

ARTslant Los Angeles

A Handful of Dust and Bloom Projects: Molly Smith, Root

Group Exhibition

Santa Barbara Contemporary Arts Forum

653 Paseo Nuevo, Paseo Nuevo Mall Upper Arts Terrace, Santa Barbara, CA 93101

January 26, 2013 - March 24, 2013

As If of the Past and for the Present Future

An implication of age compels us to craft histories for the artworks in *A Handful of Dust*. Their materials suggest a simpler time—products of earth, of metal, of wood—and their shapes imply function. Natural hues of a limited and subdued palette pervade, as if these artworks are remains all found in one place, all from one civilization.



Allyson Vieira, *A Plan for Swamplands*, 2007/2012, Plaster, 178 x 99 x 9 inches, Courtesy the Artist and Laurel Gitlen Gallery, New York, NY; Mark Hagen, *To Be Titled (The Madness of Kirk Wood)*, 2012, Obsidian on Burlap with brass grommets, 11 x 11 feet, Courtesy the Artist; International Art Objects, Los Angeles, CA; Almine Rech Gallery, Paris, France; and Brussels, Belgium. Photo: Dani Lynch

Allyson Vieira's stark and fragile carpet of white (*A Plan for Swamplands*) lies half in a state of decomposition, half in stasis; will it cease to exist from the slightest displacement of air or stay untouched forever? A rigid rectilinear presentation reinforces the organic appearance of the materials bounded within, implying a need to control that which is loose and evolving. So very chalky is this scrap of landscape—transcendentally imagined as precious material left for the last remaining inhabitants to mine—as to give us a clue to its more mundane and artistically appropriate makeup: plaster.

Mark Hagen's hand-crafted, obsidian arrowheads, aligned in elegant, cascading clusters on rough burlap patches, glisten like jewels, but bite like shards. Here, displayed as if in an unfurled classified collection, or as banners of merit steeped with age, they are a record of work done, work to come, and by association imply death. Each arrowhead shows its unique edges upon close inspection, but viewed together from a distance the obsidian fragments become dark teardrops, weighty and endless in their depth, infusing a formal arrangement with ambiguous referential complexity.



Erin Shirreff, No title (no. 1), 2009/2012, Archival pigment print, 40 x 30 inches, Courtesy the Artist and Lisa Cooley Fine Art, New York, NY. Photo: Dani Lynch

Erin Shirreff's musky photographs appear to document artifacts of familiar, yet unknown origin. Each shaped by hand, the pictured bridle-like straps drape downward in their frames, with textures reading like leather, but made of clay. The inky black warmth of the photos cleaves to us with an inviting intimacy. We want to know these objects; we want to put them, weathered and well-loved as they appear to be, in their right place. Shirreff has so convincingly plied her trade that the photographs and the objects they depict insinuate themselves into our lives easily and successfully, and without question as something known.



Ricky Swallow, *Cup (with mounts)*, 2013, Patinated bronze, unique, 3 1/2 x 6 x 5 inches, Courtesy the Artist and Darren Knight Gallery, Sydney, Australia

Unfinished, unraveling, or in a state of completion we cannot decipher, Ricky Swallow's small-scale bronze sculptures, masked by muted patinas, show the ephemeral materials of their own making: cardboard and tape. These visible underpinnings suggest a civilization that prizes light construction and the makeshift. However, captured as these objects are in bronze, their resultant weight defies convenience, proposing each's lasting function as a model, a gift of knowledge passed down in durable form for future generations to study and replicate.

It is quiet here, so quiet, and all of these tools of production are hushed and meek, as if no longer used, as if never used. Suspended in limbo, they wait for a *Mad Maxian* future of dust, of sand, devoid of resources, where every tool of the past must become the instrument for the future, gaining a purpose, once again, from a culture now desperate for the most rudimentary objects to employ, so the continuation of their existence is assured. The greater and more urgent implication is that we are a culture desperate for these artworks to function as they were intended, as art objects, which enrich while providing space for contemplation, to insure our very existence continues in the near present.

- Kimberly Hahn

Curated by Laura Fried, *A Handful of Dust* is on view through March 24 at [Santa Barbara Contemporary Arts Forum](#) and features work by artists Mark Hagen, Jay Heikes, Matt Hoyt, Erin Shirreff, Ricky Swallow, Zin Taylor, and Allyson Vieira. **Bloom Projects:** Molly Smith, *Root* is also on view in the front gallery.