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Around the Galleries
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Focusing on the Oft Overlooked
Christopher Knight, Art Critic

In "Two By Sea," an accomplished two-person show at Sam Lee Gallery, formally different color photographs by **Rebecca Sittler** and **Adam Thorman** nonetheless share an evident interest in life around the margins. That specific subjects envisioned in both are related to the ocean seems mostly happenstance.

Sittler's large-format pictures were shot in Long Beach, where the artist is based, aboard the decommissioned luxury ocean-liner, RMS Queen Mary, which first set sail at the height of the Great Depression. Sittler frames overlooked corners of faded glory.

Stained and faded velvet curtains puddle on the floor atop an Art Deco patterned carpet. A thick rope is elegantly knotted against a wall, as if it were a decorative tassel. Elegant burl wood behind a highly polished brass railing is scratched and cracked. In compositions of formal grace, drooping beauty gets a second chance at splendor through Sittler's hyper-aestheticized camera-eye.

For his part, Oakland-based Thorman wades into tide pools at the ocean's edge in Northern California. His mostly smaller pictures emphasize the alien qualities of these rocky, watery habitats, where hearty organisms grapple with a constantly shifting environment.

Little universes of new life are populated by anemones, mussels and seaweed clusters -- none more alien than a dense little forest of palm kelp, their sinuously formed fronds creating a scale-twisting illusion of trees made from plants just a few inches tall.

Thorman fills the frame with his natural subject matter of flora and fauna, allowing no glimpse of horizon or sky, except as an occasional moist reflection. His coastal landscapes are as airless and even claustrophobic as Sittler's tightly focused interiors. Both artists' works unlock an unexpected and salutary sense of ruminative liberation within that close confinement.

Sam Lee Gallery, 990 N. Hill Street #190, Chinatown, (323) 227-0275, through August 6. Closed Sunday through Tuesday. www.samleegallery.com