I Sing The Body Electric

October 1, 1999

Chuck Nanney is a poet of the protease age. His recent show, *Space Oddity (Lesson in Survival)*, at Debs & Co. in New York City, featured brillantly colored paintings whose grotesque shapes droop and hang from mundane objects like book rings and thumbacks. The titles alone--such as “colostomy,” “swallow” or the lipodystrophy-inspired “feeling helpless like the elephant man”--convey Nanney’s stark, stunning vision of life on combination therapy. “I started my regimen three years ago, as a last resort,” the 40-year-old Tennessee-born artist says. “The first few months were hell. My body went berserk. I’d take the Viracept, throw up this gray nuclear bile and cry. Then things got better. But the emotional impact of ’I’m taking these pills to save my life but the way they make me fell is worse than death’ is still with me. And I’ve stayed very tuned in to all the internal functions of my body. For example, I’m obsessed with my bowel movements,” Nanney laughs. “One gallery was horrified by the title ’fiery turd.’ Sometimes people get all dramatic, like ’I’m so sorry you have to live this way.’ I say, ’Yeah, I know. But I wish all my friends who died before these drugs were available could live this way, too.’”

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