

MATTHEW MARKS GALLERY

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

## Los Angeles Times



IN "MESSAGE TO RAPHAEL" at Matthew Marks, artist Ron Nagle recalls the drama of a cell dividing.

ART REVIEW

# Feel the risk of possibility

Ron Nagle teases and toys in his pint-sized pieces

BY DAVID PAGEL

A lot has happened in the world since Ron Nagle's last L.A. solo show in 2005.

A lot more has happened in his work, which is still intimate, whimsical and sensual yet now asks big existential questions without suggesting that the answers might be simple, direct or logical. Titled "Ice

Breaker," Nagle's mind-bending exhibition at Matthew Marks Gallery takes visitors to the heart of what it means to be alive to life's ups and downs.

Risk and possibility are Nagle's stock in trade. He serves them up in abundance at the gallery, where 15 pint-size pieces are enshrined inside 15 glass cubes, each perched atop its own pedestal. Four more similarly

scaled sculptures stand in four space-saving cubbyholes, each of which has been cut into the middle of each of the four walls.

Reliquaries come to mind. So do stashes.

The combination of religious veneration and illicit substances, or spiritual enlightenment and surreptitious bliss, takes stunning shape in Nagle's subtly subversive works. The form of their presentation amplifies the content of individual sculptures.

That cooperative synergy flies in the face of the idea that abstract art is a high-minded affair that has nothing to do with the animal impulses of flesh and blood reality. The two colude beautifully in Nagle's pieces of

movie still, a thin slice of an animated cartoon, a documentary about microorganisms or a thriller in which something dreadful has just happened. Or is about to. Or both.

Sometimes the drama recalls that of a cell dividing in two ("Message to Raphael") or a cell having second thoughts about splitting ("French Stickler"). More often, it involves a solitary being venturing, cautiously and curiously, into unknown territory ("Sandmandia" and "Pennyman").

"Historical Land Mind," "Witzelsucht" and "Cult Classic" include two components or characters that approach each other, tentatively and gingerly. The sense of anticipation



**"HISTORICAL LAND MIND"** is among Nagle's works that have two components approaching each other, creating anticipation.

3-D poetry. Each appeals to the lizard brain without overlooking the more sophisticated machinations of our cognitive hardware.

All sorts of stories can be read from the 77-year-old artist's work. Many resemble landscapes, their super-saturated palettes, exquisitely textured surfaces and unnaturally streamlined formations recalling aquariums customized by connoisseurs of beauty. Others seem to be bookends that have evolved so radically and idiosyncratically that they no longer have partners that look anything like them.

None of Nagle's sculptures sits still. Each occupies time as if it were a

toys with the mind.

Without stating anything explicitly, these pieces paint a vivid picture of the world today, when charged questions fly about how individuals interact with neighbors and strangers.

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## Ron Nagle

**Where:** Matthew Marks Gallery, 1062 N. Orange Grove Ave., L.A.

**When:** Through April 8; closed Sundays and Mondays

**Info:** (323) 654-1830,  
[www.matthewmarks.com](http://www.matthewmarks.com)