

ARTnews

Melissa Stern

Smart Clothes

Carved from blocks of clay, they stand as rigid as small golems. Some are missing hands and arms. Their features—if they have them—are rudimentary: two dabs for eyes, a line or gaping hole with weasel teeth for a mouth. The boys are all torso with pole-straight legs; the girls, in bell-shaped skirts, are lacking hair, hips, and breasts. Charcoal gray, black and chalky white, these imps and demons of the unconscious are as frightening as fetishes. Yet they're as simple as children's toys.

For Stern's poetic show "The Talking Cure," the artist paired a dozen of her ceramic sculptures with writers who created monologues for them. Actors' recorded voices were uploaded to the Cloud, and gallery visitors could use their iPhones to hear the figures speak.

A one-armed boy with a giant, toothy mouth ranted about women and bagels. Another boy, his feet tied to cement blocks, narrated his story of heartbreak. And a girl with a steel ball lodged in her chest asked, "Do you love me? It's hard, I know. The trick is letting the metal cool til it's a rock." Best of all was a young woman trying desperately to accept a threesome: herself, her guy, and the small, pointy-eared creature he has brought to bed. "Of course I like him. Why wouldn't I like him?" she began gamely. This collaborative multi-media art show, which included drawings as well as sculpture, was funny, chilling, and exhilarating. —Mona Molarsky



Melissa Stern, *Stainless*, 2012, clay, graphite, and steel, 30" x 10" x 7". Smart Clothes.