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CALENDAR

Making many parts come alive

By DAVID PAGEL

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Three years ago, when **Ken Price** last exhibited his signature sculptures in Los Angeles, many of his best ones looked pulled in many directions simultaneously, as if their molten parts were not governed by a single principle.

Price's new works amplify this impression. At L.A. Louver, each of his 10 tabletop pieces appears to have been made of at least six (but up to 50) parts, all of which seem to be animate beings -- simple critters with their own rudimentary nervous systems and primitive means of locomotion. The result is a stunning body of work that is darker and perhaps more profound than anything Price has made.

The imaginary creatures come in two basic shapes. Some resemble plump, underwater worms. Others look like bloated clams, their puffy, wafer-shaped bodies also recalling comic-strip flying saucers or inflated balloons being mercilessly flattened until they are about to pop.

The sizes and shapes vary, but no single part is too big to hold in the palm of your hand. Yet the associations the pieces trigger are far more wide-ranging.

"Spirit of '08" looks like a big pile of scat, a mound of juicy sausages, a half-melted Christmas candle or a ball of writhing snakes. From different angles, "Gonzalo," "Hotso" and "Argonne" appear to be abstract figures, their meaty lumps taking the form of the limbs and torsos of the Michelin Man, the Pillsbury Doughboy or the Venus of Willendorf.

"OG," with a surface resembling the skin of a leopard with radioactive spots, looks like the offspring of an armadillo and a sea slug, or a sci-fi battle tank. "Yeow," "Seven High" and "Vona" recall landscapes, some with crumbling ruins. And "Cocodo" has the presence of a macabre yet desperately optimistic still life. It seems to depict a hand, with fingers crossed for luck, sticking out from under a pile of rubble.

All of Price's works generate loads of associations, no one of which tells the whole story. Getting viewers to see different things at different times in the same things, they expand our imaginations and enlarge our capacities for empathy.



PLUMP: Ken Price's "Yeow" evokes a landscape. The artist merges parts that would mostly fit in the palm of a hand.

L.A. Louver, 45 N. Venice Blvd., Venice, (310) 822-4955, through Nov. 8. Closed Sundays and Mondays. www.lalouver.com.