

# ART AND CAKE

A Contemporary Art Magazine with a Focus on the Los Angeles Art Scene

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## Signifying Form at The Landing

Author / 2 days ago



Alison Saar Cotton Eater (head), 2013 Ceramic, acrylic, graphite and cotton balls 7.5 x 13 x 10.5 inches Courtesy of the Artist and L.A. Louver

## *Signifying Form* at The Landing

**By Lorraine Heitzman**

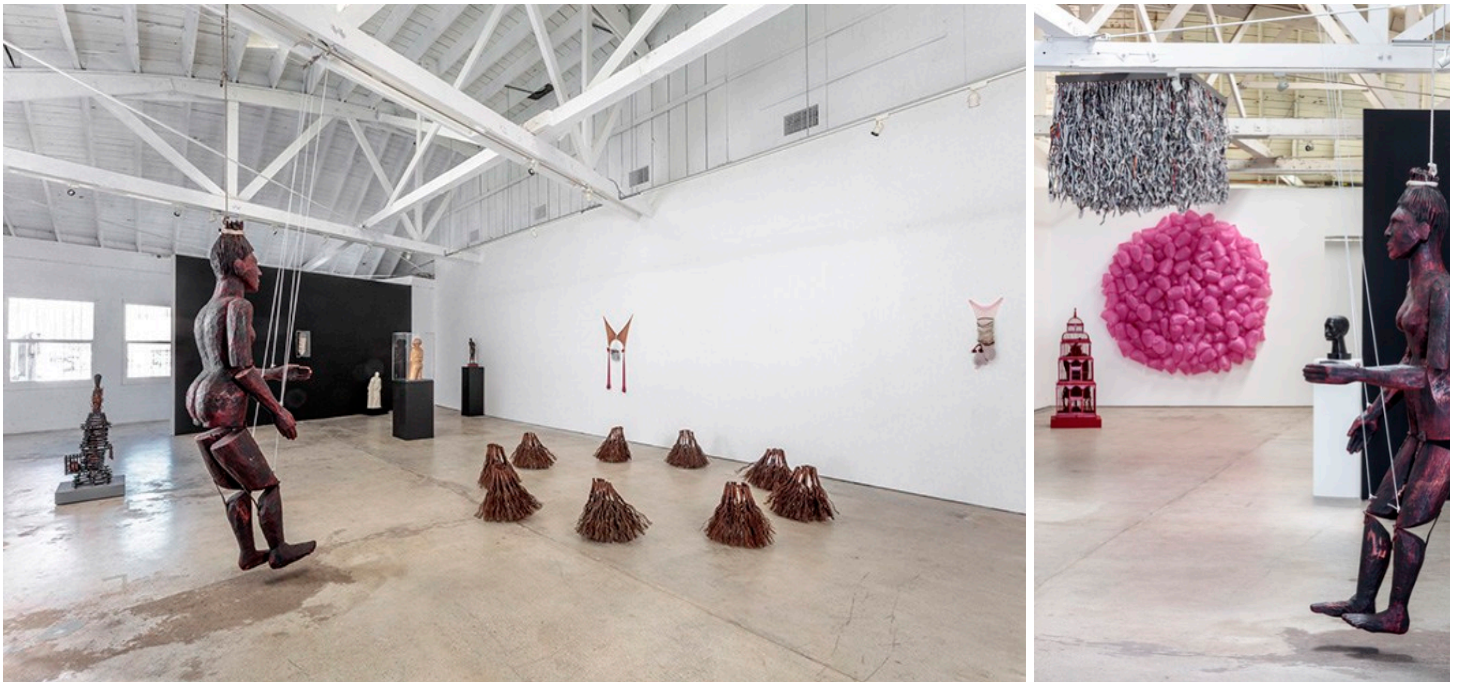
Curator jill moniz in conversation Saturday May 21st 3pm

## Exhibition on view through June 3, 2017

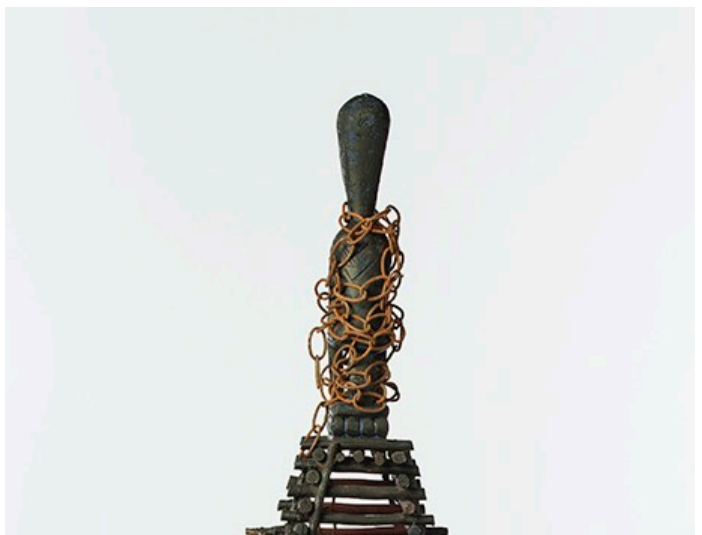
As curated by jill moniz, *Signifying Forms* is a show that instructs, empowers and evokes strong emotions. Though it is grounded in earthy, rusted hues and shaped by the weight of history, it celebrates the multi-generational bonds of community. Moniz has chosen the work of nine black women sculptors active around Los Angeles from the 1930's through the present day and honors each artist's unique art as well as their relationships with each other.

