



## John Salvest at Morgan Lehman

"No Time for Sorrow," John Salvest's exhibition of sculptures from 2005-06 at Morgan Lehman, borrowed its title from a verse in William Blake's *Proverbs of Hell*: "The busy bee has no time for sorrow. . . ." In the press release, Salvest connects this passage to his "uncontrollable impulse to salvage and preserve normally ephemeral materials," a "gesture against time's passage and the sorrow of loss associated with it. Conveniently, the process of amassing, organizing and arranging these materials succeeds in keeping me too busy to think much about such things." The materials Salvest arranges in his accumulations are almost always used: chewed bubble gum, worn-down bars of soap, pencils reduced to stubs, leftover bits of chalk, other people's business cards, corks. Each composition is limited to only one of these categories, and each element is repeated one on top of another to form a column, or one on top of and next to another to form a grid.

In certain works, accessories help organize, support or otherwise give meaning to the recycled materials. Examples are medium-size, glass-faced wooden boxes with multiple compartments reminiscent of specimen cases and works by Joseph Cornell (e.g., *Assortment*) or a soap dish holding a 5-inch column of used soaps (*Monument*). In other configurations, the tightly arranged, serially repeated elements stand alone, as in *One*

John Salvest: *Red Stalactite*, 2006, wood, steel and chewed gum, 30 by 14 by 14 inches; at Morgan Lehman.



*Square Yard*, in which vintage wooden yardsticks are placed flush to the wall to form a square.

*Red Stalactite* is at once visually compelling, funny and erotic. It consists of a large cone of chewed up gum, as red as raw steak, affixed to the underside of a stool (shades of Duchamp). The fleshy cone, framed by the legs and horizontal steel bars of the stool, compels one to imagine a seated body with which this red, masticated mass is somehow associated, flowing like menstrual blood or attached as a large scaly tail or weird phallus.

The large *Got Milked?* consists of red, white and blue plastic milk crates arranged to form an American flag, a symbol charged, among other things, with a good art-historical pedigree. However, this work of conceptual sculpture, which has antecedents in much American folk art, is little more than an amusing one-liner, alluding in its title both to a recent ad campaign by milk producers ("Got milk?") and to the Bush administration's ongoing campaigns of deceit (as in "Got bilked?"). Salvest is better when his works are at their most elegantly minimal or surreal.

—Michaël Amy