

MATTHEW MARKS GALLERY

1062 North Orange Grove, Los Angeles, California 90046 323-654-1830 matthewmarks.com

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Review 'Pavlova's Dawg and Other Works,' a group show that's playful and profound

By David Pagel

The pinpoint precision that is palpable in “Pavlova's Dawg and Other Works by Gallery Artists” distinguishes this eight-artist exhibition from most group shows, whose organizing principles tend to be based in sloppy approximations, vague similarities and laissez-faire laziness.

That is business as usual in the digital era of the Information Age. The style of thinking so prevalent today is the intellectual equivalent of spell-check software: getting close-enough to what you want to say and letting your computer do the rest. In the old days, anything less than spot-on accuracy was inadequate in art.

At Matthew Marks Gallery, laser-sharp juxtapositions stimulate the senses and the intellect. In the main gallery, three gorgeous monochromes — by Ellsworth Kelly, Katharina Fritsch and Paul Sietsema — play off of a three-color close-up of a car's trunk and bumper, precisely painted by Peter Cain.

Among all four works, the complex relationships that unfold — between surface and volume, object and image, color and line — are redoubled in an adjoining gallery, where a big color photograph by Thomas Demand hangs all alone.

On first glance, Demand's photograph seems to depict an old-fashioned kitchen. A close look reveals that every object in the picture has been carefully made of construction paper, meticulously cut and pasted in the actual dimensions of the object it mimics. These include a stove, sink and refrigerator, as well as plates, potatoes and leafy greens.

In the second building, a trio of pieces in a pair of galleries similarly messes with perception. Ron Nagle's tabletop sculpture, from which the show takes its title, is both a three-dimensional picture and abstract tableaux. Made of clay, bronze, polyurethane and epoxy resin, it torques spatial experience playfully and profoundly.

What takes shape in the mind's eye does not align with external reality. That gap is where Nagle's sculpture packs its punch. Likewise, its title packs multiple references — to an Austrian dessert, a Russian behaviorialist and American street slang — into two words. The cockeyed mix flies in the face of logic and invites visitors to let our imaginations run wild.

“Pavlova's Dawg” also functions as a fine pivot between Vincent Fecteau's shadow-box collage and Charles Ray's stack of bricks lashed with a thick rope to a well-used sawhorse. The visual tension within each piece multiplies exponentially between and among others, making for an exhibition that is all about nuance and the pleasures that accrue when precision gets it due.



Ron Nagle's "Pavlova's Dawg," 2014, ceramic, bronze, catalyzed polyurethane and epoxy resin. (Rob Nagle / Matthew Marks Gallery)