

Pagel, David. "Giving voice and video to sculpture." *Los Angeles Times*, 7 May 2004, p. E18-19.

Giving voice and video to sculpture

I can't remember the last time I glimpsed a work of art that caused me to pick up the pace of my walk toward it. The opposite happens far more frequently, recalling Dorothy in "The Wizard of Oz" when she tells Toto to run.

Tony Oursler's new sculptures stand out from the crowd because they actually get you excited about looking at them. That should be too obvious to mention, but it's worth saying because so much work these days is based on the assumption that art is good for you and — like cauliflower or rutabagas — isn't meant to be all that pleasurable.

Oursler never presumes that his talking, video-enhanced sculptures are good for anything. Indeed, part of their power resides in the fact that they might be follies — distracting traps as addictive and unwholesome as television.

Installed in three dimly lighted rooms of the Margo Leavin Gallery, Oursler's five free-standing sculptures are bulbous blobs of white fiberglass onto which he projects videos of human eyes and mouths. All create the impression that viewers are coming face to face with self-conscious characters.

"Boz" is a waist-high lump whose larger-than-life eyes are misaligned. They don't move in unison, instead opening, closing and looking every which way on their own. The Frankenstein-like figure's skin is covered with rainbow-tinted blotches. This suggests glitches in both internal, cognitive transmissions and external, electronic ones.

A nearby speaker emits a male voice. Its tone is patient, almost serene. You get the sense that "Boz" believes he's got all the time in the world to communicate with viewers — that he's dumb enough to think that a viewer will stick with him through thick and thin.

But the balance of power tips in your favor. You're free to leave Oursler's nose-less creature stuck in its dark corner. There's a whiff of futility, even borderline desperation, about it. By turns heartbreaking and hilarious, the malformed mutant compresses a cornucopia of soulful emotions into a compact package of off-the-shelf technology and theatrical artistry.

"Egot" is a soft-spoken, gold-skinned female whose head is shaped like a deflated beach ball. Wide-eyed and earnest, she recites an endless string of words

with roots in stream-of-consciousness literature, Dada poetry and newspaper headlines.

One branch of "Egot's" family tree can be traced back to the socially engaged work of Barbara Kruger and Jenny Holzer. The other goes back to Andy Kaufman and Jabba the Hutt.

Oursler's eight collages and three flat wall-sculptures are less captivating than his more ambitious floor works, which include a doe-eyed ditz, a pair of conjoined twins and an angry patriot that resembles a Picasso painting come to life. None speaks loudly, so you have to get close and listen carefully.

Such passive-aggressive power plays are effective. It's hard to escape the feeling that you've come before a chorus of oracles filled with all sorts of enigmatic wisdom.

Margo Leavin Gallery, 812 N. Robertson Blvd., West Hollywood, (310) 273-0603, through May 27. Closed Sundays and Mondays.