying to make a conscious break with tradition so much as trying to see what I could do with stuff that was near at hand. And this ultimately freed me up to experiment with organic and sometimes phantasmic forms, imaginary morphologies emerging from my private perceptions and experiences and perhaps memories and dreams.

In the beginning, everyone in Korea dismissed these works. It wasn't art, they said. Then later, when discourses of gender and the body became fashionable, they were eager to place my work into those convenient categories. But ultimately this wasn't instructive, either, because these categories became orthodoxies in their own way, whereas the "monstrous" aspect of my work has always been about exceeding prescribed boundaries and touching upon the uncategorizable, the uncanny.

KS: One of the central, recurrent themes in science fiction is the shifting borderline between the organic and the technological. How do you see your work in relation to this issue?

LB: The tension between biology and technology touches upon a range of thorny questions that have been with us since time immemorial, long before the emergence of an industrial or technological civilization. For me, it's essentially a continuing inquiry into the schizophrenia between our faith in progress and perfectibility, and our secret dread of exceeding our "natural" boundaries. In this sense, you could say the myths of Prometheus and Icarus were early examples of science fiction.

I'm exploring a similar territory with my cyborg and monster sculptures. For me, the cyborg, as a visual trope and conceptual metaphor, is deeply ambivalent. And the monster is its dark doppelganger. Yes, I'm aware of Donna Haraway's theories, which unfortunately seem to have been co-opted by the spectacle of the capitalist techno-sublime. There's a forced triumphalism to this whole phenomenon, as if to deliberately repress any suspicion of potential failure or disaster.

It might be useful here to recall Paracelsus, the 16th-century Swiss physician and alchemist, who claimed to have created a "homunculus," a little man, from a mixture of human semen and blood. This homunculus, according to Paracelsus, grew up with a sweet temperament until it acquired intellect and knowledge, at which point it turned destructive and self-destructive. In short, it became a "monster." And the word "monster," we should keep in mind, is derived from the Latin "monstrum," meaning portent, a dark hint of what's to come.

KS: Let's for a moment backtrack and talk about your beginnings, which included performances that were socially conscious, addressing issues surrounding the construction of femininity.

LB: My first performances were a natural extension of my sculptural concerns and

incorporated some of the soft-sculptural forms that I had been working on. These were made of fabric and foam rubber, and sprouted appendages resembling tentacles or extra limbs. But they were hollow inside, flexible, and relatively light, so they could be worn. In performance, they acquired the elements of motion, contingency, and immediacy. The human body within could not be viewed in isolation from this second, artificial, and somewhat monstrous body on the outside. In this blurring of distinction, I could convey something of the sense of mutability, instability, and even vulnerability in our experience of the body.

Initially, I was drawn to performance because I found it, in some ways, an oppositional practice that defied categorization. Of course, it's now thoroughly institutionalized. I'm not so sure, though, that when I began these performances I had a definite activist agenda in mind. As a young artist, I was more concerned with finding ways to give expression to what I thought were largely personal perceptions and experiences of the world around me. But the fact that I was a woman doing this in public gave it a political dimension. And that I was dealing with aspects of the body, my body—which, of course, happens to be feminine—made it controversial, and even confrontational, for many people.

KS: In your cyborgs, there are identifiable, gendered features, partial breasts and so on. But in your more recent series of monster sculptures like *Amaryllis* (pp.54,62) and *Siren* (pp.55,60), these feminine anatomical traits seem to have become subsumed in insect-like morphologies. Is this an attempt to touch upon post-gender issues?

LB: The feminine forms of the cyborgs are a symptom of the ways in which, throughout modern history, the seduction and the threat of bewildering technological advances have been sublimated into more controllable, more recognizable manifestations. Of course, the elements of menace and instability are still there, underneath the layers of intricate repression. Think of the female robot in Fritz Lang's *Metropolis*, one of the earliest examples of the modern cyborg: it's a masculine fantasy and projection which attempts to negotiate, however uneasily, the fear of the all-consuming mother and the will to discipline and harness this force. An evolution of this idea is prevalent also in the Japanese *anime* and *manga*, from which most of our current morphologies of the cyborg are derived.

I don't know if I could characterize my more recent monstrous forms as an attempt to enter the realm of the "post-gender." Unfortunately, I'm not familiar enough with this terminology to say much about it in relation to my work. But what I've done is essentially to push the logic of the masculine fantasy of the cyborg to its darkest extremes, to the point of convulsion, a shattering that ironically gives rise to proliferating, extravagant, auto-productive forms.

SK: In terms of visibility, there is a sort of post-human, post-anthropomorphic quality to these monsters. Does it allow these works to be considered in the context of figurative sculpture?

