

Saturday, September 4th, 2010

Kenneth Baker, Art Critic



"Boat House," a 2010 work by Lawrence LaBianca, is cast glass with copper boats placed on a wood shelf.

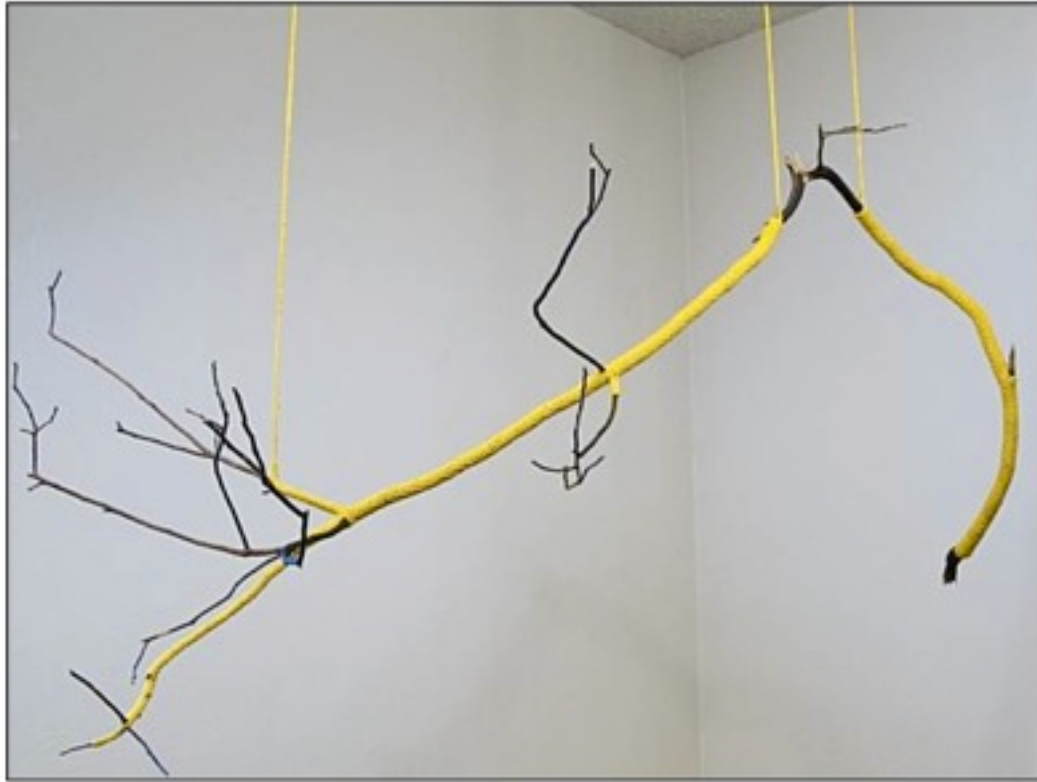
Sculpture at Cerrito: Lawrence LaBianca's sculpture often turns precious in its search for precision, but his show at Chandra Cerrito in Oakland contains some fine exceptions.

"Boat House" (2010) consists of five small house-shaped pieces of foggy cast glass on a thick wooden shelf, each with a tiny copper boat all but dissolved in it. The work seems mutely to enshrine five attempts to think the phrase "boat house" into reality, a poetic as much as a sculptural exercise.

"Dream" (2010) takes the form of a rowboat of rusted steel mesh, resting upended on a waist-high steel frame. A projector concealed within the boat throws onto the floor below a ghostly projection that looks like rippling water.

Without undue surrealism or specious agency, the piece evokes an object enjoying material memory of floating as release from its own rigidity.

[Herman Melville's "Moby-Dick"](#) frequently sparks LaBianca's imagination, as two text-embedded pieces here reflect. But he seems to work better when he keeps his sources veiled.



"Fixed" (2010) by Esther Traugot is hand-dyed bamboo yarn and branch.

Esther Traugot shares space with LaBianca at Cerrito but works in a more conceptual key. Her "Fixed" (2010) ironically - but not too ironically - takes the form of a thin, broken tree branch partially clad, like a cast-bound human limb, in custom-crocheted and dyed yellow yarn. