

AROUND THE GALLERIES

War, fire themes in sculpture

“Compliance Solutions,” Ben Jackel’s solo debut at L.A. Louver, is a testament to the power of a few well-chosen materials.

His primary medium is stoneware, a charcoal-colored material with a rich physical presence — smooth but still tactile, hard and earthy but also delicate.

The choice is apt, even poetic, given the nature of his two principal themes: war and fire. Both are circumstances of disaster and devastation, in which what appears stone-like and solid — whether the physical façade of a building or the psychological façade of a soldier — can shatter in an instant.

The sculptures themselves are skillful reproductions of discrete objects, miniaturized in most cases but otherwise faithful — the sculptural equivalent, say, of a Karl Haendel. The selection is focused and thoughtful.



Syntagma (detail), 2008-2009 overall: 72 x 55 1/2 x 16 in. (182.9 x 141 x 40.6 cm) each: 6 in. (15.2 cm) total 256 soldiers

The most engrossing is an installation of 256 miniature Greek soldiers, all bearing spears, arranged in a tight grid formation so that the spears curve into a single wave.

Also striking is an installation of seven miniature naval destroyers — each representing an actual ship in the Battle of Leyte Gulf, the largest naval battle of World War II — that spans the surface of one wall as if viewed from above across the surface of the ocean.

The fire theme plays out in a selection of firefighting objects, such as an ax, a fire extinguisher, a collection of sprinkler heads and a long, folded fire hose, all of which are reproduced to scale and enclosed in beautifully fabricated ebony cases. So unassuming at a glance that they could almost be mistaken for the real thing, they embody an exceptional degree of craftsmanship that illuminates the dignity of the original form.

Quiet, intelligent, elegant and concise, the show is an impressive debut.

— Holly Meyers