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"ORANGE CRUSH," 2006
Jeffrey Vallance
 MIXED MEDIA SCULPTURE, 10 $\frac{1}{8}$ " x 8 $\frac{1}{2}$ " x 8 $\frac{3}{8}$ "
 PHOTO: COURTESY OF MARGO LEAVIN GALLERY

LOS ANGELES

Jeffrey Vallance: "Belief System" at Margo Leavin

"Belief System: 1970s Political Work and Reliquary Chapels" combines two seemingly disparate bodies of work: a series of ornate, personal reliquaries from the last two years and a collection of correspondence with U.S. senators from the late '70s, when Vallance was in his early 20s. What emerges from this strange juxtaposition is indeed a kind of belief system: a relentless self-obsession behind which flickers the shadows of more serious, collective concerns.

The reliquaries are kitschy miniature cabinets each housing an everyday item of personal significance: underwear, a bottle of hair mousse, a bone from a supermarket chicken. Although somewhat intriguing on their own, they leap to life in brief accompanying stories. Ultimately, it is the interaction between the objects and these stories—by turns poignant and hilarious—that pushes the work beyond self-aggrandizement.

Orange Crush (2006) is a gilt, vaguely Renaissance structure sheltering the rusted metal cap and shattered glass neck of the titular soda bottle on a purple, tasseled pillow. The related story recalls an embarrassing moment from Vallance's childhood in which he attempted to live up to his stepfather's expectations by opening a soda bottle with a pair of pliers, with explosive, sticky results. Although Vallance offers no analysis, the larger themes of troubled parent-child relations and adolescence are powerfully embodied once we know the story behind the artifact.

and image in a different, although equally suggestive direction. While a college student, Vallance asked each senator to draw a picture for a school project on "Art and Government." Their responses, most on official letterhead, are by turns comic and depressing. Strom Thurmond sent a hasty ink sketch of an American flag, describing it as "something that I like almost more than anything. I hope that you can tell what it is." Apologizing for their lack of artistic ability, several legislators enclosed a brochure entitled "Art in the Capitol," while John Tower didn't bother with a personal reply at all, sending a form letter and a professional bio instead. While the letters may seem like a quirky stunt poking fun at the visual illiteracy of elected officials, they also form a sad commentary on the role of art in politics, which is to say, when not in the service of a patriotic pictorialism, it doesn't have much of a role at all.

—SHARON MIZOTA