

Art in Review

Ken Price

Works From the Late '80s

*Franklin Parrasch Gallery
20 West 57th Street, Manhattan
Through Nov. 15*

Ken Price became known in the early 1960s for brilliantly colored glazed ceramic sculptures that resembled large eggs punctuated by one or two little holes; from these protruded shapes of a fingerlike, phallic or wormy nature. Beautiful, sexy jokes, at once visceral and radiant, the eggs were followed by several series of sculptures and also some irreverent cups, all of which added luster to Mr. Price's name.

Then, around 1986, the eggs and their holes made something of a comeback in a series of larger rocklike sculptures of painted, rather than glazed, ceramic that are about the size and density of a French bulldog. Their bumpy, multicolored surfaces have been cut away in one spot, leaving either a smooth, curving plane or a three-sided indentation that suggests a tiny stage. Either way, at the center of these electrically colored, almost shockingly hard-edged surfaces is a small, precise hole so intensely black that it seems painted on.

This splendid exhibition gathers together nine of these pieces. Sometimes the color shifts are abrupt, like the rough lavender and smooth bright green in "The Bomb." Sometimes they are coordinated; the rough skin of "Snug" is yellow, red and light blue, with a yellow cut.

Each is thrillingly formal and so visually powerful that it takes a minute to see that they all restate familiar contrasts — solid or void, rough or smooth, cut or modeled, geometric or organic — fusing them in highly specific concentrations. Progressing from rough to smooth to darkness, they contrast two kinds of being and one kind of nothingness.

ROBERTA SMITH