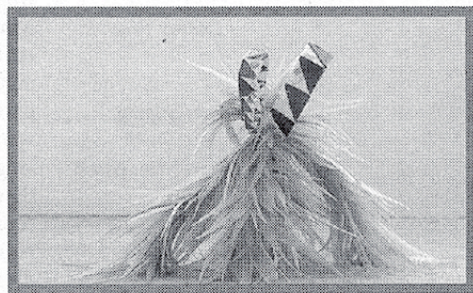


## Renée Lotenero at Steve Turner Contemporary

A raft of bright young things made *THING: New Sculpture from Los Angeles* LA's hot museum show a couple of years back. About the brightest light in the Hammer Museum survey was Renée Lotenero, a previously unknown (to me) UCLA grad whose assemblages of disparate but somehow coherent media, planted at the very back of the show, seemed to sum up the surge of smart sensuality that comprised *THING* and to transcend it at the same time. While most of the works on view were indeed "things," eccentric objects of varying sizes, semblances and surfaces: Lotenero's structures were more; they were places, they were events, they were



Renée Lotenero, *In the Cracks of Miracle Mile*, 2008, steel, vellum, handmade tiles, photographs, 6-1/2" x 11" x 7", at Steve Turner Contemporary, Los Angeles.

memories, they were records of the effects of time on apparently utilitarian structures. Unlike most of the rest of the stuff in the show, they were so poignantly *un*-self-possessed, so convincingly abject—not sloppy, but truly ruined, with an almost Zen care in the placement of every element and segment—that you wanted to adopt them like stray pets, even though they far more closely resembled stray bathrooms.

Since that auspicious debut, Lotenero has enjoyed successful exhibitions in San Francisco and Houston, but only now has she shown alone on the home court. Freshman solo flights are fraught enough without the weight of expectation strapped to their wings; it behooved Lotenero at least to maintain her unique blend of cleverness and poignancy. Could a gallery-ful of these intricately composite objects, as much built—and un-built—as crafted, maintain the intense poetics so evident in her contribution to *THING*? Could Lotenero continue to upend architectural principles, building what seems to be coming apart, while defying sculptural conventions, fusing materials that shouldn't work

together, and reflecting the world around her while fabricating sad-happy, strangely self-contained creature-structures? And could she prevent such ambitious, energetic sculptures from vitiating one another in a contained space?

She could and she did. Lotenero's new work has become at once more and less architectural, assuming in this instance aspects of the building (and neighborhood) in which they were displayed but also taking on more overt animal and plant references. The objects now sprout tufts of fur or feathers, beak-like promontories, and other bestial features, but also seem to bloom like plants and have taken on tile patterns riffing on those that clad the gallery's exterior (patterns extended into photographic elements that hug the floor and seem to root the sculptures organically). Each piece combines such aspects to different degrees, in different ways, enhancing its mix with different formal extensions—elaborate antennae, blocky platforms—and radically different sizes. (The biggest work was twelve feet across, while the smallest stood barely six inches high.)

Lotenero in fact showed only four

three-dimensional works, filling out the show with drawings and near-paintings, also of radically different dimensions. These works succeeded to the degree that they emulated the sculptures' kitchen-sink spirit of radical amalgamation while gratifying our expectations of graphic precision—in other words, to the extent that they were a sculptor's drawings, but not to the extent that they seemed mere studies for the sculpture. None seemed so indebted to the three-dimensional work, despite their frequent references to tile patterns and various of the sculptures' odd extremities.

This is some of the most wildly, most ambitiously, and yet most successfully suggestive work to have come down the pike in quite awhile. Its power comes from the fact that it looks so little like any other art we've ever seen before while looking like so much else that fills our lives. Lotenero doesn't simply hybridize living beings and manmade objects, she injects living DNA into non-living cells, giving architectural forms a life of their own. The poor things, then, don't simply crumble, they decay; their process of aging, as Lotenero would have it, displays the most touching aspects of both critter decrepitude and structural disintegration. However unlikely the emotions they inspire—imagine wanting to euthanize a house—Lotenero's sculptures inspire such emotions powerfully.

—Peter Frank

*Renée Lotenero: New Work* closed in April at Steve Turner Contemporary, Los Angeles.

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