

## ART

## AROUND THE GALLERIES

# Toys were hurt in the production

HOLLY MYERS

"Bloom where you are planted." "This too shall pass." "Friends make life bearable." "The time to be happy is now."

Platitudes proliferate in Michael Decker's second solo show at Steve Turner Contemporary. Drawing from a collection of novelty tchotchkes, photographs of which he's assembled in a fittingly kitschy wood-bound album, Decker reproduces the inscriptions in stamped black letters on 29 white painted boards hung at varying heights throughout the gallery. A computer-generated voice recites them, meanwhile, in a grating monotone, on a looped audio recording planted in one corner.

The installation, which weaves in and around the show's other half a dozen sculptures and drawings, has a vaguely insolent title: "We're Getting Old, So Let's Talk Like This." There is more at play here, however, than mere sarcasm or irony

— even if it's difficult to pinpoint just what. In this simple gesture — the displacement of text from the flord world of the gift shop tchotchke to the generic, though equally amateurish, realm of Decker's stamped letters and digital voice — Decker seems to expose the futility that these aphorism, in their natural context, aim to obscure. They feel naked and feeble, hovering in their generic print with an air of almost desperate uselessness.

Decker has a keen if oddly slanted instinct for the peculiarity of contemporary Americana. He begins, by and large, with familiar objects — ironing boards, pine cones, craft supplies, toys — and takes them in formally idiosyncratic directions, resulting in works that seem unaccountably stranger than the sum of their parts.

In "Trichromes," one of the show's three free-standing sculptures, he began with a selection of decorative glass bowls, smashed them against a wall of his studio and arranged the



Steve Turner Contemporary

**MICHAEL DECKER:** For "Fetal Ring," the artist gutted plush E.T. dolls and strung them on a suspended metal ring. Decker's works are at Steve Turner.

pieces into something resembling a floral centerpiece. In "Effervescence Adolescence Evanescence," he patched hundreds of kitschy painted wood ornaments — cows, clowns, kittens, bunny rabbits — into a sprawling, 7-foot altar-like structure. In "Fetal Ring," the most splendidly bizarre of the bunch and arguably the highlight of the show, he disembow-

eled 14 plush E.T. dolls and skewered their skins along a large metal ring that is vertically suspended over a slender chrome base.

In each case, as well as in the four abstract graphite drawings also on display, it is the off-kilter elegance of the form that catches one's attention; the perverse pathos of the content — the violence entailed in the smashing of

the bowls, the ritualistic undertones of the E.T. hides — nestles and expands from there. This isn't exactly undiscovered territory: In his debt to Mike Kelley and Jim Shaw, among others, Decker brushes shoulders with young L.A. sculptors too numerous to cite (Decker himself is 29). But there is something uniquely peculiar about his balance of psy-

chology and formalism that will be well worth watching, if the refinement underway in this absorbing show is any indication.

**Steve Turner Contemporary**, 6026 Wilshire Blvd., Los Angeles, (323) 931-3721, through Dec. 17. Closed Sunday and Monday. [www.steveturnercontemporary.com](http://www.steveturnercontemporary.com)