While acknowledging the different relationships between the artists, moniz emphasizes their commonalities. These women are bound together by their choice to use personal and inherited experiences in narrative sculptures resulting in emotional work that contrasts to much of the prevailing abstract and technological trends traditionally embraced by museums and galleries.

*Signifying Form* is also a manifesto of sorts, airing not only some of the grievances suffered by black women but their resilience too. Most work addresses the concept of restraint expressed in varying ways. This is not to say that the work in gallery is oppressive or weighted down by the politics of race and gender; it is not. Quite the opposite, the work of Elizabeth Catlett, Maren Hassinger, Samella Lewis, Dominique Moody, Senga Nengudi, Alison Saar, Betye Saar, Beulah Woodard and Brenna Youngblood is uplifting and inspiring.



The work of Alison Saar beautifully exemplifies thwarted lives in two sculptures and one print. *Cakewalk*, which dominates the gallery, is an over-sized, articulated female wooden figure that is strung up like a marionette to be controlled by the viewer/ participant who is invited to literally "pull her strings". Half puppet, half effigy, Saar's life-sized figure maintains her dignity even as she is left to our manipulations. She is simply carved, on the careful side of crude, but despite her rustic qualities, one is reminded of the static yet elegant figures of Elie Nadelman. Her humanity is powerfully intact while her helpless posture engages our sympathies and complicity. Saar's other sculpture is a disembodied woman's head. Made from clay and painted a deep indigo, the *Cotton Eater (head)* rests on a black shelf with cotton balls between her parted lips, overflowing onto the surface beside her. With eyes blank and mouth open she chokes on the source of her pain.







Betye Saar, the mother of Alison Saar, is widely known for her highly personal and idiosyncratic work that has influenced many artists. Here she embraces the concept of restraint in *Crimson Captive* from her familiar birdcage iconography and all in *Cage (In the Beginning)*. Senga Nengudi has two pantyhose and sand wall hangings whose bazaar voluptuousness transform quotidian materials so completely that feminist interpretations are almost secondary to the sensory experience. Maren Hassinger's *Whirling* is a poignant installation of wire forms laid out in a circle on the gallery floor conjuring up images of either dead branches, whips or perhaps the remnants of an unknown ceremony. Hassinger's background in fiber arts and dance inform her work as she straddles the natural and man-made. In the most colorful sculpture of the show but nevertheless laden with hidden emotions, *Pink Mandala* anchors the room with a bolt of brilliant color. The pink is courtesy of pink plastic shopping bags, inflated by breath and filled with love notes. Dominique Moody's *Sweat Equity* is a miniature house on wheels revealing pictures of every home the artist has lived in. Toy-like, *Sweat Equity* mimics the Nomad, the mobile dwelling that she now lives in while traveling from residencies around the country. Here she celebrates her hard-earned travels and nomadic lifestyle. Brenna Youngblood, the youngest of the artists represented in *Signifying Forms* shows a compelling installation of wooden mathematical symbols, such as equality signs and division, addition, multiplication and subtraction symbols. Each is an assemblage of wood scraps on wood, simply assembled and unadorned, but the inference beyond arithmetic.



Last, there are the three foundational artists who through their work, presence and example made this show possible. Beulah Woodard (1895-1955), Elizabeth Catlett (1915-2012), and Samella Lewis (b. 1924) are each represented by figurative sculptures, busts and masks. Essays are available that place these artists in an historical context with anecdotes about their lives, but it is the stories these artists tell through their art that imbues their sculptures with an overriding, universal emotional content.

