Lynn Aldrich
Art Center College of Design, Alyce de Roulet Williamson Gallery, Pasadena, California
by Diane Calder

Lynn Aldrich, “Breaker,” 1999, garden hoses, brass ends, Fiberglas, steel, wood, 36 x 32 x 50”.

Continuing through January 19, 2014

Stand behind Lynn Aldrich in a Home Depot checkout line and you may begin to wonder what she is building with “all that stuff.” An Art Center College of Design MFA grad who studied with faculty members Jeremy Gilbert-Rolfe, Stephen Prina and Mike Kelley in the 1980’s, Aldrich has become skilled in transforming “do it yourself” materials, with all of their suggestions of artificiality and consumerism, into works of art capable of inspiring people to examine their imprint on nature’s ecosystem. Gallery Director Stephen Nowlin, where “Uncommon Objects,” a twenty year survey of Aldrich’s work is on display, explains it like this: “Aldrich transforms the known into something curious and unexpected while offering a critical consumerist spin on the assemblage tradition.”

In order to enter the exhibition, viewers pass beneath “Silver Lining,” a cloud of metallic downspouts Aldrich dangles from the ceiling of the gallery. The artist reframes the ubiquitous into an aesthetic experience while carefully considering the placement of materials within their architectural frame. The interiors of Aldrich’s spouts are painted in various shades of blue, enhancing the illusion of the pipes’ purpose as carriers of water while making a poetic reference to the historical use of the precious liquid as a kind of blessing in a wide variety of sacred sacraments.
Within view of “Silver Lining” is “Breaker,” the most iconic of Aldrich’s numerous works fabricated from ordinary garden hose. On loan from LACMA, the work reaches back for inspiration earlier than Duchamp’s Readymades, Pop Art or Minimalist influences, to ukiyo-e printmaker Hokusai’s woodblock print, “The Great Wave off Kanagawa.” It was the first of his landscape series involving views of Mount Fuji, traditionally linked in Buddhist tradition with eternal life. Aldrich duplicated the pitch of the forceful wave with her water hoses, suggesting a search for spiritual yearnings through vernacular means. The artist has stated that her work is open to what she identifies as “hyper desire,” the Romanticism of a spiritual or sacred longing for revelation and authentic transcendence. That feeling plays out in a number of works in the exhibition, including the personally sized, paper moon and star filled “Evening Bag for God.”

Aldrich intensifies the sense of biological diversity existing in coral reefs by assembling a collection of brushes, sponges, scrubbers, scouring pads, mop heads, plungers, and plastic gloves in a multitude of bright colors, shapes and sizes in “Marine Preserve.” Brilliant color also plays a role in “Designer’s Choice, The Naming of the Animals,” a display of fake fabric swatches arranged in rows, suggesting the evolution of life from scaly lizard-like skins to contemporary iridescent fur simulations.

However, some of Aldrich’s most effective works are monochromatic. The all white “Subdivision,” a kind of maximum/minimalist formulation of hordes of ordinary pickets organized into a dense regiment whose outer dimensions suggest that of a minimalist work by Donald Judd, is now part of MOCA’s collection. Infused with Aldrich’s anguish with the jam-packed overpopulation of areas of the Inland Empire, the work is a telling example of the artist’s ability to transform banal everyday consumer items into compelling critiques of excess consumption.

A grouping of opaque white plastic downspouts topped with writhing gutter parts in “Hydra Hydrant” is all the more effective backed by a wall of dark glass. The near transparency of wax paper works well in “Veil,” easily seen as an homage to Eva Hess, or “Pressed for Time,” another work with nostalgic undertones perfectly suited to restrained color.

Published courtesy of ArtSceneCal ©2013