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DARIO ROBLETO

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Dario Robleto considers himself a kind of DJ: "What I do," he once told me, "is mix records." But the San Antonio-based sculptor's expression is not displayed on the wheels of steel; his preferred sculptural medium is *melted* records. Still, he chooses his tracks just as carefully as any other DJ. His conceit is that the meaning of the music, maybe even the music itself, remains implicit in the mute vinyl, even

after it's been transformed into something no longer recognizable as a record—as if to claim that a person's soul must be reembodied in the flowers that have sprouted from his corpse.

Such transubstantiation is hard to verify, but luckily, post-Conceptual art can rely on something more tangible than mere faith: captions. Robleto's works, like those of Cornelia Parker and Joe Scanlon, among others, would be incomplete without their captions—bodies without souls, you might say. So a black-and-gold capsule resting on the velvet lining of an antique pillbox may not seem particularly prepossessing artistically. But after reading the caption and learning that the pill consists of "melted vinyl from every Diana Ross and the Supremes Top 40 record released," and that the work's title is *When Your Heartstrings Break, I Can Mend Them Back (The Supreme Solution)*, 1998, one might be willing to see the piece as an encapsulation, as it were, of the consolatory promise of a certain kind of popular music. In that case, even the mute, inexpressive quality of the object itself becomes thematically significant: No pill "expresses" its contents except by conventions of labeling—and for all anyone knows, it might be a placebo.



Dario Robleto, *Your Moonlight Is In Danger of Shining for the Wrong One*, 2000–01, ivory and melted and powdered vinyl record, 1¼ x ¾".

Robleto both indulges in sentimentality and maintains a critical distance from it. Such a sensibility has something to do with camp, in the classic Sontagian sense of an attitude that confounds seriousness and frivolity, dignity and failure. But Robleto evinces a rare understanding of how broad the category can be by encompassing not only typically camp divas like Diana Ross and Dusty Springfield but also, more

surprisingly, avatars of heavy metal. Moreover, while camp delights in the flamboyant, the operatic, the exaggerated, Robleto produces understated "handmade readymades" in the Robert Gober tradition; the work's melancholy arises from an aesthetic—in tension with the camp love of the "too much"—of the "too little." Not to mention the "too late." Many of the newer works here add bits of fossil to the vinyl, which takes on the character of preserved traces of ancient sounds: *Your Moonlight Is in Danger of Shining for the Wrong One*, 2000–01, is a match carved from "prehistoric fossilized mammoth ivory" and "melted and powdered vinyl record of Billie Holiday's 'What a Little Moonlight Can Do.'" As with Robleto's other works, *Your Moonlight's* fetish value arises from the legend that accompanies it, and is all the more poignant for the incommensurability between the object and its idea. Sometimes unheard melodies really are sweetest.

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