

JOHN FRAME, MAURA BENDETT, YEK

John Frame's association with a group of local artists who practice an intricate, surrealism-tinged figuration is impacting noticeably on his own wood sculpture and assemblage. At least as gifted a craftsman as the rest of them, Frame is also as dedicated to his own vision — a view of the human condition that finds form in the rendition of precisely detailed puppet figures, their facial expressions and bodily contortions conflating anguish and ecstasy into single gestures. In his latest work, Frame investigates other formats as well: A listing ship conjures Michael McMillan's moonstruck installations, Peter Zokosky's animal portraiture seems to inflect a bas-relief carving of a bear caricature, and actual collaboration manifests in a portrait — the round, neo-Renaissance painting rendered by Jon Swihart, embedded in a finely hewn, trophylike Frame frame. Such expansion of Frame's style is welcome; it does not result in a dilution of his sensibility, but rather in the amplification of its richness and unpredictability.

Except for the fact they're both sculptors, little would seem to connect Frame's wood magic to Maura Bendett's goopy plastic-coated confabulations of tendrils and baubles. But in their distinct ways, both bodies of work balance irony with sheer sensual delight. Both display a conflicted regard for folk art and kitsch, celebrating the excesses of the popular arts without adopting them. Frame's woodworking builds, spectacularly, on traditional carving and whittling — arguably male-identified activities. For her part, Bendett clearly embraces and elaborates upon traditionally female-identified artifacture, including jewelry, interior design (notably chandeliers) and even food — especially confectionery — preparation. And she does so with gently satiric wit as well as obviously expansive complexity, upping a crucial little bit the extravagance we normally associate with these forms and métiers.

Showing with Bendett, Yek (né Yek Wong) also takes lowbrow art forms — in his case, black-light painting, custom car detailing and other forms of mid-century, mid-American decoration — to new heights, marrying them with improbable logic to the values of high-modernist abstraction. Applying blindingly luminous hues to surfaces decorously torqued into symmetrical low relief, Yek, who (wouldn't ya know it) is based in Las Vegas, introduces into each undulating psychedelic sunrise a very few lines of contrasting color. The lines are perfectly straight except where they suddenly go baroque, angling and curving with a circumspect anarchy that recalls Von Dutch Holland's auto-art at its most radical.

John Frame at Kohn Turner, 454 N. Robertson Blvd., W. Hlywd. (310) 854-5400; Maura Bendett and Yek at POST, 8130 Wilshire Blvd. (323) 932-1822. All through Feb. 6.

—Peter Frank