

Elizabeth King at Kent

Twenty-five years' worth of objects both collected and created by Elizabeth King were assembled in "Studio: Things Found, Things Made," its profusion meant to evoke the hubbub of her warehouse-size workspace in Richmond. But the show's strongest resemblance was to the 16th-century *wunderkammer*, in which marvels of nature shared space with manufactured rarities, including some that would later be regarded as art. King's latter-day cabinet of curiosities, which made use of various display cases and tables both antique and new, was crammed, tidily, with antique dummies and newly fabricated body parts. There were wooden and porcelain hands (most by King) and

acrylic and glass eyes (the latter made professionally and also by the artist, after a three-month apprenticeship with a master of the dying trade). Among other original objects (which predominated) were half-scale figures in plaster and bronze, and paper cutouts of body parts, which looked a little like dressmakers' patterns. In greatest abundance, on shelves, cases and even on the floor, were delicate, hairless female heads, all by King and all as perfect as Fabergé eggs, their limpid eyes agog, their porcelain or bronze skin brought to a level of finish that seemed to transcend mere physicality.

If the navigation route here seemed to lead from Renaissance Europe through well-worn byways of 19th-century Americana, with side trips to the darker neighborhoods of Raoul Hausmann and Hans Bellmer, in fact King's journey winds up squarely within the techno-savviest precincts of the 21st century. On three flat-screen video monitors, she had her mannequins perform in animated sequences of an elegance and technical sophistication that would put Pixar to shame. The looped 5-minute video *Bartlett's Hand* (2005) sets into mesmerizing motion a slightly under-life-size, hand-carved boxwood hand; the animation, made from 7,500 individual still images, involves enough data to require a dedicated computer. *Eidolon* (1988-99) circles a moving torso and *What Happened* (1996) a face in close-up. All are preternaturally flawless, the jointed fingers and spring-loaded heads moving with eerily fluid grace. Other wired work (made over extended periods between 1986 and 2005) was shown in a darkened room, where two wooden hands, a single disembodied eye and, most spectacularly, a subtly moving head appeared within a variety of faux-antique cases; projection devices made them seem to come into focus on big glass lenses—or to hover in the air.

Recent illusionistic sculpture that King's brings to mind ranges from Charles Ray's self-portrait-in-a-bottle to the hyper-realism of a raft of younger artists (Ron Mueck,



View of Elizabeth King's exhibition "Things Found, Things Made," 2006; inset, *By Ear*, 2004, bronze, glass, 5½ by 3½ by 4½ inches; at Kent. (Review on p. 187.)



Keith Edmier, Patricia Piccinini); Ken Feingold's animatronics seem related, too. But the subtext in King's work, the earliest of which predates most of the above, isn't superslick cyborgs and their creepy implications. King is after a more innocent kind of wonder, something like the unrepeatably dumbfoundedness that must have greeted the first moving pictures, or the first automatons (about which she has written with great wit). Elusive as it is, King pursues that sense of wonder with a devotion to both craft and invention that is as rare as hen's teeth. —Nancy Princenthal