

Blue McRight's curious sculptures bridge real and surreal

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Otherness and psychic disorientation have long been fertile themes for Blue McRight, and never more so than in her newest body of work at Samuel Freeman.

Based in L.A., McRight spreads her energies across multiple media -- painting, sculpture, installation and public art -- and her work's emotional spectrum stretches as well, from whimsical to tantalizingly dark. The darker, the more heft and mystery.

In her last show at Freeman in 2009, McRight let loose a flock of black, bandage- and thread-wrapped bird figurines in a side gallery, infusing the space with a haunting, spectral presence.

She reprises the technique here, sheathing a few more animal forms (squirrels, rabbits and birds), but mostly wrapping twigs and segments of hoses (garden variety as well as a thinner sort used for scuba) in odd configurations, incorporating nozzles, sprinkler heads and other water-related hardware. Inspired by her experiences scuba diving, McRight has conjured an alternate universe as fascinating and mildly unnerving as the underwater deep.

A menagerie of nearly 50 forms is arrayed across several platforms of varied sizes and heights. There are also a few wall-mounted pieces, and a network of hoses (some unsheathed) joining some of the works together. The assembly is curious and captivating. Some pieces look like obsolete medical devices and some like poor creatures in need of their intervention.

"Spurt" is among the best of these mutants, a small, lumpy body studded with nozzles and stumps, resting uneasily or



perhaps attempting to rise. Appealingly abject, a weirdly charming amputee, "Spurt" is a poster child for the Freudian uncanny. Identity confusion and sexuality (the hoses evoke both tubes and phalluses) converge throughout the show, and the inanimate creeps convincingly into the realm of the animate, an anxiety-inducing trespass.

Suggestions of the body are everywhere. The rhythmic alignment of rubber tubing, rusty sprinkler mounts and shiny metal clasps becomes two wall-hugging spines. Hoses double as limbs, horns and of course, arteries and veins. The conveyance of vital fluids is also evoked in pieces where sheathed twigs mimic downward-thrusting roots.

Leavening the whole are visual puns and funny, anthropomorphic cracks. One of the long, conduit hoses splits at one point, connects to two jittery-look-

ing wrapped twigs then resumes its smooth trail, as if the charge running through that line were momentarily electrified.

Water is the unifying theme in a set of small paintings on paper. The images -- of a woman floating, falling, spraying water, a filled bathtub hovering in the sky, a trailer parked on a tiny island -- feel lifted from a dream journal. They are more compelling as a group than singly, but the naturalistic rendering and super-vibrant colors detract from the stark potency of white-walled galleries filled with predominantly abstract, black sculptures.

McRight's work here bears some familial relationship to that of Lynn Aldrich, Phyllis Green and others exploring the continuum connecting the real and surreal. These curious objects resonate like fetishes, of this world and yet otherworldly.