

MATTHEW MARKS GALLERY

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CHARLES RAY'S "Sleeping Woman" (2012) is machined from solid steel, a chipping-away process that is a high-tech version of what sculptors of old did.

BY SHARON MIZOTA

Known for realistic sculptures of oversize children and incredibly detailed recreations of smashed cars and fallen trees, Charles Ray has made a career out of playing with our perceptions. Two new sculptures at Matthew Marks are no exception, evoking classical statuary and confounding assumptions about materials.

Each work depicts a life-size figure. One is a man whom Ray made a cast of about 10 years ago; the other is a woman he photographed sleeping on the street. The man is nude and stands with a slight contraposto, but his figure deviates

a bit from the classical ideal — softer, with love handles. The woman, curled awkwardly on a hard bench, can be seen as a modern-day version of the languid sleeping nymphs of antiquity, although she slumbers under far less ideal circumstances.

Both are rendered in super-shiny stainless steel, a uniform color that gives them the monochromatic stature of marble. They also have a floating, weightless quality, although perhaps I've been influenced by too much time with Jeff Koons' stainless steel inflatable bunny.

However, Ray's figures are not cast but machined

from solid pieces of steel. This means they are insanely heavy: The man weighs about 1,500 pounds; the woman, a whopping 6,000. It also means they were produced using a subtractive process, like that of ancient carvers, albeit with a 21st century twist. Instead of chipping away at stone with a chisel, Ray used a computer-controlled industrial machine to shave flakes off a metal block. To get the forms just right, the computer reads a digital model that Ray created from a clay sculpture, which was in turn based on an initial digital drawing.

This process — which

took five or six years to come to fruition — is key to the work's meaning. Of course art history reverberates through the sculptures whether or not we know how they were made, but by insisting on faithfulness to the concept, not just the look of classical sculpture, Ray creates a deeper connection across the ages.