



# SURVIVAL. TONY MATELLI

18 September—30 December 2008

**“All of my sculptures are in a state of compromise. They are lost, wounded and tangled. This is everyone’s general state at one point or another. It certainly has been mine. These things need to be talked about simply.”**

**– Tony Matelli**

Tony Matelli is an American sculptor best known for his hyperrealist works that fuse conceptual rigor with contemporary materials and techniques. Often unsettling, ironic, and emotionally charged, his sculptures reveal the fragility, absurdity, and contradictions of the human experience.

Each of Matelli’s works channels a worldview shaped by sarcasm, vulnerability, and irrepressible vitality. Drawing from personal experience, his sculptures

distill the intensity of emotional states with a disarming mix of humor and sincerity. Anchored in self-awareness and attuned to the absurdities of everyday life, they remain simultaneously complex, playful, and poignant.

The exhibition brings together four of Matelli’s major works — *Old Enemy, New Victim*; *F#cked Couple*; *Sleepwalker*; and *Double Meat Head*. Collectively, they span the breadth of his conceptual concerns

and technical mastery, offering a quietly powerful meditation on the beauty and fragility of the human condition.

*Old Enemy, New Victim* presents a darkly comic scene of violence: a monkey lies torn apart, under attack by two predatory beasts. The hyperrealistic detail — rendered in silicone, resin, and wool — reflects Matelli's rigorous technical training at the Cranbrook Academy of Art in Michigan. At once grotesque and strangely theatrical, the composition evokes the moral ambiguity of a fable, drawing inspiration from the writings of La Fontaine. The monkey's exaggerated expression and helpless posture introduce a tragicomic tension: is he the victim of senseless cruelty, or a stand-in for human folly? Beneath its visceral surface, the sculpture becomes a meditation on power, instinct, and the absurd violence embedded in both the natural and social orders.

*Sleepwalker (Female)* — a counterpart to Matelli's now-iconic *Sleepwalker* — challenges cultural taboos and social expectations. It depicts a life-size nude woman walking forward in a trance-like state. The vivid emotional effect brought on by the work's hyperrealism gives way to a deeper reflection on an ethical paradox. Matelli confronts what he calls "issues of modesty and Victorian ideas people have about the human body," exposing how gendered perceptions shape our emotional responses.

While the male *Sleepwalker* provoked outrage and hostility, the female figure was met with relative acceptance — viewed through a lens of fragility and compassion. This contrast underscores how readily the female body is framed as a symbol of vulnerability and victimhood, rather than disruption or threat.

**"Love is such an old and, in some ways, clichéd idea, so I needed to find a way for it to feel fresh and relevant,"** says Matelli. In *F#cked Couple*, two human figures appear impaled, broken, and disfigured — yet their hands remain gently clasped. Amid chaos and devastation, this small gesture of tenderness endures. The sculpture becomes a moving metaphor for the resilience of emotional connection in a damaged, unstable world.

**"The realism of my work was never the point. My approach to object-making has always been about clarity and precision. I want someone to initially experience the subject rather than 'read' it. I want them absorbed in the work."**

— Tony Matelli

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