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Rebekah Bogard at the Vincent Price Art Museum
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In the context of the Los Angeles visual arts scene, composing canvases decorated with imaginary creatures that appear equally endearing and mischievous can hardly be considered an innovation. Perpetuated by the popularity of skateboard and comic cultures, galleries like Black Maria, Junc, Thinkspace and Merry Karnowsky, as well as *Juxtapoz* magazine and the Giant Robot store, have cornered the market on fantastical flora and fauna whose creators look to Tim Burton, Guillermo del Toro, Japanese anime, Nintendo and Maurice Sendak (among other sources) for inspiration. These anything-but-cuddly creatures on skate or snowboards, T-shirts, or walls of street-inspired galleries are all too common. While the work of Nevada-based artist Rebekah Bogard fits comfortably among their ranks in many ways, she has elevated the idea with the level of craft in her three-dimensional work. For *Twilight*, a solo exhibition at East Los Angeles College's Vincent Price Art Museum, curated by Karen Rapp, Bogard not only invents an imaginative cast of ceramic animal world misfits, but also orchestrates an entire environment to envelop them—as well the viewer—in a fictional landscape.

Coinciding with another solo exhibition, *Flesh + Bone* at Sam Lee Gallery, *Twilight* is a full-fledged installation of earthenware surreality, where piglet/rabbit/fawn hybrid creatures lounge, nuzzle and otherwise play among stylized, lollipop-esque trees, unfolding lotus flowers and ambiguous stumps. Unsurprisingly, the seemingly saccharine tone of the setting quickly transitions upon realization that these inhabitants are more naughty than nice. *Nine in the Bush* (2008), in which a squirrel-like animal appears ready to pounce on a tiered tree of unsuspecting birds, hints at this. In *Dead Weight* (2007), one creature wickedly drags a helpless companion by its tail. But some vignettes are decidedly more explicit than others. *Handjobs for Heartbreaks* (2007), for example, finds a lavender-skinned animal atop a phallic pink pedestal indulging in self-pleasure. To drive the overall effect of sexual deviance (and subsequent irony) home, Bogard's creature is anatomically correct and sits inside a lotus blossoming with phallic projections. The juxtaposition of sexuality with a fanciful cartoon environment pushes the buttons of accepted morality in humorous and interesting, if not wholly original, ways.

The true marvel of *Twilight* is Bogard's craftsmanship. The variety of tactile treatments on view in her ceramic creations all but erases the hand of the artist, vital to creating a believable fantasy world. Some figures boast skin folds you'd swear were rubbery to the touch like a swine's; others have the seemingly plush texture and glossy eyes of a stuffed animal and the matte heads of trees appear as plastic as a child's plaything. It seems unreasonable to think that this entire imagined forest is composed of one material, and even more surprising to realize that material is fired and glazed clay.

The joyousness of this body of work lies in the details of Bogard's anthropomorphic creatures. Thick tails twist and curl. Pointed ears fold backwards in contemplation. Wings spread in anticipation of departure. Open mouths expose shiny, glazed tongues. The artist has thoroughly considered the breadth of her imagined environment and presents it to viewers with exacting detail, ostensibly mimicking its once intangible state. Her sheer dedication to creating a fictional space is not only sincere, but also admirable. Whether or not individual vignettes are innovative or shocking, Bogard is decidedly committed to her vision and executes it with considerable technicality and true craftsmanship—this alone is a thing worthy of praise.

Rebekah Bogard: Twilight closed April 23 at the Vincent Price Art Museum, Monterey Park.

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