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Boyce at Altman Siegel

Kenneth Baker
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Early photographers liked to shoot sculpture because it stood still uncomplainingly for very long exposures. But probably no one else so far has reconciled sculpture and video - photography's descendant - as cleverly as San Franciscan Nate Boyce.

His new video pieces at Altman Siegel Gallery have it all. They acknowledge and exploit video as a hypnotic medium, whose sources in reality viewers can never know with certainty. They take us into a zone in which the language of description quickly loses traction, and several of them, such as "R-1" (2012), appear to depict sculptures.

"R-1" presents a golden form slowly rotating onscreen as if on an invisible spit. It looks like a chunk of abstract surrealism that might bring Henry Moore or Isamu Noguchi to mind. Reflected light ripples over the moving form, so nearly dissolving it at times as to make a viewer unsure whether digital animation morphs it as it revolves.

In fact, Boyce germinated "R-1" and several other pieces here by shooting sculptures that he carved from foam and gave a reflective finish. But the video medium, which he doctors by combining current and obsolete technologies, so digests the reality of the original object that we wonder in what sense, if any, we see "the same" form as it turns in virtual space.

The revolving views Boyce offers idealize the possibility of seeing sculpture in the round. But they also recall, almost parodically, the commodities revolving on turntables that we see so often in onscreen advertising.

Boyce has underlined the showroom reference of his work nearly to the point of mocking the gallery by fabricating slender custom supports for several of his industrial LCD screens.

Boyce shows a single sculpture, intriguing in its own right, and a couple of wall-bound structures that do not marry physical and depictive information very successfully.

But on the whole, what a debut!

Nate Boyce: Knockdown Texture: Video and sculpture. Through June 16. Altman Siegel Gallery, 49 Geary St., S.F. (415) 576-9300. www.altmansiegel.com.

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