

Los Angeles Times

Glitz, glamor, shine and sparkle: the dazzling photomontages of Fay Ray

Leah Ollman, April 24, 2018

In one of Fay Ray's dense, dazzling photomontages, carnations and crushed beer cans jostle against fur, abalone shells, strings of clear beads and a hand-modeled clay head.

That kind of disjunction harks back to the medium's heyday a century ago, as a Dada vehicle of the politically infused absurd. It works, visually.

Ray's montages at Shulamit Nazarian gallery are strikingly high contrast. Blacks go deep, serving as a kind of velvety jeweler's cloth, strewn with a pseudo-casual array of shiny, sparkly objects.



Fay Ray's "Egg Arch and Pearl Portal," 2018. Dye sublimation on aluminum, 79 inches by 40 inches. Fay Ray / Shulamit Nazarian



Fay Ray's "Calipatria," 2017. Queen conch, aluminum and zinc-plated chain link, 50 inches by 18 inches by 12 inches. Fay Ray / Shulamit Nazarian

"Egg Arch and Pearl Portal" is the most arresting of the photo pieces. Scaled to human height and shaped like a passageway, the aluminum-mounted print beckons us inward, to a space at once cosmic and commercial, primal and performative. A mosaic circle vaguely suggestive of an ancient stone relic emits glittery beams of tinsel, striped with tresses. A giant pearl appears between floating lips, and more nacreous orbs separate the fingers of two hands that emerge from the darkness. Arching over all of this is a jaunty border of painted eggs — spotted, stained, or bearing the words "mercy mercy mercy."

Glitz and glamour pervade the montages as well as the sculptures on view here, and the L.A.-based Ray offsets this artifice with hints of authenticity. She hangs three gorgeous, fossil-like conch shells from aluminum struts fanning out from a zinc-plated chain in the strangely haunting "Calipatria." Other sculptures similarly mix slick slabs of marble and industrial-strength metals with chunks of cactus and ears of corn cast in aluminum.

Whatever her medium, Ray exercises a montage sensibility in this mixed bag of a show, constantly shifting material and emotional registers. Sometimes the compression of natural and denatured, earnest and superficial generates a curious, compelling friction. Just as often, though, it yields a less fruitful incoherence.

Shulamit Nazarian, 616 N. La Brea Ave., L.A. Through May 26; closed Sundays and Mondays. (310) 281-0961, www.shulamitnazarian.com