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Art in Review

By KEN JOHNSON

BARRY X BALL

'Masterpieces'

Salon 94 Freemans

1 Freeman Alley

Lower East Side

Through Dec. 12

Barry X Ball is known for carving surrealistic stone heads with perfectionist craftsmanship. This striking show is a departure. It consists of three busts made from different kinds of stone using a combination of high-tech machinery and manual labor. They are based on computer scans of Italian Baroque sculptures in the Ca' Rezzonico museum in Venice. Two glowing pieces replicate "Purity" by Antonio Corradini, an image of a woman whose head and face are covered by a sheer veil. One in white Iranian onyx has a ghostly appearance, and, most remarkably, you can make out the shadows of her features through the fabric covering her face. The other is made of candy-orange honeycomb calcite that is veined by jagged white lines. Both are materially gorgeous and poetically haunting.

The third sculpture, based on "Envy" by Orazio Marinali, represents a snarling, snake-haired Medusa. Mr. Ball's version is carved from dark-gray Belgian black marble, and horizontal lines made by the reproducing machine give the whole a finely ribbed texture. It seems slightly unreal, like a 3-D virtual image.

All three sculptures prompt meditation on how society views women. In the veil sculptures, the near-invisibility of the woman's face seems to be saying something about the seductive mystery of femininity to a male-dominated world.

As for the Medusa, Greek mythology held that those who looked directly at her were turned to stone. A kind of evil, anti-Pygmalion, she is the opposite of Mr. Ball, who brings stone to life.

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