

Los Angeles Times CALENDAR

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George Stoll Untitled (43 tumblers in a holiday arrangement) [Detail of reverse view] 2008
Beeswax, parafin, and pigment on a painted wooden shelf and painted wooden pedestal
74 x 100 x 12 inches

George Stoll at Kim Light/LightBox by Christopher Knight

Made from wax, a hand-cast sculpture of a plastic drinking glass by George Stoll is an incredible simulation — a synthetic cup that isn't plastic; a machine-made form that is not pristine but instead betrays the idiosyncrasy of the hand; and an object whose color, never quite saturated, seems to be leaching out, like a face going pale. Dusty doppelgängers, his vessels look exactly like the real thing, except not quite.

A peculiar new Stoll sculpture at Kim Light Gallery multiplies what could be called “the strangeness of banality” in his earlier art, which in addition to cups has also focused on sponges, toilet paper rolls, soap bars and other familiardomestic items. “Untitled (43 tumblers in a holiday arrangement)” is a virtual village of beeswax and paraffin drinking vessels, each occupying an individual niche in a large wood shelf atop a pedestal.

You don't see the tumblers, however, unless you walk around to the back of the tall shelf. (It's just over 6 feet tall and 8 feet wide.) Approached from the front, the back-lighted shelf at first appears blank.

It has a stepped, rectilinear contour that recalls a city skyline. Small holes drilled into its face show tiny colored spots, like a randomly lighted pattern of apartment and office windows in urban buildings crossed with stars in a night sky. The colors turn out to be made by the multicolored tumblers on the other side.

The ensemble is like an eccentric church altarpiece crossed with a reliquary — an impression enhanced by a second group of works in an adjacent room. Bones and skulls made from gessoed plaster are arrayed on pedestals and embedded into wall niches. Stacked Halloween-pumpkin baskets underscore the elemental paganism that lurks beneath most religious feeling, while bowls overflowing with female breast forms — dotted with pastel-colored nipples — provide a disconcerting note of nurturance.

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LIGHTBOX

Stoll's ode to the traditional Baroque theme of vanitas, or the fragile transience of life and death's inevitability, gets under your skin. The sculptural forms are covered over with gesso, a thick and powdery white liquid traditionally used to prepare wood panels or sculptures for painting. Stoll mostly leaves the paint off, which means the soft, chalky contours of the gesso coating yield a melting, marshmallowy appearance. It's as if these strange modern relics were disappearing before your eyes.