

LAWEEKLY

Figuratively Seeing

Nathan Mabry, Alison Saar

By Peter Frank

Wednesday, April 2, 2008 – 11:59 am

Nathan Mabry's much-vaunted send-ups of cultural artifact are as snarky as anything conjured by the mid-'80s appropriationists, but they're even less P.C. — less deadpan, less distant, less respectful — revealing a world in which nothing is sacred enough to transcend the vernacularizing debasement of consumer culture. Pre-Columbian ceramics make obscene gestures; vanitas skulls right out of Hamlet's hands are given animal-nose masks. Minimalism fares no better, turned by Mabry into photographic repetitions that might as well have come off beach towels. Mabry's approach is resolutely lowbrow, clever, easy to grasp and free of aesthetic rationale, but in its effrontery it vents the same anger and confusion it provokes in us. Cherry and Martin, 12611 Venice Blvd., L.A.; Wed.–Sat. 11 a.m.–6 p.m.; thru April 5. (310) 398-7404.

Alison Saar's sculptures also center on weighty, even monumental figures, but they manifest a poetry of scale, material and image that Mabry studiously avoids. This group of objects, fabricated from wood, ceiling tin, tar, bronze, etc., centers on the female form, but as a locus for our empathy rather than as the object of our gaze. The figures' perilous situations, tortured positions and strange transformations bespeak a sensibility no less angry than Mabry's but far less stylized in its expression, and far more dependent on a faith in beauty and metaphor. Despite their often turgid materials, these allegories of the spirit boast an infectious lightness of being.

L.A. Louver, 45 N. Venice Blvd., Venice; Tues.–Sat. 10 a.m.–6 p.m.; through April 5. (310) 822-4955.