

MATTHEW MARKS GALLERY

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The New York Times

Art in Review

Ken Price

'Large Sculptures'

Matthew Marks Gallery
502 and 522 West 22nd Street,
Chelsea

'Specimen Rocks'

Matthew Marks Gallery
526 West 22nd Street, Chelsea
Through June 28

Ken Price, who died in 2012 at the age of 77, did not go quietly. Exhibitions of his large painted bronze sculptures in two Matthew Marks Gallery spaces on West 22nd Street show him pushing his work into new territory to the end.

A third show of seven pieces from his small, rough-surfaced "Specimen Rocks" series of 1983-84 verifies that forward motion was his normal mode, fueled by a profound understanding of clay and its history, formal possibilities and inherent sexiness.

The large bronze sculptures, which were initially modeled in clay, might be taken as Price's response to the Light and Space movement of Los Angeles, where he began his career. Visually and suggestively, they are wild aggregates of two or more sausage or bean shapes coiled together. They bring to mind things like food, bodily organs, oddly-fingered hands, excrement and even blissfully spooning couples.

These forms have glowing, seemingly monochrome surfaces that are actually alive with fugitive, chameleon hues. The colors slip and slide — a little like the forms themselves — as you move about them: purples and reds float up from blues or greens, and reds from bronze. The dips between the rounded forms do their own thing with light and shadow, adding to the sense of color as a living thing.



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"New Mexican" (1984), by Ken Price, fired and painted clay, at Matthew Marks Gallery.

Isolated in Price's signature wood and glass boxes, the "Specimen Rocks" mimic geological samples, presenting irregular amalgams of smooth and rough, bright and earthen, iridescent and matte. They acknowledge clay's origin in the earth, but also sometimes harbor odd geometric forms that add to the tension between natural and artificial. It is almost as if the larger pieces next door were germinating inside these, struggling to get out.

The "Specimen Rocks" have not been seen in this number in New York in decades. Price may be gone, but there remains much to discover about his amazing, ever-changing continuity.

ROBERTA SMITH