

'Material Girls,' Assemble!

Find yourself in SCAPE Gallery's exhibition of female found-object artists

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• Kim Abeles, *Silhouettes in Smog*



Getting smogged

Assemblage art can take on as many forms as there are discarded items in a junkyard—and, content-wise, even more meanings. Sometimes, the materials are obvious to the eye and the meaning of the work clear. More often, such efforts venture into abstraction, asking us to observe and feel, and then uncover how the image was created; when done well, the actual construction informs the piece even further.

The curator/owners of SCAPE, Jeannie Denholm and Diane Nelson, have gathered together some prime examples of female assemblage artists for the show “Material Girls,” an amalgamation of pollution, refuse and benign artifacts of industrialization that rarely garner our attention.

Kicking things off is renowned “smog artist” Kim Abeles, with several prints from her pollution series. Bursting onto the art scene in a big way in the early '90s, Abeles placed paper, cellulose, acrylic panels and other templates on the roof of her house for days and allowed our particle-laden atmosphere to deposit its soot through stencils; her technique was hailed as revolutionary and unique. It's also powerful. In *Silhouettes In Smog* and *Smog Map*, Abeles turns the mundane outline of our continental topography and the antiquated art of human silhouette cutting on their respective ears, creating images purely from grit and dirt.

Akin to her smog work, yet instituting another process, *Sign of Life (Downtown LA)* is a wall-hung scale model of 700 tiny plastic trees of various heights springing from points on a map of Los Angeles—apparently representing where clumps of trees occur in the city. At first, the piece might recall a toy model we'd expect to see an electric train run through, but the secondary response cuts to the chase: This bird's-eye view of urban terrain represents the clash of commerce and nature, and it's a peril with no end in sight.

Julie Easton's harvesting of discardables is repetitious and hypnotic—and that is her aim. For *Morning Glories*, Easton plucked hundreds of real morning glory blossoms and dipped them into rubberized paint, arranging them into a field of shrunken white globs (with a few black sheep thrown in for diversion). The panel at first appears to be a tray of popcorn with burned centers, and if that's what you see, that's what you get: The piece has no message about flowers because that's not Easton's shtick—she creates images to mesmerize and draw us in, making us dissect what we're seeing, how it was created and with what materials.

The same can be said of her *Blue Wave Series 01* and *White Wave Series 04*, two 40-inch frames filled with strata of singed cigarette papers. Considering that these days, smokers are often tossed into the same category as domestic terrorists, it's interesting that Easton's layers of delicate white papers do not seem like an indictment—in fact, they don't seem to be set up to make you feel one way or the other about the issue, but they might twist your head up a little as you see how pretty something reviled can be.

Taking things further into abstraction are the companion panels *Coffee Break I* and *II*, groupings of white, powder-coated aluminum sides modeled after coffee-cup protectors; they could easily be mistaken for pieces of your kid's Erector set. Even more spacey-cool are her series of ball bearings and blown plastic beads breaking through sheet metal: Evoking planetary visions of some outer universe or perhaps the fall of raindrops on Saturn, the brushed gray, iodized bronze, and explosions of white orbs and shiny silver balls recall the sublime punk futurism of an old Devo or Gumby video—enticing and foreign, yet somewhere we'd probably like to go.

Carrie Sunday's works are mostly composed of the same materials: cylindrical rolls of acrylic paint chips—you know, the paper squares you find at home-and-garden shops. Arranged in various blocks of color, the composition is not initially clear, but the fascination they elicit is immediate. In *Ascension*, hundreds of black and white tubes commingle in a mobby horde, seeming to organize and push themselves toward a destination of paramount importance. In *Dust*, a wall of hot-pink tubes is lightly scored with what might be the hash marks on the wall of a princess' prison. As with Easton, Sunday's goal is for each of us to see our own vision in her work, and this ultimately tells us more about ourselves than the artist. In this vein, all of the pieces in "Material Girls" serve as both artist statements and observer reflections, and where those reflections take us depends on . . . us.

"Material Girls" at the *SCAPE Gallery*, 2859 E. Coast Hwy., Corona del Mar, (949) 723-3406;
www.scapesite.com. Call for hours. Through Oct. 16.

This review appeared in print as "Living In a Material World: SCAPE's 'Material Girls' transform refuse into reflection."