

QUEENS Chronicle

Experience a new sculpture show in LIC
By Cristina Schreil, qboro contributor — March 03, 2016



There's something in the basement.

The start of 2016 has brought intriguing new exhibitions to SculptureCenter in Long Island City. On view are furniture-sculpture works by Jessi Reaves and “The Eccentrics,” an engaging group show in the center’s main ground-floor space. The latter draws from a term for Russian avant-garde circus performers and explores the beloved folkart form as a space wherein performers push physical limits within a perceived alternate reality. As if bringing our eyes and minds into the perspectives of the show’s subjects, a suspended work of metal pipes, wooden rings and a motor by Tori Wranes evokes sky-high circus rings. The rings sway back and forth in the middle of the space, also populated by works exploring such topics as magic, spirituality, clowns, magicians and acrobats.

But in your visit, be sure to head in the opposite direction, down into the basement. There you’ll find the first-ever solo institutional exhibition by Vancouver-born artist Rochelle Goldberg, titled “The Plastic Thirsty.” Ten new “sculptural topography” works by Goldberg, who now lives in New York City, are installed in the near catacomb-like basement galleries. One, “Thirsty Bucket,” is on the ground floor right next to stairs leading down to the rest. The effect is at once compelling and eerie, with the same kind of impact as stumbling upon gems in a cave. There’s also an element of mystery and a kind of elusive wonder afoot. For example, one might easily miss “Original Spill,” a curiously glowing work of fiber optic cables, resin, ceramic, an LED illuminator and plastic that looks to be installed in a slim crevasse behind a wall.

Many sculpture works are composed of ceramic and steel. As the exhibition description stresses, Goldberg also often uses ephemeral media in her work, such as crude oil, which ultimately evaporates, and chia seeds, which germinate. She’s also incorporated wood and earth. Goldberg’s blending of sturdy metal and more raw natural materials imbue it all with a shape-shifting quality that’s especially interesting to contemplate.

Many works seem to have sprung right from SculptureCenter's floors and walls, prompting inquiries of organic versus manmade or industrial. "Hands Replace the Deck," another mystical network of ceramic, fiber optic cables, resin, chia, an LED illuminator and plastic, seems like an otherworldly spring seeping right from the ground. Handlike shapes coming from the glowing tendrils add a River Styx-esque quality that may lure viewers in for a closer look. In the exhibition catalog, SculptureCenter Curator Ruba Katrib analyzes Goldberg's works with engrossing guidance on how the artist ruminates on our "contemporary landscape." But those not fluent in art speak can still glean a lot from the entire exhibition. There's an absorbing fusion at work marrying symbols of human ingenuity — train, bucket, hook — with nature — fish, seeds, soil, wood, snakeskin. One can see this in a large pair of fishlike creatures, titled "For every living carcass I" and "For every living carcass II," positioned in one room. Chia seeds speckle parts of the sculptures, including heads that looks haunting and primordial. Diamond-shaped ribs, made of steel, lead to a textured tail.

Goldberg is also part of a noted group of artists in 2016; this year, all of SculptureCenter's solo shows will feature female artists.