

Aldous Huxley in 'Heaven and Hell' writes "...heaven is always a place of gems... They offer descriptions of paradise colored in sapphire and lapis lazuli." In the latest variations on his "Offerings" Pavel Kraus is not so literal, yet he does equate the beauty of jewel-like objects with a transcendent sublime. While suggestive of gemstones and all that they culturally signify, these 'gems' have one quality that sets them apart from their more intimate, portable relatives: they may weigh in excess of three hundred pounds. The sheer physical presence of these objects is in stark contrast to their exquisite, sensitive craft. Even given their weight, the 'offerings' invite touch, and can be playfully manipulated. They elicit a desire for physical contact contrary to their deceptive weight.

Kraus' works often involve a sense of contradictory or dual identities, and the "Offerings" and "Altars" continue this tendency. The earlier versions of these objects suggested ancient artifacts; mysteriously evocative but elusively identifiable wax and fabric encased "Offerings" of undisclosed content, placed before primitive alters covered in beeswax. Their materials and fabrication were decidedly man-made and suggestive of the body itself.

The new works are something entirely different. Perhaps the objects contained by the earlier wrappings, we have something very much like gems. Luxurious egg-shaped forms and altars (benches) carved in classical materials. Loaded with symbolic identity the egg-shapes constitute a whole, resisting interpretation even when bisected. The eggs and altars exude an ecstatic spiritual inscrutability confounding purely aesthetic conditions. Their overt luxury is less subjective than beauty; it calls out for sensuous participation over aesthetic sensitivity or mere contemplation. This is a notion of the sublime that exists somewhere between knowledge and experience, eliciting a seductive longing for the ineffable. One could extend this relationship between desire and fulfillment to one of transcendent redemption; the object has outstripped its metaphor and become ecstatic in its inherent condition of pleasure.

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