

ENTERTAINMENT & ARTS

Forget the corpse flower. ‘Blossoming Carcass’ at this gallery has alien appeal



A detailed look at “The Nymph by the Window” by the artist duo ASMA, 2019. (Yubo Dong / ASMA and Make Room)

By DAVID PAGEL SEP. 2, 2019 | 11:56 AM

“Blossoming Carcass” by the collaborative duo known as ASMA combines sculptures, paintings, fluorescent light, water and a few hundred pounds of beach sand to create an installation in which everything seems to be on the cusp of becoming something else — visitors included.

Make Room gallery in Chinatown is filled with the sense of possibility. And the sense of loss. Optimism and melancholy collide and conspire, catching you in a whirlpool of deepening emotions.

In the middle of the main space, a big orchid-like flower towers overhead. Its stem descends 8 feet straight to the floor, where it slithers to the far corner of the gallery. It ascends the wall into a small, grated opening at eye level. Warm yellow light, the color of highlighter pens, glows from the little window.

The synthetic quality of that luminosity complements the industrially processed materials out of which ASMA (Matias Armendaris and Hanya Belia) has fashioned its unnatural flower: Strands of steel wool have been carefully woven and then sprayed with a gray, felt-like substance. Delicate yet off-putting, it has the presence of a robot gone rogue. Animated and alien, the impossible blossom embodies the artifice of the present.



"The Nymph by the Window" by the artist duo ASMA, 2019. Felted steel wool, cast bronze and patina. (Yubo Dong / ASMA and the Make Room)



Detail of "The Nymph by the Window." (Yubo Dong / ASMA and Make Room)

Five tablet-size paintings similarly fuse handmade components and machine-produced features, their laser-cut steel frames contrasting — but not conflicting — with their delicately rendered images of pods and nodules, stems and tendrils, all drawn and painted in colored pencil, acrylic pigments and dry pastels on thin brass panels.



"Picnic at the Garden" by ASMA, 2019. Acrylic, colored pencils, dry pastel on brass with steel frame, 14.5 by 10.5 inches. (Yubo Dong / ASMA and Make Room)

An unlighted hallway leads to the entrance of the room into which the flower's stem disappeared. From the center of the sand-covered floor spouts a sunflower-like sculpture. Made of cast bronze and resin, its petals resemble stained glass windows. Into each, ASMA has embedded tea leaves. A pair of sculptures, made of volcanic sand, cement and synthetic foam, have the presence of relics, their burnished blackness making them seem to be ancient, if not prehistoric.

To look back at the main space through the little window is to see a world bathed in blue. The soothing shades of the gallery and the street outside the front window conflict with your memory of those spaces. It is as if you are watching a video of your life as you've just lived it — while it's still going on, the same but different.

That sense of out-of-sync doubleness may have something to do with the collaborative nature of “Blossoming Carcass.” To make it, Armendaris and Belia combined different experiences and perspectives. In any case, your perceptions do not deceive so much as they scratch the surface of a reality ASMA invites you to dive into, deeper and deeper.



“Instar” by ASMA, 2019. Made from: foami, resin, volcanic sand, cement, water and aquatic moss. (Yubo Dong / ASMA and Make Room)

ASMA

Where: Make Room, 1035 N. Broadway, L.A.

When: Wednesdays-Saturdays, through Sept.

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Info: (323) 834-2780, makeroom.la