

JAKE & DINOS CHAPMAN LITTLE DEATH MACHINES

9 MAY - 14 JUNE 2008



*Before our
very eyes,
matter now tortured and transformed,
matter traded - "kind for unkind",
until the excrement of toil and rack,
tints the blue sea dark brown
plus green land black...*

{Excerpt from "Ode to the industrial revolution" by Jake Chapman}

Jake and Dinos Chapman's "Little Death Machines" appear to be painted assemblages of hammers, motors, milk jugs and ossified human body parts, but underneath the slathers of luridly oversaturated high-gloss paint there is bronze instead of plastic, wood or flesh. This distance between appearance and reality, and the perceived inversion of "high" and "low" materials, activate these works and raise other questions. Are these machines made of "death," of dead tissue, or are they manifestations of psychological mechanisms-- the embodiments of human thoughts and biological processes that cause stasis, or death in life? The "little death" of the title is not only a disarmingly cute diminution of these macabre machines, but also, in referencing "la petite mort," refers to the aroused, disembodied genitalia forced into service of the mechanical and compulsively repetitive sexuality constructed here. There are brains involved as well, but they're victims, not agents guiding the operation of the machines, so we are left with the visceral horror of machines working on people, in tableaux whose distortions of familiar human interactions are bizarrely comic. The juxtaposition of horror and blackest humor is familiar from other works by the Chapmans, yet these sculptures create a distressingly intimate sensation through the union of disparities: intention and compulsion, death and activity, and flesh and machine, where the flesh must be dead and yet the machines seem all too alive. The sculptures mock goal-oriented processes and production, whether human and biological, or mechanical and industrial. Their grotesqueries both evoke and outstrip the worst rumors of wartime atrocities and the most extreme imaginings of Hollywood's serial killers; for even though these painted bronzes are fixed and immobile, despite their extension cords and greasy flywheels, they might well be projections from an alternate reality where such machines actually work to horrific purposes.