



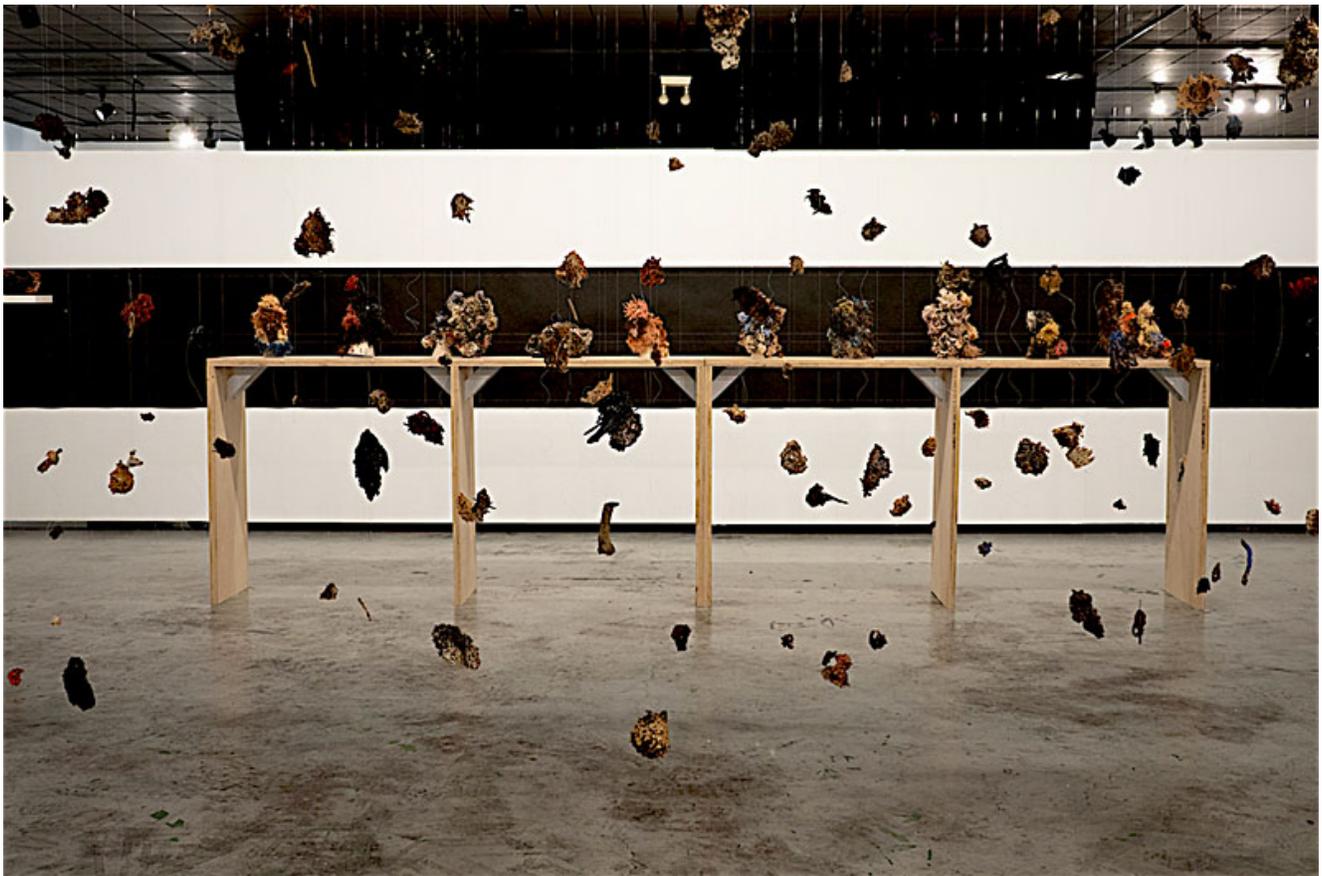
TRUTH TO POWER

ARTS

"Tammie Rubin: Everything You Ever" at Women & Their Work

This sculptural labyrinth of values casts an epiphytic spell

REVIEWED BY WAYNE ALAN BRENNER, FRI., JAN. 4, 2019



"Everything You Ever" by Tammie Rubin, gallery view

There's an occupation going on within the Women & Their Work gallery right now, an invasion of what seems to be static explosions of enhanced plant life, a midair ballet of odd horticulture replicating the patterns of chaos embodied by the ball moss that grows on, that *festoons*, so many trees in this part of the country.

Austin's own Tammie Rubin, an assistant professor of sculpture and ceramics at St. Edward's University, is the general of this bromeliad army, the creative force behind its structured incursion. It's called "Everything You Ever."

These fibrous and knotty sculptures are not just evocations of a naturally occurring phenomenon, though, but also a sort of commentary, I'm thinking, on how art – how the urge toward human mark-making – affects nature and human perceptions of nature, especially after those natural objects have been filtered through an acutely aware mind, a skilled hand, and the intentions of someone who will sometimes drench her complex mossifications with liquid clay "slip" or set them atop portions of small ceramic vessels built to hold them. That's not just sculpting, that earthy coating, but what you might call "ensculpturing." What arch critique of the creative process, of the artistic sublimation of landscape elements, is being conjured here?

Conjured is definitely the word. As sure as there's a Tumblr called "The Only Magic Left Is Art," there's a sort of modern witchery going on in this show, and it's informed by local bits of our planet's floral infrastructure – even though the plants in consideration here aren't, say, mistletoe or belladonna. Here's Rubin, updating the ancient druidic manipulation of plants by repurposing old rituals toward a display of modern, gallery-spiking artifacts meant to cast a spell of contemplation on visitors – a protean sort of spell that's as mild or powerful as the receptors within a viewer's forest of memory will insist.

The experience of "Everything You Ever" puts this reporter in mind of that episode of *Kolchak: The Night Stalker* from the Seventies, "The Spanish Moss Murders," where the myth of the Cajun boogeyman Père Malfait is modernized and used as horrific plot material to titillate TV viewers between commercial breaks. The underpinnings of Rubin's show are not dissimilar, it seems to me – intimations of arcane lore reiterated for present-day exploration and consumption – though of course her creations are much more subtle, non-narrative, and not focused on galvanizing the fear factor that accompanied fictional journo Carl Kolchak's every adventure.

(Note: Ball moss is not a parasite like mistletoe, but an epiphyte like its relative, Spanish moss. We sense a possible resonance in that fact – with the relationship between artists and subjects, critics and artists.)

Darren McGavin's dead, more's the pity, and so we're left without an intrepid Kolchak to help us investigate the deeper potentials of Rubin's exhibition. But before the show closes, the artist will participate in the latest of Women & Their Work's "TalkAbout" series – Sat., Jan. 5, 11:30am-12:30pm – where you, citizen journalist, can engage with and question this mossy story's primary source.

"Tammie Rubin: Everything You Ever"

Women & Their Work, 1710 Lavaca, 512/477-1064

www.womenandtheirwork.org

Through Jan. 10

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