

Ken Price and Ed Moses: Individualists in Tandem

ART REVIEW

By WILLIAM WILSON
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A Beat Generation revival is afoot so it's entirely apt that two grizzled veterans of that era should be showing their art together. Ed Moses and Ken Price share history going back to the late '50s at the legendary Ferus Gallery. They also stand out as individualists among nonconformists.

Price was nurtured in the womb of a revolutionary class taught at Otis Art Institute by ceramic sculptor Peter Voulkos. It grafted the spontaneity of Abstract Expressionism to that of Japanese *raku* ware. As a result, the craft of potting was promoted to the status of sculpture.

Although a gifted draftsman and potentially brilliant painter, Price has remained an obdurate clay artist. Saying what kind is a tougher nut. He has made everything from hostile eggs to turtle cups and ironic curios in the accents of Mexican American Southwestern vernacular art. Just when you think you might get by calling him a Pop Primitivist or a Folk Aristocrat he comes up with a new oxymoron that deconstructs definition.

The present gaggle of about 10 works, showing at the L.A. Louver Gallery, are abstractions with strong hints of expressive content. Some are lumpy and organic-like fossilized root balls. The colors of pieces like "True Blue" catch light in extraordinary ways. They radiate a nebulous glow.

By contrast, faceted works are sophisticated and slightly flashy as if thinking of Art Deco Cubism. Predominantly a suave matte black with flashes of green and red, the largest appears fairly narrow in depth until you peek around the back to encounter a tapering rectangle that puts you in mind of the bump on the rear of those television sets designed to look slender when they are as clunky as the rest.

One motif common to both sets seems significant. Works are notched in such fashion as to suggest a ledge high atop a cliff. Small black rectangles or silhouettes of cubes on the abutted vertical will do for entrances to very domesticated caves. Portals are so black as to appear painted on the surface. They are, in reality, holes. Ah, shallows that are deep. Open portals that appear closed. It's all very Zen and mordantly witty.

Moses has spent a long career on a quest through the labyrinth of classical modernist abstraction. He ran it through the sensibility unique to himself and L.A. art, its craziness, love of craft and urge to hybridize.

Last year he made an astonishing summary in a group of works that melded the primitivism of Lascaux with that of the graffiti writers. They achieved the impossible dream of combining figurative imagery and abstraction, absolute spontaneity and complete technical control.

It's the kind of feat that puts a fellow in the awkward position of being his own toughest competition. Never capable of settling into a trademark manner, Moses has dealt with this dilemma through understatement.

Called "Frontals and Reversals," new works echo the dribbles and earth tones of the previous bunch but look like blown-up sections turned backward. Staining soaks through, covered with clear acrylic that sometimes gives images the problematical appearance of large prints under glass.

Figures are now suggested within abstract shapes. "Revere Ome Number 1" has intense physical richness and a hint of hanging female torsos. By contrast "Ome Bu Number 1" is a sheet of thinly stained plywood evoking landscape. "Revere Dug Number 4" has rich rivers of acrylic blobs that suggest a microscopic inner world.

Every painting points provocatively in another direction, to a new idea. They play hob with the conventional show-biz notion that the next movie has to be a bigger hit than the last one. For an artist like Ed Moses, it's the quest that counts.

■ L.A. Louver Gallery, 55 N. Venice Blvd. and 77 Market St., Venice, through July 30, closed Mondays, (310) 822-4955.