



Michael Minelli, *hunchback*, 2004, polymer clay and acrylic paint, 5¼ x 3¼ x 3¼".

## LOS ANGELES

### MICHAEL MINELLI

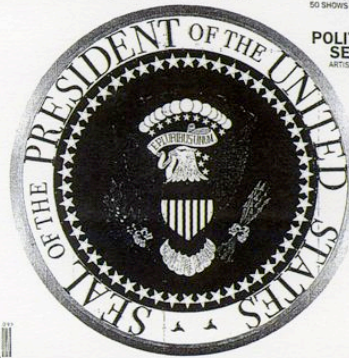
MICHAEL KOHN GALLERY

The head of a nurse, an Arab woman in *Niqab*, and a cicatrized, monocled Daddy Warbucks-like man stare at the viewer blankly, not even asking, in the manner of De Niro's Travis Bickle, *You lookin' at me?* The problems inherent to representing in sculpture both the act of looking and the information provided by a specific face account only partially for the strange power of Michael Minelli's second solo show. Where previously he proffered totemic, gleefully gaudy Bruce Conneresque assemblages or combined the bodies of various televisual and cinematic stars to make small, meticulous figurative fetish sculptures (quietly deranging the Greek ideal of a body by constructing seemingly seamless wholes made up of disparate parts (a Mia Farrow-ish torso, say, topped with Yoda's noggin), with his new pieces something only apparently simpler but in the end more disturbing goes on. Minelli deploys a variety of stylizations and stereotypes to create a nostalgic rainbow coalition of silent talking heads from a nonexistent global village—tribal *cannibal* (all works 2004), wealthy *flapper*, efficient *mid-level manager*—that convey everything and nothing through contradictory looks. It's as if a manic Geppeto began making the puppets for an adult version of *It's a Small World After All* but never got beyond the tops.

Minelli capitalizes on, well, a weird proto-neo-social realism while managing to recall the tender three-dimensional portraiture of John Ahearn. Tuned in to the

bombardment of fictional characters, "real" personages, and liminal figures broadcast and eerily equalized or flattened by television (I hesitate to suggest by contemporary life), Minelli succeeds in applying the vernaculars of Disneyland and Norman Rockwell to Hogarth- and Daumier-like ends. Three piezo prints, *Rotunda*, *Usual Suspects No. 1*, and *Usual Suspects No. 2*, make this democratization(?) abundantly clear: They work almost as a pictorial manifesto, positioning, centrifugally, an entourage of various types—a Koons bunny, a Forcefield troglodyte, Flip Wilson as Geraldine, Colin Powell—around empty blue sky and puffy clouds, a placid, what-me-worry view his heads deny. Purposefully flirting with caricature, his busts provide reason to question how, why, and exactly when Western human typologies coalesced (post-World War II, during "robust" American expansion?), in order to consider what it means to see them now.

At times, the politics of Minelli's head games remain intractable but palpable—a calm, helmeted *soldier girl* in camouflage hangs next to a vibrant yellow ski-capped *terrorist*—secured from any straightforward ideological narrative. If some heads evoke, intentionally, a frisson of "political incorrectness," perhaps we could begin by asking, Why some and not others? To position a stoic monkey in an astronaut's space suit as the final figure plots a point on a strange daisy chain of connections, becoming perhaps a gloss on our Mars-gazing commander in chief, disinherited of the Great Communicator's mantle, settling for Bonzo's; *monkeyhead* situates itself just as quickly as a nod to our possible *Planet of the Apes* future.



\$6.00

—Bruce Hainley