

ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT

KENNETH BAKER *Galleries*

Sculpture redefined in ribbon

As if finding words for your experience of artworks were not difficult enough, basic terms long in use such as "sculpture" and "painting" have lost all precision in the past half century.

Although liberating for many studio practitioners — and even more so for those who work in public spaces — this loss of definition leaves more and more unprompted spectators bewildered.

The Mirus Gallery's "Off the Wall," a selection of contemporary "sculpture," usefully dramatizes the challenge of recognizing credible work under a heading so baggy.

To my eye, Southern Californian Matt Hosey's wall pieces, such as "Lattice-" (2012) and "Arris" (2012), qualify as sculpture on at least two grounds.

First, they suggest, but do not depict, ruins of architectural ornament. Sculpture's marriage to architecture lasted from antiquity through Art Deco, or whenever architects began to mask buildings' functions by giving them sculpture-like forms overall. See Frank Gehry and Daniel Libeskind, among other perpetrators — even the Frank Lloyd Wright of New York's Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum.

Second, Hosey's pieces strut their uselessness through his keen but unfussy attention to their details. Their merger of strict geometry with a rough circular-saw attack suggests a convergence, possibly inevitable from Hosey's generational vantage point, of minimalist and

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post-minimalist aesthetics.

But perhaps Hosey's works' strongest claim to sculpture status is their insistence that no mere concept and no alternative materials could stand in for their exact physical reality.

Aaron Moran's assemblages of reclaimed, painted wood assert themselves in similar terms, though more weakly. Ditto Duncan Johnson's 2004 eccentric honeycombs of wood that look as if a creatively prescient artist of the late 1940s might have made them.

German artist Bartek Elsner's cardboard simulations — of a surveillance camera, a bomb and a TV set with shattered screen — seem intended to reduce these potentially destructive instruments to fragile, unthreatening form. Yet even the hint of that intent ironically magnifies again the reality of their threat.

But for me the great discovery of "Off the Wall" is the work — on the wall — of New York artist Vadis Turner. Her "Cake Mold" (2011), a characteristic work, judging by what we see here, impersonates an



Mirus Gallery

"Cake Mold" (2011), ribbon and clothing by Vadis Turner, is a discovery at the "Off the Wall" show.

abstract painting heavy with impasto, using ribbons and other textile bits.

Turner slyly translates expressive exertions associated often with macho abstract painting into the anxieties of personal adornment that the culture at large encourages us — women especially — to experience.

In doing this, she achieves a sort of social satire, possibly with a vein of self-criticism entwined in it, while fully satisfying a viewer's hope of seeing something generously, attentively and unpredictably invented.

Turner's work looks both relaxed and urgent, educated, funny and painstaking, a mingling

of aspects very rare in contemporary art.

Katie Fisher's polyurethane-frosted clumps of found objects share something of Turner's comic exuberance, but they seem more to be ruled by creative anxiety than to reflect upon it.

For Hosey's and Turner's works alone, "Off the Wall" should not be missed.