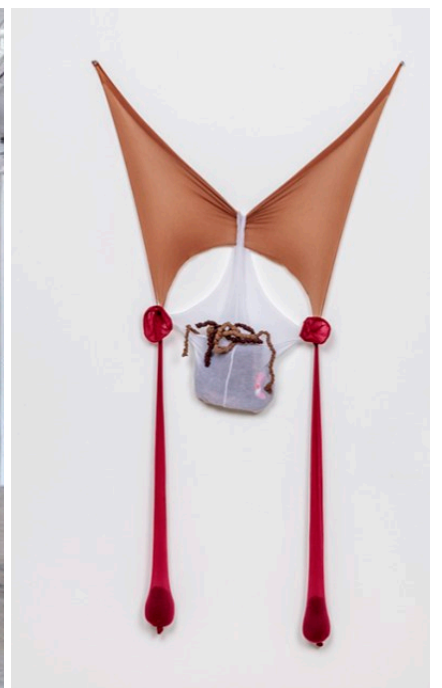
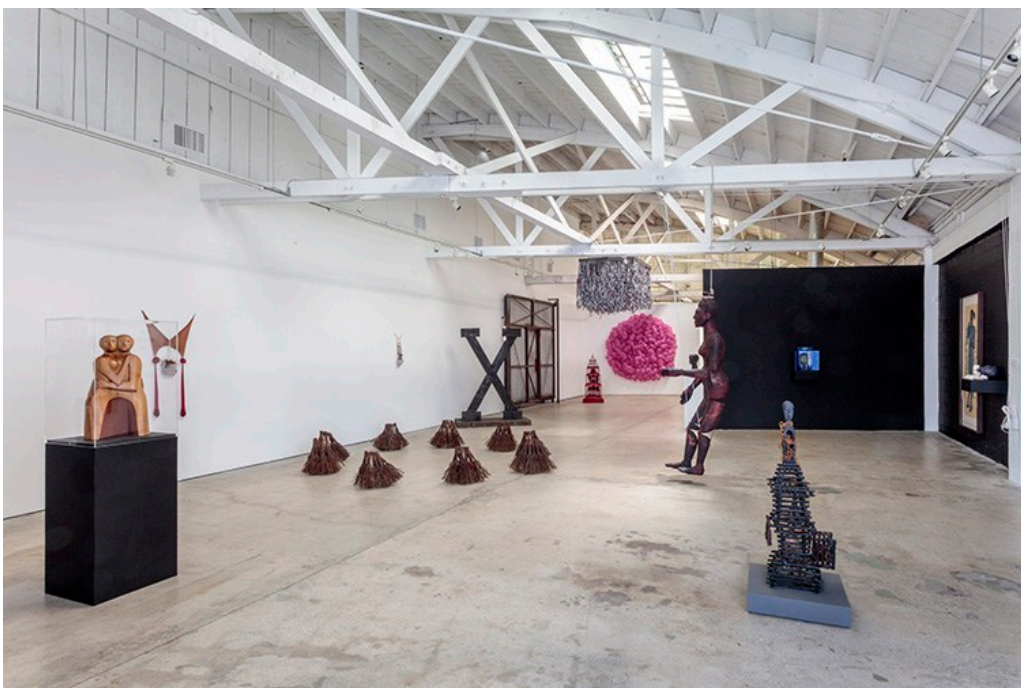
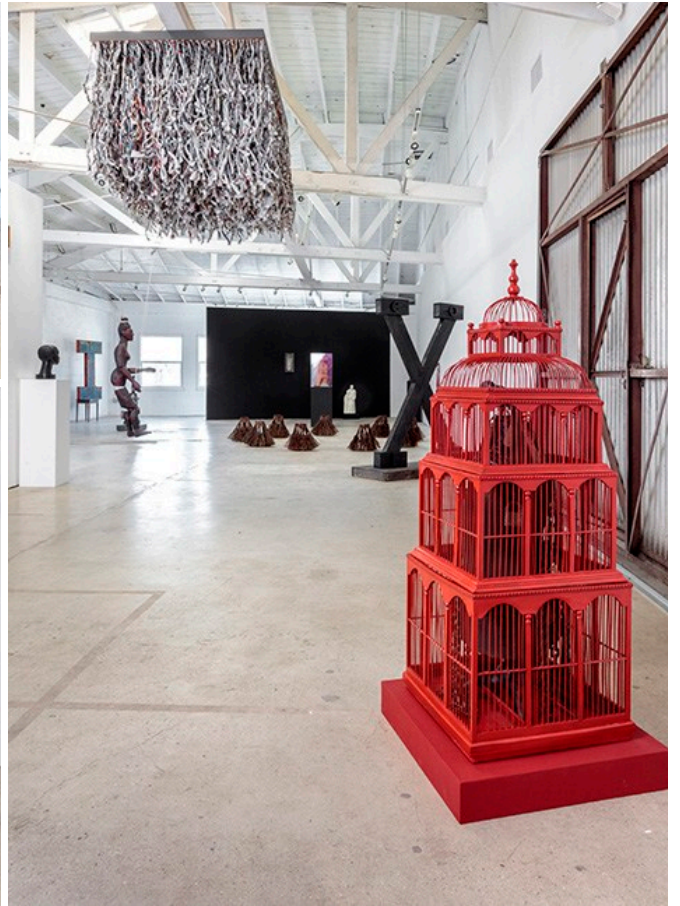
Artists: Elizabeth Catlett, Maren Hassinger, Samella Lewis, Dominique Moody, Senga Nengudi, Alison Saar, Betye Saar, Beulah Woodard and Brenna Youngblood

The Landing  
5118 West Jefferson Blvd.  
Los Angeles, CA 90016  
323-272-3194













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