



Gisela Colón, Ultra Spheroid Pod (Iridescent Orange), 2014, blow-molded acrylic, 42" x 90" x 13"

Invasion of the Pods

**Gisela Colón at the Castellani Museum, Niagara University, NY,
Part of a Nine-Museum Tour between Sept. 2015 – Jan. 2020**

by Steve Rockwell

There is no substitute for a direct experience with a work of art. I found this to be particularly true with the sculptures of Los Angeles-based Gisela Colón, as her display at the Castellani Art Museum in Niagara, New York bore out. Having viewed print and digital images of Colón's *Pods*, and as intriguing as these might have appeared on paper or monitor, what is missing with two-dimensional modes is the visceral face-to-face response only possible with the work itself.

Taking in the installation of *Pods* was an active bodily engagement. Their perception somehow bypassed the conscious aesthetic processors unfiltered, giving them somewhat of a transgressive, subversive quality. Yet the sensual beauty of the *Pods* made

it difficult to see them as dangerous. True, there was an attack on the senses, but the assault advanced in gentle, friendly prods, evoking curiosity. The works were frankly delicious to look at, inviting touch. Their gently modulating surfaces made them seem alive. Since my every move seemed to register a corresponding change in the *Pods*, a communion of sorts took place, a respectful give-and-take between art object and viewer.

Posited as amoebic organisms, the facility of the *Pods* to shift their surface appearance at will hinted at the other-worldly. Might they not be alien plant spores issued from space, having gestated into these large seed pods, with the capacity of producing duplicate copies of a human,

perhaps? Their size would allow for the possibility. Lacking menace, they seemed rather to be the titanic, but friendly labors of gods rather than monsters, reluctant as they might be, to muffle their whisper, "nothing made on this earth."

The artist's working method is terrestrial enough. Colón begins with drawing, building up her forms and colors step-by-step in nuanced stages to achieve the signature biomorphic radiance with which the works are imbued. The artist baker has deemed to list some of her *Pod* ingredients without giving away the whole recipe. The results are achieved by matching industrial process with conception, from plywood platform, plastic blow-molding, oven-heated Plexiglass and its formation to finished product into which light has somehow been mysteriously embedded.

Colón's fabrications are nascent spawns from the cradle of California's Light-and-Space and Finish-Fetish

movements, where the Vancouver-born artist is based. She has drawn both technical and theoretical inspiration from the early practitioners of these movements. DeWain Valentine and James Turrell have been influential in terms of material usage and theory respectively. Colón's vision, however, diverges in application from Turrell's in the way that the microscope differs from the telescope. Turrell has stated, "You could say I'm a mound builder: I make things that take you up into the sky. But it's not about the landforms. I'm working to bring celestial objects like the sun and moon into the spaces that we inhabit." Colón, on the other hand, takes you deep into the minutiae of matter, albeit an enlarged form of it. In that respect, she is very much about the mounds and their interiors, her *Pods* being the highly-magnified cellular incubations of the phantasmal.

If Turrell invites the viewer on a voyage from earth into space, then Colón's is a beckening to inner space, a journey into the material center of the biomorphic universe, the flip side of Turrell's coin. Along the way, a contemplation of the psychology of

perception is an obligatory stop. While this might be true for the visual art experience in general, Colón's forms are infused by a welcomed sense of the fluid in the way that an oasis might be in the inorganic arid expanses of much contemporary art.

As sculptures, the *Pods* are not particularly large in their material scale. Yet, they come across as outsized by their implied magnification and the manner in which they cling and meld with the walls of the exhibition space. The effect is one of gigantism, referred to in medicine as excessive growth due to hormonal imbalance. In plants it's known as polyploidy. Veined in this way, Colón's exhibition sites may be seen as enormous seed beds. It leads the viewer to a consideration of the geography of these "seed beds." The Castellani Museum is located in the Niagara Region, with its own gigantism in nearby Niagara Falls.

While Colón's *Pods* are viewed in museum gallery interiors, the energy of the Light and Space movement will necessarily lead us outdoors and into a consideration of their geographic setting as it did with Turrell. The

emphasis on the study of light has infused and informed art at important historical junctures. To the Renaissance, it came in the form of chiaroscuro, to modernism it had its light precursor in impressionism.

Colón's *Pods* touched down at the Butler Institute of American Art in Youngstown, Ohio in the fall of 2015; continuing at the International Museum of Art & Science in McAllen, Texas, April to August, 2016; Castellani Art Museum in Niagara, New York, August, 2016 to February, 2017; and Macon, Georgia's Museum of Arts and Sciences between March and June of this year. Their tour continues at San Angelo Museum of Fine Arts in Texas; December 15, 2017-February 4, 2018; South Dakota Art Museum, Brookings in South Dakota: March 2-July 8, 2018; Daum Museum of Contemporary Art, Sedalia, Missouri: September 29-December 16, 2018; Hilliard University Art Museum, Lafayette, Louisiana: January-August, 2019; and finally Foosaner Art Museum, Florida Institute of Technology, Melbourne, Florida: September 27, 2019-January 5, 2020.



Gisela Colón, *Pods*, 2016, installation view at the Castellani Museum, Niagara University, New York