

'This is what sculpture looks like,' at the Postmasters Gallery

Roberta Smith

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An installation view of the group show "This is what sculpture looks like," at the Postmasters Gallery in TriBeCa. It features an exclusively female roster of 16 artists. Credit Postmasters Gallery

The best things about this overflowing group show of sculptures by 16 artists are its freewheeling spirit and sprawling diversity of approaches, materials and subjects, as well as its exclusively female roster. To a degree, these factors balance the weaker, more conventional inclusions.

Among the show's standouts is Joanna Malinowska's poignant "Genre scene with a fountain," in which the artist, on video, spouts water (as in an early Bruce Nauman photograph), seemingly performing for a mound of large vinyl walrus carcasses, piled up like beanbag chairs — or dead baby seals. Natalie Jeremijenko takes a more ironic, if technically elaborate, approach to nature, wiring up live mussels in an aquarium so that their opening and closing shells activate the work's small lights and digital sound system — a son-et-lumière science project.

On the figurative front, Shinique Smith pushes her stuffed and bound fabric sculptures toward more explicit body forms, a good move, but one that also brings her into Louise Bourgeois territory. And Rachel Mason, whose career spans sculpture and music, pays homage to creative heroes from Frida Kahlo to Björk by clothing vivid, doll-size portrait sculptures in glittering mirror shards, as if the artists had merged with disco balls.

Abstraction is present, but never pure. Brenna Murphy's glyph-like forms made of plexiglass and printed plastic have a notable decorative jazziness, but can also function as musical instruments. Daria Irincheeva's "Evening Composition #017," a vaguely Constructivist installation, consists of bricks, wood dowels and paint samples festooned with air plants. Michelle Matson lampoons public art, adding paper apples and banana peels to a Sheetrock mock-up of a sculpture, as if it were already dotted with colorful garbage.

Also notable, and on the agitprop front, is Molly Crabapple's "Portraits of myself and Lola Montes with things said about us by our contemporaries." This outside painted wood cutout has faces from pulp-fiction illustrations covered with enough written comments to prove that little has changed from the 19th century to the 21st in terms of the verbal abuse often heaped upon nonconforming women.

Fittingly, the sex of the artists represented here goes unmentioned in the gallery's news release, as it is for all-male group shows. More, please.