

# THE COMMERCIAL

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## STEPHEN RALPH



### SOUTH WIND

FRIDAY 23 AUGUST, 6-8pm

exhibition: 23/08/13 - 14/09/13

open Wednesday-Saturday, 11am-6pm

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Stephen Ralph (b. 1966) makes abstract and figurative sculpture. The combination of seemingly incongruous forms and materials is a salient aspect of his work. Over the last decade, his practice has shifted from symmetrical, Brancusi-like, turned-wood totems to more organic and decadent ones in cast concrete and hand-carved wood encrusted with 24-carat gold leaf. Increasingly the work is becoming untamed, reminiscent of intoxicated and/or dancing maenads. Works from his early career interrogated architecture in pursuit of shifts between two and three dimensions.

Ralph's exhibition, *South Wind*, comprises a new series of cast concrete and gold leaf works that play upon the tradition of the classical bust. He takes the domain of three-dimensional portraiture into the inanimate world. His gnarly-erotic personifications of natural phenomena play between the textured and the smooth, the colonisation of surface à la the decorative arts and the reproduction of rustic natural forms in a less cultured way.

Regardless of its subject matter, much of the pleasure of Ralph's sculptures is in the handling and choice of materials. In the case of the cast concrete elements, he teases from this industrial material tender surfaces that display subtle variations in texture and coloration.

Stephen Ralph graduated in sculpture from the National Art School in 1991. In 1998, he co-founded Stone Villa Inc, a prominent artist collective and studio complex in Sydney which actively exhibits and hosts an artist residency program and the annual Vortex Sculpture Prize.

Ralph has had regular solo exhibitions at artist-run initiatives in Sydney and Melbourne over twenty years, including Austral Avenue, Melbourne (2006), Front Room, Sydney (2003), Elastic, Sydney (2001), Published Art, Sydney (2001), CBD, Sydney (1998), 151 Regent Street, Sydney (1996, 1997, 1998), Selenium, Sydney (1995). He exhibited in the Artbox at Sherman Galleries, Sydney in 1995.

Group exhibitions include, *Figure and Ground*, Utopian Slumps, Melbourne, curated by Melissa Loughnan and Jane O'Neill (nee Gallagher) (2012); *20/20*, curated by Robert Lake at Damien Minton Gallery, Sydney, (2011); *City Mambo*, at Shin Leh Yuan Art Space, Taipei (2006); *Rough Trade (Jay Balbi, Adam Cullen, Callum Morton, Stephen Ralph, Tony Schwensen, Rodney Spooner)*, curated by Jane Gallagher at Plimsoll Gallery, Hobart (1998).

Stephen Ralph's work is in the collection of Artbank, Sydney. *South Wind* is his first solo exhibition in a commercial gallery.

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