

LOS ANGELES

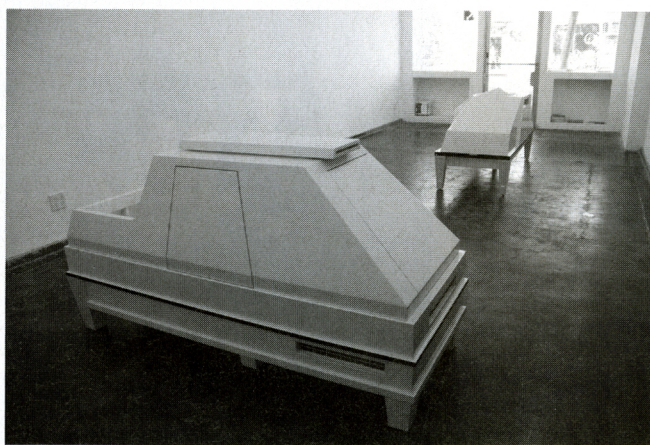
KEITH WALSH

Kristi Engle

KEITH WALSH, an elusive shaman whose work jumps and howls around Postminimal traditions, has fabricated three floor sculptures, a painting and a wooden symbol as talismanic charms for the construction of a time/space convergence that dog-collars arterial movements of Western Art. Broad-survey furniture trends, 1970s automotive design and high-Modernist polemic architecture intersect at Kristi Engle's clean, white, reductive space — itself a confluence of modern historical aesthetics, i.e., the refurbished white cube — to form a kind of supreme Minimalistic gestalt body the progeny of Donald Judd would orgasm inside of.

Central to this formal hysteria are *Cab 1*, *Cab 2* and *Cab 3* which form the primary argument/rebuttal for the artist's admitted historical fascination with "Classical and Visionary architecture, 20th-century bunkers and post-18th century furniture design." In other words, viewers engage a geometric trinity (white boxes with complications) that simultaneously resemble full-scale, functional furniture and large-scale modeling of some architect's LSD-induced lost weekend hallucinations. Yes, these sculptures are far-out. If Judd's boxes were premonitions of Arthur C. Clarke's 2001 monolith with its terrifying logic and irrefutable proportionality, Walsh's "Cab" series is a hilarious accoutrement for Dave Bowman's alien-dominion town home near the film's end: a white Trojan horse from the future — masquerading as neoclassical midget armoire — suddenly scissors open to reveal the naked, innocent Natasha from Jean-Luc Godard's *Alphaville*. Crafted lovingly out of fine-grained Baltic birch plywood (common to dollhouse construction), these anthropomorphic-scaled residences are ultimately home to no one; they contextualize so many different historical forms and functions as to make a complete mockery of any specific meaning. Walsh's sculptures are, fundamentally, prototypical mirrors of cultural/historic time and space.

These three bold Greek temples in miniature are reconsecrated as "modern art" by the addition of *Painting*, a rather small, almost pure-black canvas with an extremely subtle illustration of a columnated Roman arch; and *Carving*, a hand-shaved, savage wooden emblem with weapon-like undertones. Both smaller pieces anchor the otherwise enigmatic sculptures to the notion of "artworks," though it's uncertain whether the "Cab" series interprets this qualification as endearing compliment or hopeless pick-



Keith Walsh, "Cab" series, 2007

up line. The real charm of *Painting* is its placement; situated about 12 feet above the floor, a nod to Ad Reinhardt. *Carving*, not to be outdone, prefigures the echo of this sacred whispering with pre-Columbian sacrificial screams.

Walsh's deceptively simple exhibition sails a deep ocean rich in the multifaceted, protean language of art university lecture halls, commercial furniture woodworking studios and automotive paint and body shops. Add to these the sobering American war machine, seductive James Bond gadgetry, mad scientist persona non grata and Clint Eastwood gunslinger/hero to arrive at one hell of a show.

—Darrin Little

VANITY FAIR PORTRAITS 1913-2008

Los Angeles County Museum of Art
ends March 1, 2009

VANITY FAIR CELEBRATES its 95th anniversary this year. An international exhibition honors the publication's most prized portraits and celebrates très chic glam snapshots paired with high profile reportage — risky enough to satisfy sophisticates yet intimate enough to nourish strangely curious sycophants of the Hollywood glitterati. The world tour exposes the *Vanity Fair* aesthetic as more likened to the undeniable mark of an auteur than a publication. The show, sponsored by Burberry, is a collaboration between *Vanity Fair* and the National Portrait Gallery of London, making its only U.S. stop at LACMA.

The launch of Conde Nast's *Vanity Fair* was contemporaneous to the birth of Modernism and the Armory Show of 1913 that introduced avant-garde art to America. "Vanity Fair" first appeared in John Bunyan's, *The Pilgrim's Process*, referencing rascality and frivolity. The aesthetic of portraiture implemented in the magazine remains anything but frivolous as the use of wide margins emphasize the importance of photography as an art form.

The exhibit provides a rare retrospective

fusing the dubbed "vintage" photographs from 1913-1936 with the "modern" works of 1983-2008. Something changed between the vintage and the modern — a shift not owed to the invention of color photography. The vintage portraits have a joined signifier and signified. We understand the portraits because we supply the narrative

of the artist to their image. The information card beneath the 1926 portrait of James Joyce sporting an eye patch, deeply rounded professorial frames, a bow tie and a pin-striped linen suit reads, "Ulysses hailed as most important single volume of fiction written in our time." In a modern photograph, however, the celebrity represents a separate signifier thereby their name and likeness signify a moment congruent to gossip or news, and their pose creates a meta-narrative designed to stun readers.

The vintage and the modern collide with the Annie Leibovitz photograph of now-California Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger (1997) rigid like a Grecian statue in skis on top of a snow-capped mountain. He looks off into the distance, taking inventory of the landscape below. Arnold's pose is not accidental as Liebovitz was greatly inspired by Martin Munkasci's portrait of Aryan filmmaker Leni Riefenstahl (1931) climbing to the top of a mountain in a swimsuit, leather ski boots unlocking at each step, and wooden skis digging into the snow. She climbed to the mountain that Schwarzenegger is already on top of.

Berenice Abbott, James Joyce, 1926

