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CRITIC'S NOTEBOOK  
TRIPLE PLAY

Shows of new sculpture by the L.A. artist Charles Ray are rare—his labor-intensive works may be years in the making—and reliably amazing. He targets aesthetic and conceptual bull's-eyes that you didn't know existed. So it is with



his three pieces at Matthew Marks. "Father Figure" is an enormous blowup, in machined and glossily painted solid steel, of an old (made in America, that old) plastic toy tractor with a benignly beefy driver. It weighs a Richard Serraesque eighteen and a half tons. "The New Beetle" is a life-size nude, cast in steel and painted white, of a young boy seated on the floor and playing with a toy Volkswagen. Its astute beauty reflects Ray's ongoing fascination with the integration of realism and abstraction in Classic Greek sculpture. Then there's the tiny "Chicken," a pedestalled egg in white painted steel with a circular cutout revealing a porcelain chick about to be born. The gristly little bird struggles to get out; we look in. The show seems to be about childhood as an ever-recurring state of nature, history, and the soul.

—Peter Schjeldahl

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