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Charles LeDray

Sperone Westwater
415 West 13th Street, West Village
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Charles LeDray lavishes the care of an overly protective mother on his sculptures. Painstakingly hand-made, each represents personal belongings that hover somewhere between miniature and life-size. Meaning in Mr. LeDray's work vacillates between fantasy and neurosis, brilliantly signaling one of contemporary society's most deeply held beliefs: that adult unhappiness stems from childhood trauma.

Toy chests, haphazardly piled with once-loved playthings of an era long passed, ooze loneliness. Is the mother waiting for her now-grown-up son to come home and play? Or is she too self-involved to have put them away?

"Necklace Busts," jewelers' busts adorned with beaded necklaces made of juju, starfish and exclamation points, intimates one answer. They conjure up visions of an eccentric, muumuu-clad hostess whose passion is cocktail parties, not motherhood.

Manhattan is presented as an oasis for young adults. In "Village People," an assortment of doll-size hats, downtown New York is, among other things, a refuge from small-town America. (Note the Wisconsin Swiss cheese hat.) "Party Bed," a steamer-trunk-size bed piled with funky vintage coats, indicates a lively urban gathering of open-minded friends.

In Mr. LeDray's world, however, life doesn't get easier with age. A coat tree holding a single man's trench coat, jeans jacket and working-in-the-garden chamois suggests the melancholy of a man successful at work but not at love. And a foot-high dressmaker's form strapped in a straitjacket evokes both Houdini's death-defying escape acts and "One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest." Together, they suggest that you can neither run nor hide from life.

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