LB: By "post-human" or "post-anthropomorphic," I assume you're talking about the relationship of these works to the human figure. Of course, consciously or subconsciously, the form and structure of our body is an inescapable point of reference in any representation. Whether alluded to, denied, distorted, or even abstracted, it's always there—like a specter.

Even when we conceive of the divine, it tends to take on a human semblance. This is the only way we know how to grasp the unknowable. We are essentially narcissistic that way. And so it only makes sense that when we delve into our

darkest fears and anxieties, they also tend to become manifested in forms that are predicated, however tenuously, on the human. Think of the figures in Bosch. Or even further back, the fantastic creatures of the medieval bestiary, a very early expression of our impulse to project elements of the human even onto an imaginary natural world.

In this sense, the “post-human” has always existed alongside the human as its doppelgänger. It’s nothing new. Of course, we now live in an age that is supposedly rationalist and technological. So today, our bestiary is filled with the fantasies and nightmares of biomechanical couplings, the fusion of flesh and polymers, but this too ultimately refers back to our preoccupations with the body we inhabit. Insofar as figurative sculpture is understood as a sustained exploration of such preoccupations, I guess you could consider my work in that context. But strictly as an art-historical category or genre, it doesn’t interest me.

Editor’s Note:

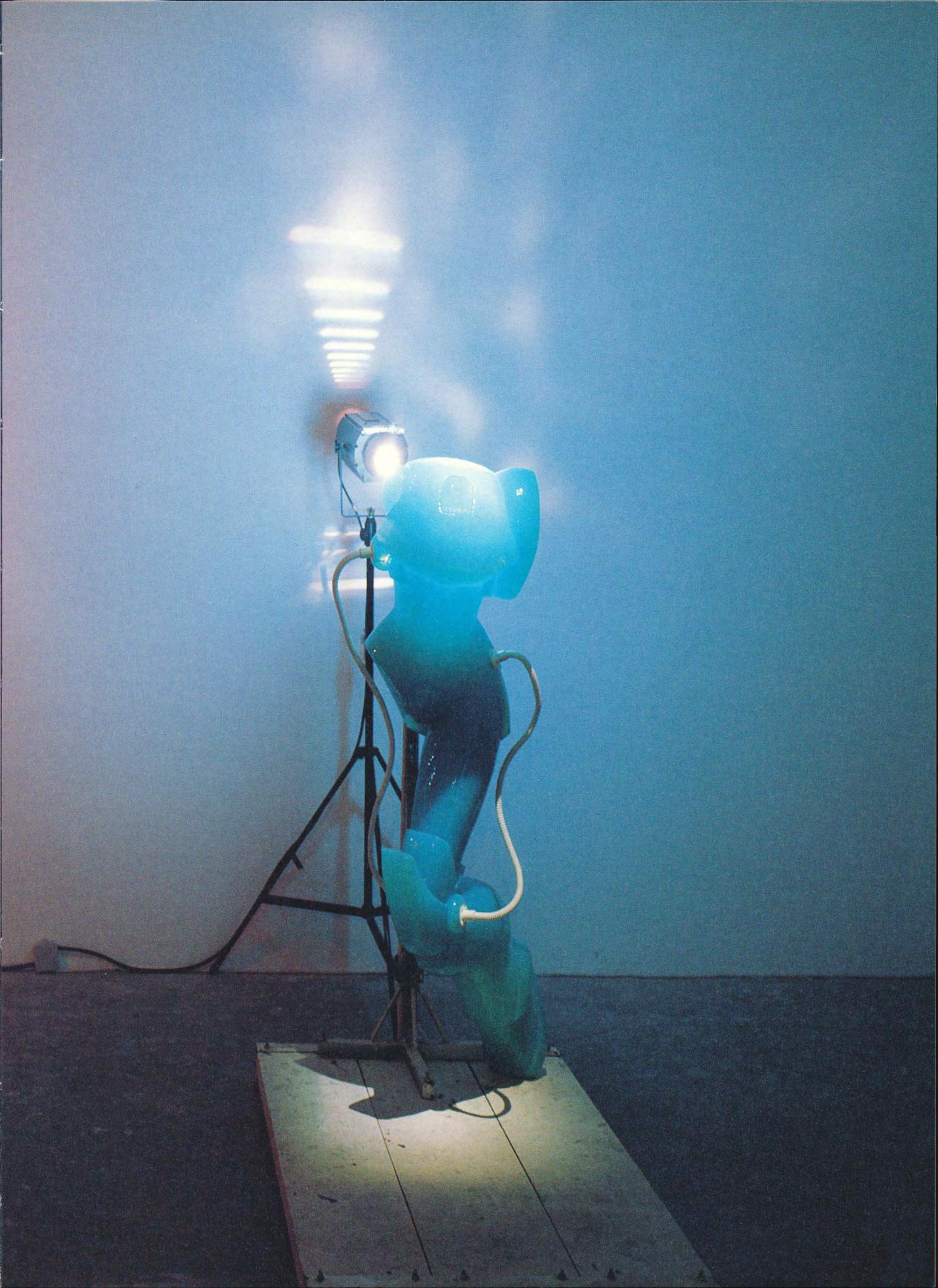
- Kim Seung-duk is a critic and curator based in Paris.
- This interview was first published, in its longer, original version, in *artpress* No.279 (May 2002), Paris.

