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Art review: Michelle Segre at Daniel Weinberg Gallery

October 21, 2010

Michelle Segre used to make wonderfully idiosyncratic sculptures that often resembled desert plants and sometimes recalled designer desserts. Part supersized cake decorations and weirdly realistic cactuses, her Pop landscape fragments were coated with loads of beautifully tinted beeswax that made them look fleshy, delectable and strangely human.



The New York artist's six new sculptures at Daniel Weinberg Gallery are even better.

Made of construction-site scraps and summer-camp craft supplies, Segre's abstract forms are more primitive and more sophisticated. Rough and resolved, scrappy and smart, they're among the most exciting sculptures being made today.

All but one come up to your waist and are about as wide as they are high. Less elegant than flotsam washed up on the beach, they form broken circles, bent loops and irregular spirals. Some resemble tentacles. But the materials

Segre uses evoke the skeletons of prehistoric sea creatures, from which the flesh has been stripped. Seashells, barnacles and petrified kelp also come to mind, along with shipwreck leftovers and homes swept away by tsunamis.

The oddball, at more than 7 feet tall, is a rudimentary scarecrow that looks as if it has been lashed together by someone stranded on a deserted island, far away from everything except her deep need to have someone -- or something -- to keep her company. Titled "High on a Mountain," its funky form packs ample pathos into otherwise incidental details: the tilt of its head, the turn of its torso, the reach of its arms.

Like all of Segre's curiously optimistic sculptures, this celebration of misfittedness transforms ordinary stuff, including rocks, milk crates, papier-mâché and plaster, into a potent totem, a poetic beacon for human imagination and interaction, otherwise known as civility.

-- David Pagel

Daniel Weinberg Gallery, 6148 Wilshire Blvd., (323) 954-8425, through Oct. 30. Closed Sundays and Mondays.



Images: Top, installation view of the Michelle Segre exhibition; bottom, "High on a Mountain." Credit: Daniel Weinberg Gallery