

Art in Review; A Four Dimensional Being Writes Poetry on a Field With Sculptures , Ken Johnson

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Charles Ray is one of the most interesting artists alive. He is a pretty good curator too, judging by the organization of this beautiful, spare and mysterious show of works by three sculptors and a photographer.

Mr. Ray is known for offbeat perceptual effects in his own sculpture, like one of a naked family with the two young children enlarged so they stand as tall as their parents. But no special effects are in play in the relatively traditional sculptures on view here.

First you encounter one of Giacometti's skinny and crusty standing-woman sculptures. Some distance away is a massive assemblage of variously skewed wooden beams and a found staircase by Mark di Suvero. And a shelf along the rear wall displays a set of doll-scale wooden sculptures representing scenes from the Book of Genesis carved and assembled by the folk artist Edgar Tolson.

In the exhibition's catalog essay Mr. Ray ruminates on space, time and sculpture, but a more immediate key to his show may be found in what at first seems its most perplexing piece: a huge photographic transparency on a light box, by Jeff Wall. It depicts a ventriloquist and his alarmingly ugly dummy entertaining children at a birthday party. With some reflection it may occur to you that the dummy is a kind of sculpture, and that the art of sculpture is like ventriloquism: the act of giving dumb material the kind of magical animation that so wonderfully imbues the actual sculptures in this show.