



ARTIST BEN BUNCH CREATES SEMI-PLUSHY CYBER-WASTE SCULPTURES YOU'LL WANT TO SQUEEZE.

By Megan Burns

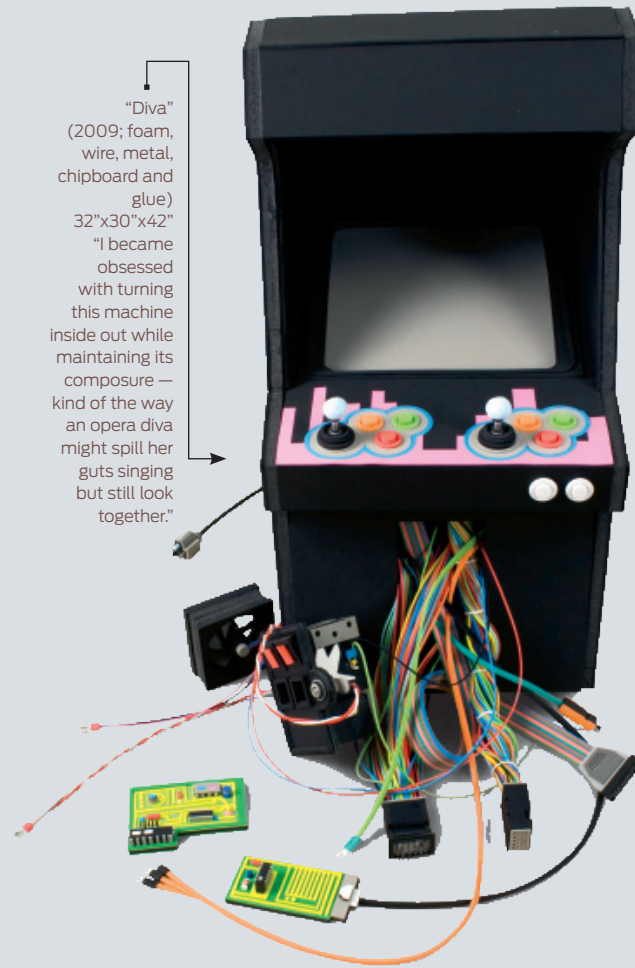
SOFT MACHINES



"Nom, Nom, Nom" (2011; EVA foam, foamcore, chipboard, glue, paint marker and spray paint 12"x24"x36")
 "A lot of my pieces are about holding things together, finding the moment just before something is about to fall apart."

Hangin' out with New York-based sculptor Ben Bunch's latest work gave me a flashback to that episode of *Captain N: The Game Master* where the gang travels to Tetris Land, and the flat, staid puzzle game is transformed into a city full of block people and impossible skyscrapers. Similarly (but, obviously, with far more subtlety and grace), Bunch's sculptures humanize computers, machines and the lovely, complex things that lie within them. Arcade games, printers and turntables are re-created out of brightly colored foam and paper, and then glued together by a wily and precise craftsman. Some machines are allowed to remain intact and keep their dignity, while others are opened, piles of lewd innards spilling out in exuberant coils. Other pieces are comprised of variegated computer guts alone, combined and reconfigured into primeval shapes. Bunch's main medium is meticulously carved, light, flat

"Diva" (2009; foam, wire, metal, chipboard and glue) 32"x30"x42"
 "I became obsessed with turning this machine inside out while maintaining its composure — kind of the way an opera diva might spill her guts singing but still look together."



"Extended Conjunction" (2011; EVA foam, chipboard, glue, metal and wire) 22"x14"x24"
 "Record players are the ultimate fetishist device. They have so many things in common with altars, rituals, pleasure and escapism."



complex systems and meaning out of simple shapes and objects." Mankind's most elemental shapes — the triangle, circle and square — are melded with the new: the braid, wire and circuit board.

The centerpiece from that show, "Prog Zodiac," sits on a pedestal at waist height, looking like a model from a cityscape in a cartoon *Blade Runner*. The pyramid of circuit boards and wires seems both stone substantial and whipped-cream airy. At the pyramid's apex are four sinister red eyes that stare at you from each side as you move around it, and suggests the dark mysticism of an ancient world with enough power to hold mastery over the technological age. It's both charming and terrifying.

