

Los Angeles Times

Around the Galleries
Friday, February 13, 2009

Human Animals, So Badly Behaved
David Pagel



Rebekah Bogard's ceramic sculptures belong to the school of curdled cutesiness. At the Sam Lee Gallery, a menagerie of sleek cartoon beasts runs amok, its animals' stylized bodies and generic cuddliness giving way to a mean streak that's anything but sweet.

On first glance, Bogard has crafted a cotton candy wonderland. Its flora consists of lollipop trees (some 6 feet tall), bulbous bushes and starfish flowers, which are bigger than bowling balls. Its fauna includes a flock of oversize hummingbirds and a dozen pet-size creatures that appear to be the crossed offspring of bunnies and squirrels, with a smattering of fawn, piglet and raccoon mixed into their discombobulated DNA.

Everything is pink, from bright bubble gum to rosy pastel, except for some of the mutant critters' eyes, which are bloodshot, and other anatomical features, which are swollen.

Such creepy details poison the sugarcoated fantasy of Bogard's impeccably fabricated and beautifully glazed animals. Suddenly, the segmented trees look phallic, less like innocent cartoons and more like supersized sex toys.

The unsavoriness of it all is hammered home when you notice that many of the beasties in the Nevada-based artist's L.A. solo debut are behaving badly — less like real animals in nature, where sex and death are just part of life, and more like humans, who often complicate such purely animal activities by layering all sorts of ill-begotten meanings upon them.

Emotional cruelty and psychological complexity take pointed shape in Bogard's provocative installation. Titled "Flesh and Bone," it paints a sensitive and vicious picture of the domesticated animal known as man.

**Sam Lee Gallery, 990 N. Hill Street #190, Los Angeles, (323) 227-0275, through March 14.
Closed Sundays, Mondays and Tuesdays. www.samleegallery.com.**

Above: *Sweet Somethings* (2008), earthenware, underglaze, glaze and oil.