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## Women as Ripe Symbols of might

By Leah Ollman

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The woman sits on a precarious perch, a tower of old, child-size wooden chairs. Her back rounds in a posture of protection or possibly grief. Her hands cup the halves of a split pomegranate. Down her bare knees, its blood-like juices flow.

"Brood," the title of this sculpture by Alison Saar, is so potent an image and so dense with metaphoric suggestion that it could constitute her entire show at L.A. Louver and be enough. Instead, it stands among 10 other pieces -- sculptures and works on paper -- many of which also sear into the psyche.

The L.A.-based Saar is one of the most significant sculptors working today, and her shows tend to be serious occasions. She reaches deep into Greek myth, African art and practice, the history and associations of her materials, everyday experience and the stark sculptural tradition of German Expressionism and emerges with work of primal intensity, work that abounds in cultural and historic references but doesn't depend on them to exert its blunt, visceral power.

"Brood's" sole figure is cast in fiberglass, though her naked skin looks burnished, like a painted wood surface sanded smooth by time and wear. As in most of Saar's figures, her eyes are not articulated. Her attention seems directed inward. A breathtaking icon of maternal fertility and loss, she holds something broken and yet filled with potential. The pomegranate in her hands and the other gnarled fruits clustered at the foot of the tower of chairs are rendered in bronze. Their tough hides protect a juicy womb of promise.

Nourishment and fertility factor heavily in these works. Seeds, roots, milk and blood all come into play, with woman as a generative force throughout.



*Brood*, 2008



*Bareroot*, 2007, in which a female figure's feet transmute into a loose weave of meandering roots, brims with metaphors.

In "Bareroot," a female figure with her knees pulled to her chest lies on her side on the floor.

Her feet transmute into a loose weave of long, meandering roots. The roots imply a sense of connectedness to the earth, but they are also bared, as if the figure had been pulled from her native soil.

In "Sea of Nectar," roots double as branching streams of milk coming from a standing figure's breasts. Like the figure in "Bareroot," this one is life-size and clad in patches of ceiling tin. Geometric patterns stamped in the tin create an all-over effect similar to scarification. Tar rubbed into the surfaces yields a rich, dark patina.

Small copper moths coated with gesso and pale greenish paint cling to the skin of the standing figure in "Hither," the show's title piece. The figure cups her hands around her open mouth as if to issue a call; the moths are, perhaps, the response. One rests on her tongue. The rest attach themselves to the dark body as if it were a flame, and dozens more swarm across the gallery walls.

Other works in the show make reference to the lunar cycle, as well as to the mythic origin of the seasons. Cyclical nature, gravitational pulls, periods of fertility and dormancy -- all have deep associations with women, both positive and negative, as Saar suggests in "Lunaseas," the punning title of a series of wall-mounted sculptures.

Saar's forms register immediately in the body as well as the soul. For all their wondrous physicality, they are elegantly poetic; for all their knowing eloquence, they endow silence with presence.

L.A. Louver, 45 N. Venice Blvd., Venice, (310) 822-4955, through Saturday. [www.lalouver.com](http://www.lalouver.com).