

MATTHEW MARKS GALLERY

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The New York Times

Rebecca Warren

Pas de Deux

*Matthew Marks Gallery
523 West 24th Street, Chelsea
Through Dec. 24*

Rebecca Warren's obstreperous forays into clay operate in a decidedly pre-Minimalist mode, mocking art's pretensions with juicy abandon. This British sculptor's New York gallery debut is impressive, although the color that Ms. Warren often lavishes on her objects is in regrettably short supply. The display includes extended wall vitrines lightly strewn with sculptural fragments, found detritus and occasional bits of neon that suggest a kind of abject situation — architectural or stage-set models or neglected displays of antiquities. There are also large, messy orbs — portrait busts redone as heads of cabbage whose gouged and kneaded forms include the odd snout-like breast, crude roses and occasional phalluses. Smaller orbs tend to be brusquely painted; "Sporting Lady" includes a bit of tattersall,

while bits of deep red highlight the black of "Invention of the Daguerreotype."

Most plentiful are a row of large, lurching, leering figurative forms, reminiscent of de Kooning's sculptures, that gradually reveal themselves to be female dancers, complete with bows, braids, floppy tutus and bulging toe shoes. The exception is "Clark," which may be a dancing couple in acrobatic Fred-and-Ginger mode, or perhaps Superman wearing a woman as a cape. For all their wildness, Ms. Warren's efforts have their own kind of rigor and a strong sense of independence. Her artistic precedents include John Altoon, Nikki de Saint-Phalle, Mary Frank and possibly the early work of Claes Oldenburg and Georg Baselitz. That's a very interesting, overlooked lode to mine at the moment.

ROBERTA SMITH