

ART

AROUND THE GALLERIES

Joining in on all the drama

SHARON MIZOTA

With his recent role on "General Hospital" (as part of James Franco's performance art shenanigans), artist Kalup Linzy became an actual part of the soap opera culture that has been a touchstone of his work for the last decade. Although his appearances on the show, in and out of drag, barely caused a ripple in the already freakish aesthetics of the soap opera, his exhibition at Ltd Los Angeles provides much-needed perspective on the whole strange business.

Linzy's videos can be characterized as parodies of daytime melodramas in which he inserts himself as a black, queer presence. But this is only half the story. The works actually walk a flickering line between lampoon and genuine homage. Steeped in a DIY aesthetic, they are hopelessly inadequate approximations of soap operas. But this purposeful failure to mimic even the low production values of daily soaps not only highlights the TV shows' artifice but also reflects an amateur's longing to be a part of the drama.

The exhibition's centerpiece, 2008's "Keys to Our Heart" is a black and white 1940s period piece about an interracial love triangle that (surprise!) turns out to be an unconventional square. Its trite dialogue is peppered with profane, anachronistic slang; the acting is uneven and often exaggerated, and all the voices, both male and female, are dubbed by Linzy, who also does a scene-stealing turn in drag as the main



Ltd Los Angeles

KALUP LINZY: The video "Keys to Our Heart" is a 1940s black-and-white period piece that centers on an interracial love triangle.

character's conniving best friend. All of these devices create a distancing effect that prevents one from being completely immersed in the drama, but they provide another point of entry — for Linzy. By inserting himself into every aspect of the narrative, he literally gives voice to the widespread desire to see oneself reflected on the screen, to bring those stereotypical roles to very personal life.

This aspiration is even clearer in "Melody Set Me Free" from 2007, in which Linzy plays a young girl who must choose between her family and her dream of becoming a famous singer. The

plot is boilerplate — dreams do come true! — but the disruptive power of Linzy's imperfect drag performance wreaks all kinds of havoc on gender relations and categories. As any casting agent knows, dramatic roles — the ingénue, the hero, the domineering mother — are only containers to be filled with the right "type." But Linzy stretches and distorts their boundaries, asking us to accept a man in drag as a starlet or a romantic lead.

And why not? Watching Linzy's characters go through their formulaic paces, we must constantly reconcile what we see (a man in a wig and a dress) with what

we are used to seeing (a pretty, slender girl). As a result, we understand how femininity or other traits can be donned or doffed like a costume. Linzy playfully re-maps ideas about what kinds of bodies are allowed to inhabit stereotypical roles, opening up all kinds of fissures, contradictions and questions in the process. In this sense, his work is both utterly conventional and thoroughly liberating.

Ltd Los Angeles, 7561 W. Sunset Blvd., No. 103, L.A., (323) 378-6842, through Oct. 23. Closed Sundays and Mondays. www.ltdlosangeles.com

Bad-boy sculptor gets creepy

In his first hometown show in a decade, consummate bad boy Paul McCarthy proves he can still make us squirm. He inaugurates the Venice outpost of New York gallery L&M Arts with three large sculptures that build on two ongoing bodies of work: "Hummels," a series of grotesque transformations of the kitschy German figurines, and "Pig Island," an evolving, multimedia riff on Disney's "Pirates of the Caribbean" ride.

Of the Hummel-inspired pieces, "Ship of Fools, Ship Adrift" is the standout: a monumental bronze depicting a vessel helmed by sweetly deformed children. Roughly textured with glob and drips, their heads and hollow eyes are violently run through with unforgiving pipes and rods. Unified by a mournful black finish, the piece reflects McCarthy's fascination with the viscera messiness of sculptural process — cracks and lump and slop — as an analogue for physical violence and decay. In this case, the work's oily sheen resembles nothing so much as the crud [See Galleries, D23]