



L.A. Louver Gallery

Ken Price's "Izaak" (2002): Lava landscape meets Brancusi.

Art Reviews

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Price Purges Anxiety and Sets Libidos Free

Surrealism linked sex and anxiety so inextricably that modern art has not fully recovered from their coupling. The advertising industry hasn't helped: Using sex to sell everything under the sun, it has created a few generations of artists who are suspicious of all forms of pleasure, especially ones that excite—and satisfy—erotic desire.

At L.A. Louver Gallery, a gorgeous exhibition of 10 salacious sculptures by Ken Price shows the 67-year-old artist to be a man with mission: breaking up the relationship between sex and anxiety in order to make the world safe for hedonism.

In the U.S., hedonism has a bad

name. It's ordinarily treated as a mindless diversion that's better left to decadent playboys than pursued by serious artists. But Price makes it the focus of his abstract sculptures, which redeem hedonism from puritan narrow-mindedness by taking viewers back to classical antiquity, where philosophic contemplation and shameless pleasure were not opposed to each other.

As inspired by animated cartoons and California car culture, Price's tabletop sculptures are covered with multicolored metallic finishes that put many painters to shame. All inhabit a world in which the libido has been set free. Your mind has to move nimbly to keep up.

The plump protrusions and inviting orifices in "Off Color," "Marmaduke" and "Plushous" simultaneously resemble buttocks, breasts, legs, jowls, noses and more. Seamlessly fusing male and female forms, they stimulate category-defying desires and make a virtue of polymorphous perversity.

"Gorilla Ed" and "Red Neck" are softball-size orbs from which five or six fat fingers emerge. Some of these reach outward as if to explore their surroundings, like the antennae of sea creatures. Others curl back to rejoin the orb. Mocking the idea that art provides disinterested pleasures, these hilarious pieces put tongue-in-cheek onanism on display. They satisfy a lot more than themselves.

The five remaining sculptures resemble lava landscapes beneath the surfaces of which lie thinly veiled references to previous masterpieces. "Toots" is a futuristic version of Rodin's "Burghers of Calais." And Brancusi's fused figures haunt "Izaak," "Sourpuss" and "Kabongy Balls." These links to art history are not the first thing you notice about Price's wildly accessible art. Rather than overshadowing it, they make it even sexier.

L.A. Louver Gallery, 45 N. Venice Blvd., Venice, (310) 822-4955, through July 27. Closed Sundays and Mondays.