“Nobody Said It Was Michaelangelo”
THING—New Sculpture from Los Angeles at UCLA Hammer Museum

Featuring L.A.’s most prominent emerging artists, UCLA Hammer’s current exhibitions “THING—New Sculpture from Los Angeles” showcases the most creative artwork being produced today. Original and a bit quirky, “THING” is creating a lot of buzz in the art world. “THING” raises many questions about the conventions of art and sculpture.

Matt Johsnon’s *Breadface*—what appears to be a piece of bread with holes eaten into it—is the promotional icon for the exhibit being featured all over Los Angeles. It symbolizes the unconventional exhibit by using traditional media to recreate juvenile remainders of a child’s sack lunch. *Two Orange Peels*, another piece by Johnson, looks like an elephant made out of orange peels. Both pieces are so small and realistic that they look like they should be thrown away, like the sack lunch leftovers they represent.

Kaz Oshiro has a similar approach to representational sculpture, though on a much larger scale. Oshiro’s sculptures are likewise life-sized—he reconstructs a portion of a kitchen. Called *Kitchen Project*, the piece looks as real as Johnson’s *Breadface* but generates an entirely different reaction from the viewer. Despite its hyper-realism, Oshiro’s *Kitchen* consists of nothing but acrylic-painted canvases. Complete with coffee stains and a vintage California sticker, Oshiro purposefully creates a comfortable, casual environment that invites the viewer to touch and utilize the kitchen. However, the wall label informs the viewer of the kitchen’s complete lack of functionality and warns of its frailty by boldly stating, “Please resist the urge to touch the sculpture.”

Kristen Morgin displays another large sculpture whose effect is the opposite of Oshiro’s piece. Her life-size sculpture of a baby grand piano resembles an ancient artifact. One resists getting too close to the brittle sculpture for fear that it will crumble to the floor if even breathed on. The emaciated piano made of unfired clay, wood, wire, salt, cement and glue embodies a humble exquisiteness rarely found in contemporary art.

Jedidiah Caesar’s sculptures sit on the floor, forcing the viewer to crouch down to appreciate the intricate details of the sculpture. Crammed with barely identifiable objects of all sizes, each resin-filled geode begs to be thoroughly examined like a rare treasure found on an archaeological dig.

While the representational pieces challenge artistic conventions and trick the eye, the abstract sculptors produce lively, imaginative forms with unusual materials. Joel Morrison's *Untitled (Upside-Down Exclamation Point)* reaches for the ceiling—admiring the sculpture requires leaning back and looking up. Morrison found random objects, cast them in aluminum, and placed them atop a skyscraper pedestal. The resulting aluminum cast sculpture is a shiny, organic blob with bulbous protrusions. Silver paint drips from the top of the sculpture, oozes down the towering pedestal and gently touches the hardwood floor.

Mindy Shapero's energetic sculptures explode with color and imagination. Incorporating poetry into the visual arts, Shapero uses bits of her poetry to title her work. One of her pieces is entitled *Almost the exact feeling one has when staring at the blinded by the light for too long just after everything begins to happen, similar to the images that you see when you open your eyes after closing your eyes and pressing into your eyeballs (whiteness)*. The piece looks like a dense sphere of oversized, brightly-colored jacks. It echoes the literary imagery in its title and does, in fact, resemble the images one sees after looking at a bright light. Utilizing materials like Coloraid paper, sticks, and paint, Shapero's assembled sculptures maintain a crafty quality along with its radiating liveliness.

Whether abstract or representational the Hammer recognized the group of artists as the most significant emerging sculptors in Los Angeles. These artists have been catapulted to superstardom in the art world, and their "THING" show is not to be missed.

-*Christina Balch*