One series features a group of scaled-down arcade game cabinets, some sitting on a black Q*Bert-like grid, the largest only waist high. With the cabinet art stripped off, the little games become abstract, pocket-sized Pokémon friends. You can almost hear them chirping and mumbling to each other. "I feel the machines are more like pets in a terrarium their

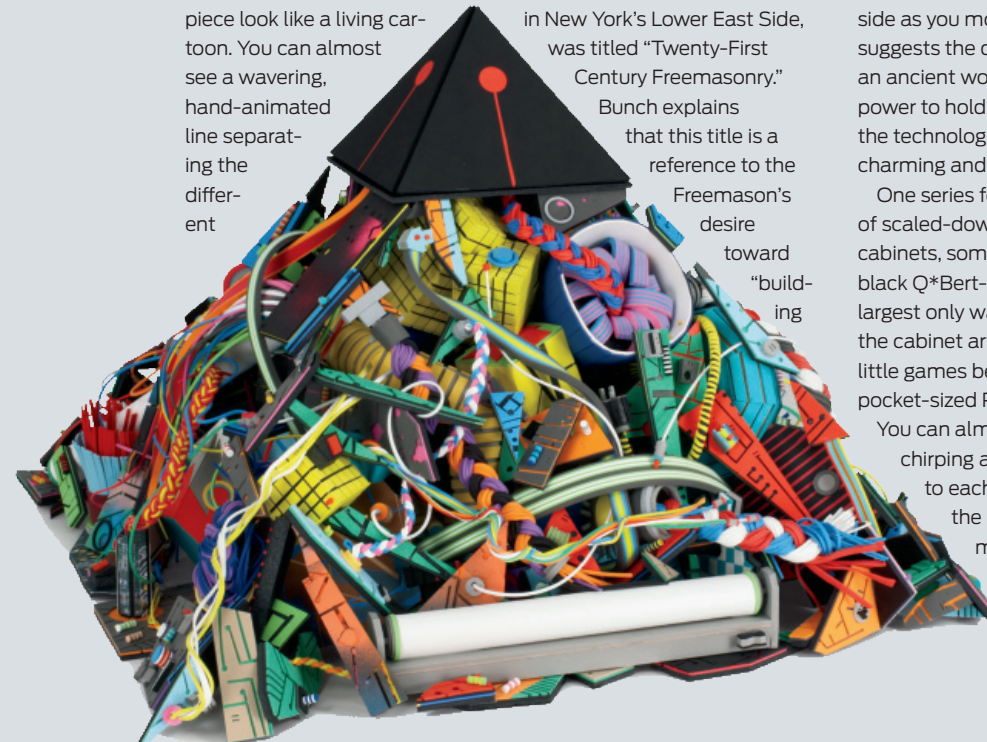
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EVC foam — the kind of material that the floor is made out of at a toddler's daycare. The DayGlo colors set next to flat blacks and grays make each piece look like a living cartoon. You can almost see a wavering, hand-animated line separating the different

planes. In real life, it's almost impossible to resist the urge to reach out and touch them.

Bunch's most recent solo show, held at The Proposition in New York's Lower East Side, was titled "Twenty-First Century Freemasonry."

Bunch explains that this title is a reference to the Freemason's desire toward "build-



"Prog Zodiac" (EVA foam, foamcore, chipboard, glue, paper collage, paint marker and spray paint) 32"x32"x24"
 "The altarpiece to a nerd maelstrom, full of connections, conspiracies, gadgets and plastic colors. First thing my friend said was, 'Yeah, you must have grown up in the Midwest in the '80s with plenty of video games.'"

own mini world and ecology," Bunch says of his work. They certainly do invite you in, like a bowl of psychedelic candy. Getting Bunch's delightful nerdy references makes you feel like part of a secret club of Geek Freemasons. Just the title "Force Field Donut Hole" makes me glow happily like Unicron from the Transformers after eating a planet. It helps that the piece also looks like a circle carved from Unicron's guts. Ben's work speaks to a time when the inner workings of the machines we use every day were not so hidden from us. They're the opposite of the Apple prime directive to hide everything in a cold, impenetrable shell. They're full of mad inventor's joy. They're your Commodore 64, a half-fixed dot matrix printer, a homemade robot, or your fantasy of getting sucked inside your Nintendo to hang out with *Castlevania*'s Simon Belmont.