

# ARTFORUM

MAY 2014

## Michelle Segre

DEREK ELLER GALLERY

Michelle Segre's sculptures have the feel of totemic objects assembled to ward off bad luck—or perhaps to draw in a thing intensely desired. Indeed, their spiritual and formal antecedents may be the God's-eye and the dream catcher, two objects drained of much of their original power thanks to their appropriation by New Age culture and kitschy tourist shops. Segre's works, however, suggest action, impulse, pulse—energy flowing first one way, then the other, intensities announced in the title of the largest work that was on view here, *Self-Reflexive Narcissistic Supernova*, 2013. The piece, which has one of the best titles for a sculpture in recent memory, was the centerpiece of "Systems of Escape Velocity," the New York-based artist's fifth show in this gallery.

The work is anchored by an enormous wax mushroom cap set on its side, a sensuous Louise Bourgeois-style form Segre has been employing for many years. But whereas earlier sculptures featured a single enormous fungus, or an arrangement of them, this one anchors a kind of explosion: Shooting out of the mushroom cap's top (which has been splashed with petroglyph-like marks in bright-white, purple, and yellow paint) are real dried mushrooms that have been tied to taut strands of yarn, all of it seeming to hurtle toward a large hoop made of wire, mirrored paper, and more yarn. Inside that hoop, Segre has suspended smaller wire hoops held in place—chaotically, not too neatly—by wrapped yarn, such that the whole thing resembles a cell with multiple nuclei. The nuclei in turn hold small objects both suspended and stuffed in, mottled forms recalling those of Miró, Calder, and Gorky (and Klee's *Twittering Machine*, 1969). The work is like a dream catcher for Surrealist nightmares. The large hoop resists flatness, buckling and curving against itself, and the energetic use of wire and string gives it the inquiring quality of a drawing in three dimensions, like Gego's *Reticulárea*, 1969, made of lines that seem unsatisfied with occupying anything so flat as a work on paper. Although her precedents are refined, Segre's choices feel raw and improvised: The metal-and-yarn hoop is propped on a found cobblestone and a plaster stanchion, the latter dripped in black paint so glossy it looks still wet.

A supernova is a catastrophic explosion; egos, however, tend to implode, in meltdowns of an interior kind. *Self-Reflexive Narcissistic Supernova* suggests simultaneous movement inward and outward: flying apart into bits or drawing everything of interest or importance into its dense black hole. That both directions are palpable gives the sculpture an invigorating, energizing physical presence.

In the vertical sculpture *Porous*, 2014, a blue-painted pedestal supports a spindly, permeable structure made from wire and yarn, which the artist has also painted blue. Whereas *Self-Reflexive Narcissistic Supernova* suggests psychological or emotional movement, *Porous, Porous*, with the shapes and colors of the bottom evidenced in inversion above, gestures toward something physical but intangible: a thing and the perception of it, movement flashing along synapses. The same kind of progress, suggestive of thought and ideation, moves across *Spaghetti Love*, 2014, composed of hundreds of drawings, doodles, and photographs nailed to the wall. This is no random collection of ephemera, however. Across this imagery, we find the same shapes (the multinuclear orb, the atomic tangle, the mushroom, the grid) that Segre deploys in her sculptures, here colliding and mutating, collating and dispersing, with cells turning to owl eyes to tree rings to fingerprints. In this show, the artist returned to the same forms and iconography again and again, via circuitous routes and with an obsessive determination. FROM MY HEAD TO YOURS, reads a note scribbled at the end of a to-do list.

—Emily Hall

Michelle Segre, *Porous, Porous*, 2014, metal, foam, wire, wood, plaster, modeling clay, yarn, thread, plastic lace, bread, 109 x 50 1/2 x 22".