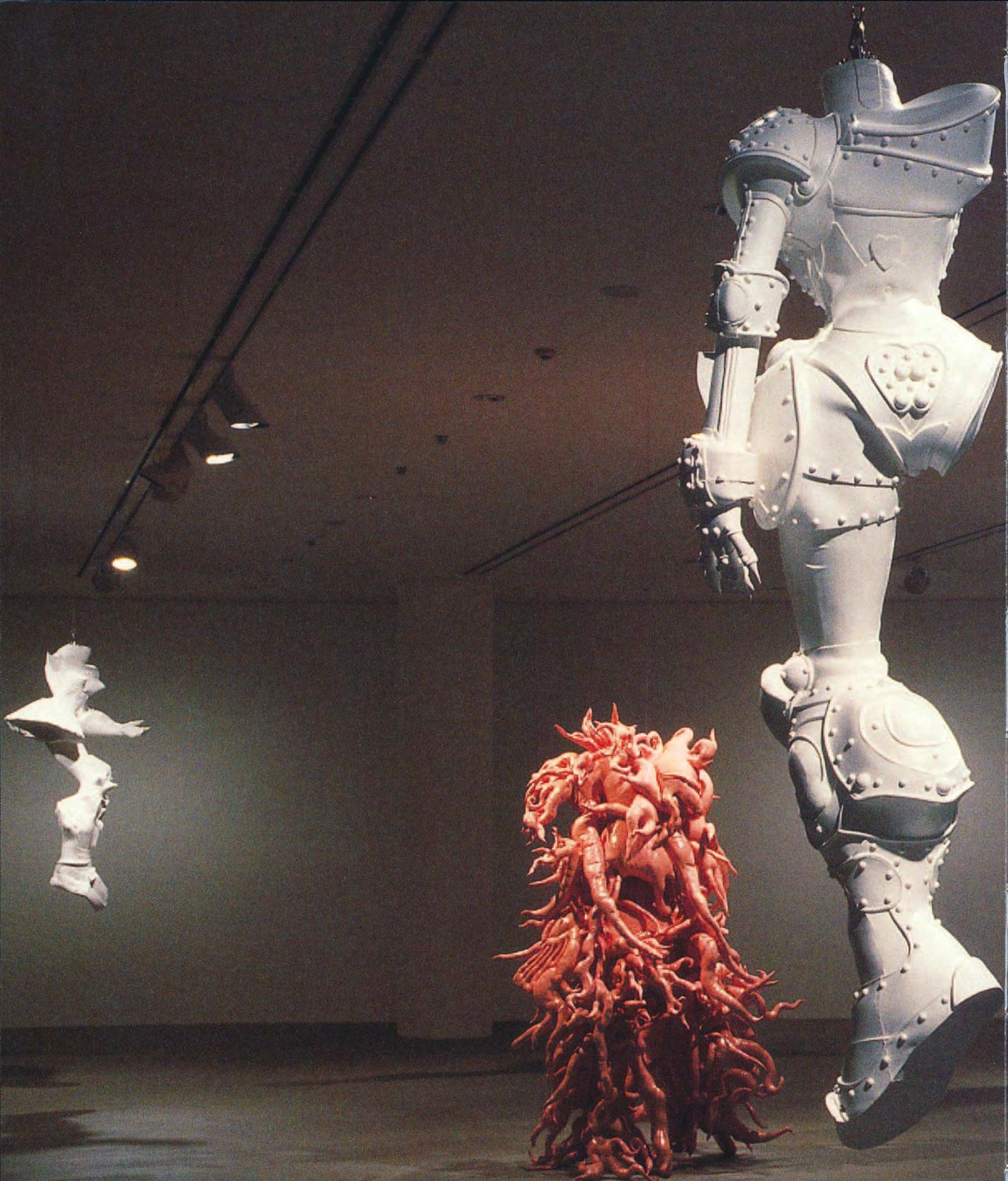


Previous Works



《サイボーグ 赤》《サイボーグ 青》/1997-98、コンソルティウム、ディジョン、2002
Cyborg Red and Cyborg Blue/1997-98, Le Consortium, Dijon, 2002





《サイボーグ》と《モンスター》の展示風景、アートソンジェ・センター、ソウル、1998
Installation view of *Cyborgs and Monsters* at Artsonje Center, Seoul, 1998