



A B O D Y O F W O R K

T H E P O R T F O L I O O F A R T I S T P E T E R O P H E I M

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By **Cate McQuaid** GLOBE CORRESPONDENT APRIL 04, 2012

A family with two small children passed by Steven Zevitas Gallery the other day, opened the door to come in, and then thought better of it. You can see the allure for children in Peter Opheim's large-scale paintings of sweet but monstrous figures he has built out of clay. Some have flowers for eyes; many smile; one holds a bunny and a duck. They could star in a claymation show aimed at preschoolers.



Peter Opheim's "Untitled (159)," one of the large-scale paintings that the artist has on display at Steven Zevitas Gallery.

But there's something very adult about Opheim's paintings — and not just the one in which the figures might be having sex. They are gorgeously painted, with loose, sometimes aggressive brushstrokes that agitate these very solid bodies. The sheer scale of many of them intimidates. What would be cute at 6 inches tall becomes monstrous at human size. It's hard for the mind to square adorable with confrontational; Opheim asks us to do that, and sets us off our pins.

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Naturally, there's an element of letting your freak flag fly underlying these works. Opheim also explores relationships, in a piece such as "Untitled (153)," which features one big white figure with bulging brown eyes and a carrot-type nose, and two smaller figures, perhaps the progeny of the big one. They gaze up as he — he seems like a dad, to me — extends his tiny stubs of blue arms outward, welcoming or pontificating.



Peter Opheim's "Untitled (153)