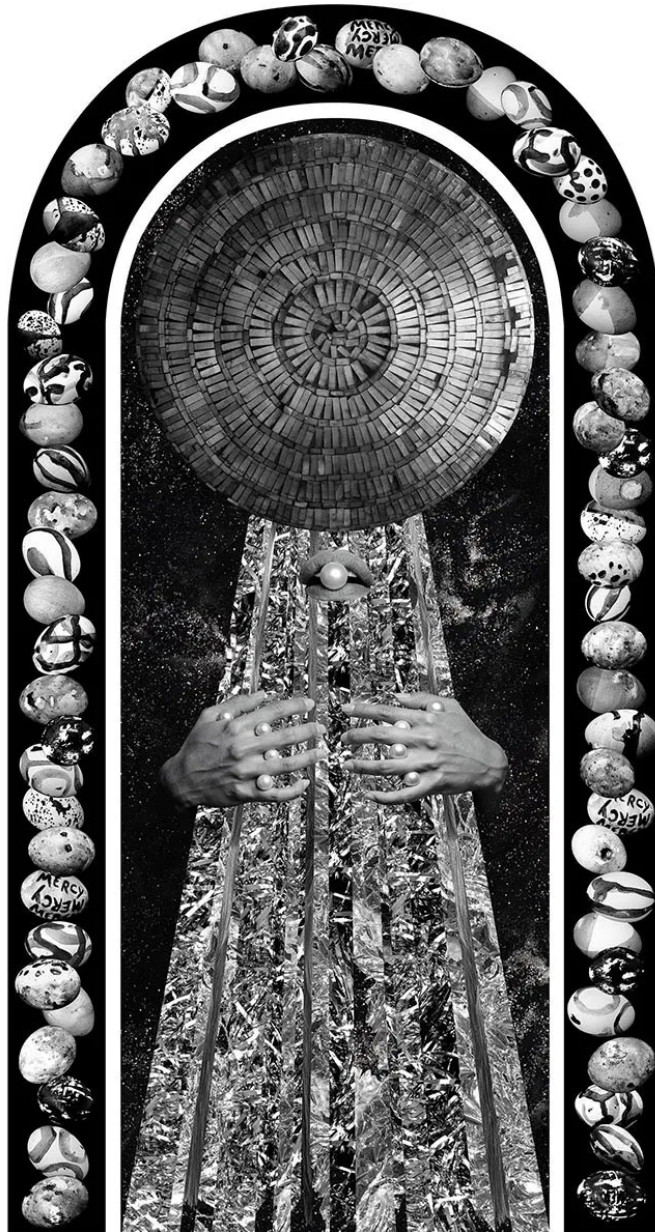


Fay Ray at Shulamit Nazarian

May 10, 2018
Text by Catherine Wagley



Fay Ray, *EggffArchffandffPearlffPortal* (2018). Dye sublimation on aluminum, 79 x 40 inches. Image courtesy of the artist and

Shulamit Nazarian, Los Angeles.

Fay Ray's wit is always in my kitchen. The poster from her 2014 solo show *Modeling Clay* at Samuel Freeman hangs in the corner: a model shaping mounds of weird, gray clay against her perfectly smooth body. It's a literal play on acts of objectification and creation, but seductive and light. Ray's *I Am the House* at Shulamit Nazarian, her first solo show there, is just as seductive but darker.

The palette—black, white, gray, silver—sets a somber tone. Abstract ritual objects resemble oversized charm bracelets, aluminum casts of cacti or sea shells hanging from chains alongside slim marble slabs. Shaped photographs-of-objects-on-photographs combine flora and crumbling clay with metals and trash (Ray placed real objects over photo collages, thus giving her images a special dimensionality). Losing yourself in the environment is sort of like falling into an esoteric silent film, in which ethereal characters scavenge and assemble little shrines so aesthetically pleasing that tastefulness competes with purpose.

This tension in Ray's work—between taste, function and critique—is key, and pretty blurry. In the sculpture *El Golfo* (all works 2018), a phallic cactus and jagged-edged shell hang from chains attached to a metal bar. A silver cross dangles from a longer chain between them, grazing the floor. The sculpture recalls a rosary in a bondage ritual. In *Swirls and Pearls*, a black and white photograph shaped like a Victorian fan, a triangle of flowers frames five chains.

The show's centerpiece, *Egg Arch and Pearl Portal*, consists of two arced, human-scale photographs. The outer, thinner one pictures loosely painted Easter eggs. Inside, a figure with a wooden wheel-shaped head has a body of shiny foil. She clenches a pearl between her collaged-on, well-glossed lips. Her only other human features are pretty hands grasping at her foil chest, pearls between fingers. The whole thing is an altar piece to a goddess who's also a well-designed, attractive object, her alien qualities tamped by her own aesthetic perfection. Unlike in any good, sexy cosmetics commercial, empowerment and good taste counter each other throughout this show, leaving both in uncomfortable limbo.

Fay Ray: *I Am The House* runs April 7–May 26, 2018 at Shulamit Nazarian (616 N. La Brea Ave., Los Angeles, CA 90036)

