

Ken Price's resplendent sculptures pack a punch

New sculptures at L.A. Louver show the 70-year-old artist to still be in the forefront.

By David Pagel , Special to The Times

Four years ago, **Ken Price** was making the best work of his career. This year, he's still at it.

Ten fabulous new sculptures at L.A. Louver Gallery show the 70-year-old artist to be among the most important sculptors of his generation and, more likely than not, at least two subsequent generations.

Techniques and themes that appeared in earlier works are refined and expanded in the new pieces. All were made in 2004. Each commands far more space than its size suggests. Only two, "Gongs" and "Bloato," stand two feet tall. "Stacked," "Steeps" and "Down" would have to lie about their height to claim they were 12 inches high.

Even so, Price is not a miniaturist. His rock-solid sculptures never shrink the vast dimensions of the real world or some fantasy version of it. On the contrary, they inhabit the same space — and the same mental plane — occupied by visitors.



Steeps

Although all of Price's ceramic sculptures are visually resplendent, their bulbous forms gorgeously covered with no less than 75 coats of paint in a stunning techno-autumnal palette, their initial impact is bodily. You feel them in your gut. Only then does your perceptual machinery try to make sense of them.

Price complicates the game of mind and body cat-and-mouse by making works that also seem to be pulled in many directions at once. Unlike his sculptures from the past decade, the new ones do not appear to be subject to single organizing principles or animated by unified consciousness, sense of purpose or will. Instead, many seem to be made up of several independent organisms, each with a mind of its own.

"The Heap" takes this multi-part, multidirectional complexity to extremes. From every angle, it appears to be half a dozen or more separate blobs of animate protoplasm that slither all over one another in a sort of organic orgy or group grope among cellular structures. It's hard to tell whether the cluster sticks together for protection or pleasure.

"Wide Load," "McLean" and "Down" also resemble fantastic, lumbering sea creatures. These meaty pieces have no proper fronts or backs; they require you to circle them repeatedly. From various positions, they look like completely different objects.

As a group, they take a step away from the exuberant cartoon goofiness of Price's earlier works to evoke ancient Mesopotamian talismans rubbed smooth by devotees and Mayan monuments weathered by centuries of exposure. Their droopy softness has nothing to do with deflation or abjection. Instead, seasoned wisdom makes them the most generous and forgiving art Price has made.

L.A. Louver Gallery, 45 N. Venice Blvd., (310) 822-4955, through Feb. 19. Closed Sundays and Mondays