

ART

ART REVIEW

Scraps lead to elegant whole

BY DAVID PAGEL

Many of the most exciting works of art being made today look as if they were cobbled together on deserted islands by castaways who have frantically lashed together natural scraps and bits of flotsam to form forlorn totems to their own homelessness. The sense of being outside the fold, beyond the pale and cut adrift from civilization takes shape in such scrappy works.

The stunning sculptures, fluid paintings and whiplash drawings in Rina Banerjee's exhibition at L.A. Louver do something similar, but different. The grunginess of repurposed materials and the grubbiness of dumpster diving are nowhere to be found in Banerjee's oddly refined assemblages. Off-balanced elegance also emerges from her mixed media paintings on panel and paper, many which depict malformed figures who are not only reconciled to the reality of their monstrousness but proud of it.

Banerjee's four sculptures steal the show. Each is made of hundreds if not thousands of small objects she has wired and strung together with the fastidiousness of a dressmaker and the devotion of a miniaturist.

Cowrie shells, rooster feathers, gourds, acrylic horns, ceramic balls, plastic nets, glass vials and swathes of silk are among the materials Banerjee combines in her hallucinatory sculptures which appear to be figures, both animal and human, still lifes or landscapes. The best ones shape-shift, changing their nature as you move around them.

The newness of the objects Banerjee uses is striking. It distinguishes her work from the traditional assemblage, which, for the past 60 or 70 years has romanticized detritus, particularly that which has been cast off by societies infatuated with new-and-improved conveniences.

Instead of junk-picking her stuff, Banerjee appears to buy it online, from specialty sites and off-the-beaten path outlets. Strange as it may seem, this intensifies the lostness at the heart of her art, amplifying its insistence that we are all shipwrecked – and that global culture is as much about isolation as it is about connectivity.

Her seven paintings and six drawings sample styles from all over the globe. Asian, African, European and American artifacts get uprooted in Banerjee's haunting images, where freedom and loss intermingle so promiscuously it's impossible to tell one from the other.



A RINA BANERJEE sculpture is made of cowrie shells, rooster feathers, gourds and other objects.*

L.A. Louver, 45 N. Venice Blvd, (310) 822-4955, through June 28. Tuesday–Saturday, 10 am–6 pm. www.lalouver.com

*image: Rina Banerjee, "She was now in western style dress covered in part of Empires' ruffle and red dress, had a foreign and peculiar race, a Ganesha who had lost her head, was thrown across sea until herself shipwrecked. A native of Bangladesh lost foot to root in Bidesh, followed her mother full stop on forehead, trapped tongue of horn and grew ram-like under stress," 2011