

art

MUSEUMS • GALLERIES

The fluid, figurative forms of one complement the other's formality.

Pairing of sculptors brings out their best

By Edith Newhall
FOR THE INQUIRER

Sometimes a two-person show allows one the possibility to see a connection between both artists' work that went unrecognized before.

Having previously only seen the sculptures of Clint Takeda and Paul Oberst separately, in different venues, I would not have thought of them as compatible, much less of putting them together in an exhibition.

But now that the improbable has occurred, their pairing in a show at Bridgette Mayer Gallery suddenly seems a stroke of brilliance.

What I anticipated as the main clash between the two has turned out to be an asset for both. Takeda's forms — derived from his study of Japanese Buddhist sculptures dating from the seventh to the 13th centuries but also reminiscent of some of Lynda Benglis' sculptures — are melting, fluid, figurative. Oberst's, meant to represent temples, are extenuated, totemic and more formal. But they share an eccentricity and exaggeration that brings out the best in both.

There are so many real similarities between Oberst's and Takeda's works, on the other hand, that it's hard to imagine why they haven't

been matched in a two-person show before. Both artists use a playful palette of reds, yellows, and greens. (Takeda also favors silver.) Their works have distinctive surfaces — Oberst silkscreens words in color onto his wood sculptures, but the wood is never hidden; Takeda rubs the painted enamel surfaces of his synthetic foam sculptures to reveal the imperfections underneath their glossy exteriors.

There is something inherently childlike and toylke about both artists' work. Where Takeda's sculptures can resemble amorphous elves, Oberst's recall gigantic versions of the interlocking wooden toy figures from the 1930s' Bill Ding Balancing Clowns Set, or baby giraffes.

One of the most powerful bonds between them — visible in Oberst's work, not in Takeda's — is the temple. Takeda saw his first Japanese Buddhist sculptures as a child in Japan, on visits to ancient temples; Oberst has been working with the temple image for 27 years, as a place of meditation for himself. But whether or not you see a temple or sense an invisible one in close proximity, both artists' works ask you to pause and reflect.



Clint Takeda's "Zocho" (2008), above, and Paul Oberst's "Acoma, Ancestors in the Sky" (2007), right, both at Bridgette Mayer Gallery through April 26.



Bridgette Mayer Gallery, 709 Walnut St., 10 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. Tuesdays through Saturdays. 215-413-8893 or www.bridgettemayergallery.com. Through April 26.

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