

Art in America

Rebecca Warren at Matthew Marks

Rebecca Warren's New York solo debut, this show featured new cartoonily expressionistic sculptures made of unfired reinforced clay on a considerably smaller scale than the works for which she has achieved renown in her native U.K. Trolling the sculptural tradition of expressive figuration for iconic depictions of the female form to grapple with and caricature, the artist has previously confronted Rodin, Picasso and Boccioni, among others. Possibly Dubuffet and certainly William Tucker also feed this work. Warren's relation to her influences is so upfront that it becomes her content.

The stars of this show were some nutty little dancers, most under 4 feet high. *Madeleine* and *Courteille* are take-offs on that mixed-medium freak of art history, Degas's *Dancer, Aged Fourteen*, and they are modeled with the exuberant directness and tactile authority of de Kooning's *Clamdigger*. In each piece, the dancer's big toe protrudes from her gigantic platform heels, her tutu is reduced to a tiny apron and the ribbon in her hair is tied in a bow bigger than her head. Two of her nearly identical sisters are paired under Plexiglas in *The Twin*. *Clark* is a high-stepping cancan dancer with enormous bow-bedecked pumps, bulging calf muscles, flying skirts and flopping breasts. Warren presumably had the Frenchman's *Grande Arabesque* in mind for her *Grand Cru*: one foot is firmly planted in a shoe like a cinder block, and the other points skyward. Her torso arches down, her arms sweep the plinth, and the ruffles of her tutu,

splayed like enormous frantic petals, divulge her fluttering labia.

For some years, Warren has also constructed boxy assem-

or elbow emerges from a scribbly whirl of lines are three masses of unpainted clay sporting breasts, limbs, lumps and flowers. About



View of Rebecca Warren's exhibition "Pas de Deux," 2005; at Matthew Marks. (Review on p. 183.)

blages. Here, two wall-mounted vitrines seemed ancillary to the modeled clay sculpture, although the smaller, *Pas de Deux*, lends its name to the show. In it, a circle of red neon the size of a softball illuminates a little landscape of lumps of clay and chunks of wood, bits of Styrofoam, twigs and a fuzzy pompom. *In the Bois* is similar, an archly wan accumulation of studio detritus and neon, all 16 feet of it: Joseph Cornell meets Keith Sonnier. Determinedly elliptical, comparatively reticent, the assemblages court the arbitrary but are a bit too artful really to put themselves across.

Reminiscent of cartoon fist-fights where the odd foot, nose

3 feet high, they are positioned at eye level on white pedestals. The clay in *Louis* has a slightly dry appearance; in *Europa* rough furls seem to have bloomed from deep crevices and clefts. *In the Last Ditch I Think of You* is more generalized and cloudlike, its components abstract but for one conspicuous, large-nippled breast. *Sporting Lady* and *Cologne* are smaller, and brushily painted in tints of green and pink over a blackish base coat in a way that emphasizes their turbulent surfaces. With clay, the most earthbound of materials, Warren evokes a roiling formlessness.

—Stephen Maine