

Ollman, Leah. *Jeffry Mitchell's subversive charm at Ambach & Rice*. Los Angeles Times. April, 2012

Los Angeles Times

Review: Jeffry Mitchell's subversive charm at Ambach & Rice

April 27, 2012

By Leah Ollman

The clumsy charm of Jeffry Mitchell's ceramic sculptures at Ambach & Rice acts as a sort of friendly greeting. After a bit of time in the work's company, more complicated, more interesting traits emerge, mainly an equal-opportunity attitude of gentle irreverence. The warm brown glaze with whispers of green that sheathes all of the work reinforces its staid, decorative cover, but beneath the surface, Mitchell is reckoning with -- and quietly subverting -- traditional representations relating to gender and Christianity. Mitchell, based in Seattle, recasts two Chinese guardian lions (commonly misnamed Fu Dogs) as garishly ornamented welcomers, a sprightly "HELLO" spelled out at each base. "Stout Green Stack" makes obvious reference to Peter Voulkos' raw, physically assertive works from the late '50s on, but grown soft, somewhat domesticated and feminized, ebulliently overgrown with flowers but also hung with chains and studded with nails.

A dozen figurines lining a plywood shelf tweak other tropes of masculinity. Many feature small, stocky men, gruff, old-school types with cigars clamped in the corners of their mouths. Two work as coopers, and another two as lumbermen. Before long, Monty Python's parodic lumberjack song starts to tickle the back of the mind as the subjects of several other sculptures with similar sturdy characters become clear through their titles: "A Kitten, a House Plant, and the Gay Maid," and "Jesus Kissing Judas." There is just enough tension embedded in these loving and lumpy pieces for them to be surprisingly memorable.

Ambach & Rice, 6148 Wilshire Blvd., (323) 965-5500, through May 12. Closed Sunday and Monday. www.ambachandrice.com