

AJAY KURIAN

LATELY, I'VE BEEN WONDERING why people often deride art that deals with identity. I've concluded that what they may be thinking of isn't actually art concerned with the politics of identity, but that which addresses the calcified cliché of "identity politics." The latter is something that might be more akin to identity consensus, where artworks *reproduce* the signifiers of an already interpellated identity. What was radical settles into convention; the minority position becomes enfranchised by a master narrative. Art, however, should always disrupt master narratives. Reformulating the human, or redrafting its genre, as novelist and cultural theorist Sylvia Wynter would say, is a critically urgent task, one that is more important than ever—not so we can leap into some distant speculative future, but so we can transform the present with a different kind of humanity. In my own work, I have forged a kind of racialized vernacular where images and proper nouns are fractured. In *The Less I Know the Better*, 2016, a child-size figure with mottled skin stands looking at an image on his phone. His head is a tangle of wire and mesh, his skin a collage of animal-print duct tape and swabs of thick brown putty. He is caught between performing for himself and performing for an other who sees his body marked by something that looks primitive. My sculpture doesn't subscribe to the myth of a pure phenomenology; instead, it induces a diffracted one, which does not imply a unified subject but a multiplicity of contradicting positions—a prismatic experience. Together, these positions produce an ensemble of tensions, variously legible, variously felt. □

AJAY KURIAN IS AN ARTIST BASED IN NEW YORK.



Ajay Kurian, *The Less I Know the Better*, 2016, foam, aluminum, expanding foam, epoxy, wire, model figurine, iPod touch, duct tape, sneakers, custom T-shirt, shorts, rope, 49 × 22 × 16".