

## MATTHEW MARKS GALLERY

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### Charles Ray



**Matthew Marks Gallery**, through  
Sat 12 (see Chelsea)

Weight as well as size matter in Charles Ray's mildly disorienting, aesthetically alluring trio of life-size figurative sculptures. The subjects—a self-portrait of Ray naked as he ties a nonexistent shoe, a homeless woman sleeping on a bench and a standing nude young man—feel remote from us as they look down, lie still or gaze into the distance. But the discovery that each polished steel sculpture tips the scales somewhere between 1,400 and 6,000 pounds makes these slightly larger-than-life characters conceptually weightier than they first appear.

The seductive smoothness of the figures belie their identities as everyday folk: aged skin seems rejuvenated (Ray's toes have the unmarred elegance of Greek or Roman statuary), and tangled hair turns into a pleasing, waving mass. Ray's approach also diminishes racial and class distinctions, as if he'd waved a magic wand or given his subjects a (modified) Midas touch.

Still, the sleeping woman's itinerant situation suggests a story that the other two lack. The slipped waistband of her sweatpants, revealing her back and underwear, exposes her in a way that her companions aren't, while her beatific smile, as well as the bench on which she rests, set her up as a tangible personality to contemplate. While the roughness of her shoes recalls George Segal's plaster pedestrians, the fluid expanses of her substantial thighs induce wonder. Although Ray may elide difference, he beautifies imperfection, so that the peculiarities of his characters remain.—*Merrily Kerr*

Shoe tie

