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Art in Review



PHOTOGRAPHS FROM CHARLES LEDRAY, COLLECTION OF THE ARTIST

From the left, an installation view of Charles LeDray's "Becoming/Mister Man" (1992); a detail of "Becoming/Mister Man"; and "Throwing Shadows" (2008-16) at Craig F. Starr Gallery.

'Charles LeDray Works'

Craig F. Starr Gallery
5 East 73rd Street,
Manhattan
Through Oct. 29

Charles LeDray's sculptures are unusually small-scaled, but they are also weighty with hard-to-pin-down emotions and meanings. For a labor-intensive installation called "Throwing Shadows," he made 1,400 hand-thrown,

inch-or-so-high ceramic pots over a period of eight years. The result, now at Craig F. Starr Gallery, has the potential to be daintily charming, like a display of dollhouse porcelains. But because the pots are all charcoal black, they look like funerary urns or smudges of ash.

Mortality and the passage of personal and historical time are all preoccupations of Mr. LeDray's art. From 1991 comes a handmade, doll-

size Victorian mourning coat right down to its minute black buttons. On view nearby is a selection of detached, normal-size buttons, all of which are carved from human bone, as are the delicate linked florets in a sculpture called "Daisy Chain."

The title of that piece is innocently poetic; it's also a slang term for a type of group sex. And confusions over sexual identity, first stirred up in childhood, along with adult-imposed gender

branding meant to suppress such feelings, are recurrent themes in Mr. LeDray's art. A tiny tweed suit carries an emphatic embroidered label: "Mister Man." A rugged-looking mini-overcoat bursts open to reveal, like a kind of sartorial subconscious, a cornucopia of high-color dresses and ties.

For children, toys can give a sense of control over reality, a way to order it and play with it, have it make sense. Art, particularly the art of the minia-

ture, can do the same for adults. It's nice that the Craig F. Starr show coincides with the Charlotte Brontë exhibition at the Morgan Library & Museum, which includes some of the Brontë children's micrographic books. That those Lilliputian items are, like Mr. LeDray's sculptures, executed with fetishistic formal perfection makes the idea of control through art feel as desperate as it does heroic.

HOLLAND COTTER