



Michelle Segre, Porous, Porous, 2014, Courtesy of the Artist and Derek Eller Gallery

MICHELLE SEGRE

Derek Eller Gallery / New York

by Elwyn Palmerton May 6, 2014

It is rare to see an artist make a shift in their work as dramatic as the one Michelle Segre made between her shows at Derek Eller in 2008 and 2011. Within a few short years, she went from making fastidious, slightly-surreal beeswax and papier mâché sculptures to sprawling explosive ad hoc assemblages. These new works inevitably call to mind assemblage sculptors like Rachael Harrison and Isa Genzlin, but they also have their own concerns. Unlike those artists' emphasis on certain disjunctive qualities, her work attests to a general continuity or even fragmentary harmony, of essentially incongruous materials—not just with each other but also with everyday life. *Self-Reflexive Narcissistic Supernova* (2013), for instance, includes a 3-foot-high wax sculpture of a mushroom cap (a refugee from her previous work) intertwined with tangles of wire, yarn and threads dangling real mushrooms. This mycological specimen could not be odder, yet her painterly manhandling of it suggests no more regard than she offers for piles of cheap Styrofoam. Likewise, other found objects, like a couple of turquoise plastic grocery bags float, here and there, as if blown into this conglomeration by the wind.



Michelle Segre, Self-Reflexive Narcissistic Supernova, 2013. Courtesy of the Artist and Derek Eller Gallery, New York.

Another sculpture, *Porous, Porous* (2014), dispenses with the fungi and recontextualized wax sculptures altogether, in favor of bread (actual bread) in loaves, slices and crumbling crusts—several of which are painted Yves Klein blue and suspended between her skeins of string. This weird blue bread seems both fragile and improbable, abstract and unquestionably organic, like a trippy sacrament. The spirit of Yves Klein himself, hovering in the void, leaping, alludes to sculpture's fraught relationship with gravity—the necessity of always working simultaneously with and against it as an immutable force. Metal piping bolted to the floor props up its skewed oblong frame, meeting it at a tangent, and a bit awkwardly, like an amoeba leaning on a cane, while clumps of yarn casually hang like unruly fringe. This combination of hanging and propping as sculptural problems are contrasted, a bit tongue in cheek, with a knobby clay Statue of Liberty homunculus imbricated with colored pebbles.



Michelle Segre, Spaghetti Love, 2014. Courtesy of the Artist and Derek Eller Gallery, New York.

Still, the best piece in the exhibition might be Segre's wall-sized installation of reproduced sketchbook pages and found images. These drawings show her developing ideas in sketches adjacent to grocery lists, all sorts of notes and titles being rehearsed on paper. Her form of entirely linear wire-frame based stream-of-consciousness drawings are echoed in the found photos of scientific and natural imagery. Scenes from Joshua Tree, a collection of crystals and photos of space nebula all exist at the intersection of natural science and a kind of quasi-mystical awe at the universe. However, next to her drawings, these photos are given a particularly abstract spin—as if the outlandish appearance of a lizard's foot that resembles a sci-fi prop (like a nearby *Star Trek* screenshot) is merely grist for her particular mill. This sense of cosmic wonder is abstracted and relieved in her drawings and sculptures—visceral, energetic and resolutely physical works.