



Parading their humble pedigree, the artworks of Los Angeles sculptor Lynn Aldrich can seem almost casual at first. Don't be fooled. Precisely composed out of largely ordinary materials, each of her sculptures is a self-contained statement of discovery and transcendence. In a sense, they could be almost called aspirational, not so much imposing a vision on mundane consumer items, but collaborating with them, allowing the intrinsic beauty already inside them to take form. Her 2013 retrospective survey at the Williamson Gallery at Art Center, in Pasadena, was called "Un/Common Objects." The works themselves suggested a cross between a Home Depot outlet and a botanical garden, where clusters of colorful garden hoses, or household plungers, dusters, and sponges erupt into bloom with almost biological fervor. Yet despite their humdrum origins, her works also have a purity and concision to them. "I've always had an affinity for marginalized materials. I kind of want to redeem them by some sort of craftsmanship that is very careful and deliberate," Aldrich says, adding with a laugh, "Found? Scavenged? I don't do that."

The pseudo-scientific taxonomies implied by her work are in fact deeply rooted. Aldrich's father was a research scientist and pathologist who worked with the Air Force. He was "very influential on me," she recalls, in ways "both scientific and poetic. Empirical science was the atmosphere I grew up in. I loved the ideals of the natural sciences." Born in Texas, she got a degree in English at University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill before arriving at Art Center in Pasadena to pursue her MFA, initially as a painter. Among her teachers were Stephen Prina, who impressed her as a conceptual theorist, and Jeremy Gilbert-Rolfe, who "pushed for the pleasure of the art object. So I had these two, almost opposing philosophies." Her practice today reflects this unlikely diversity of influences. "I don't have the classic sculpture education or background, but it forced me to be inventive."

Because her materials are often recognizable as common household and consumer items, they come with their own baggage: a resonance Aldrich clearly embraces. And yet, in stark contrast to Warhol's mass-produced consumerist aesthetics, say, Aldrich's work are doggedly individual; each one is its own experiment. Despite their transformational yearnings, her objects could be called Darwinian descendents of the Duchampian readymade. "I think about Duchamp almost every day," she admits. The idea of "removing the object from its normal context, that is very intriguing to me." In recent works, she has adopted metal drainage downspouts, painting some of them subtle shades of blue while leaving others stark silver. In one piece, the blockish channels sprout trimly in a little grove; in another, they writhe and twist together like a bag of snakes. "They refer to water," she explains. "They already have this graceful, curved form. I exaggerate that, into allegoric twists and turns. But the spout itself has its own integrity... I'll manipulate it, tend to nudge it in some direction that it wants to go, but I don't alter its essence."

Her upcoming solo show at Edward Cella Art & Architecture in Los Angeles, titled "More Light Than Heat," promises to push Aldrich's vision into the realm of religious and celestial imagery. The droll title



suggests both the natural phenomenon of illumination, and the transmission of knowledge. In her small-but-airy studio, in a mid-century house on the edge of Glendale, various works-in-progress are arrayed neatly. Prominent among them are several large sculptures referencing cathedral-type rose windows. To Aldrich, the rose window is a symbol rich with meaning. "In the Middle Ages, they used it as an occlusus... The original Light and Space art was stained glass windows. Painters were jealous, to have that luminous quality," she continues. The discussion winds through several Big Ideas, from the Judeo-Christian tradition, to the origins of Western science and skepticism, to the concept of a created cosmos, before weaving back to the iconic template of the rose window. "They were like a lens on the world," she says. "They looked through this and made connections to what it meant to be alive."

Although everything in the show relates to painting in some way, it is all still very much built. The show will feature a large sheetrock installation from which her main rose window piece will emerge; elsewhere, another rose window-like form floats ethereally, dispersed into layers of gray and lavender. Only partly tongue-in-check, Aldrich dubs the show's theme "Gothic Galactic." In her piece called *The Universe in Captivity*, she suspends an assortment of celestial-inspired discs, galaxies, and nebulae inside a tall, cylindrical birdcage. She describes the work as "seeking transcendence, trying to capture the universe, using craft puff balls, velvet, over-the-top clichéd materials." She adds, "Can one address monumentality in a small, encapsulated form? In a way, I'm mourning entropy." (Talking to her about the expanding universe, one cannot help recall the scene from "Annie Hall" when the psychologist attempts to assuage young Woody Allen, stating: "Alvy! The universe won't be expanding for billions of years!") Yet as with all Aldrich's work, no less than its implicit content, it's the work's sheer seductive presence that provokes contemplation. As Aldrich says, of sculpture itself: "It's a call to physicality, a reminder that you're experiencing life in a body."

—GEORGE MELROD

"Lynn Aldrich: More Light Than Heat" can be seen at Edward Cella Art & Architecture, in Los Angeles, October 24 – December 5, 2015. www.edwardcella.com

OPPOSITE TOP LEFT:
LYNN ALDRICH IN HER STUDIO

FAR LEFT:
"ROSY FUTURE (DETAIL)," 2015
OIL, FLASHE, DRYWALL PANELS, DRYWALL SCREWS,
TAR PAPER, DIMENSIONS VARIABLE
ROSE WINDOW FORM IS 74" X 74" X 4"

LEFT:
"THE UNIVERSE IN CAPTIVITY," 2015
VELVET, TULLE, ACRYLIC, CRAFT PUFF BALLS,
STEEL WIRE, MIRROR, CAGE, 72" X 14" X 14"
PHOTOS: COURTESY EDWARD CELLA ART & ARCHITECTURE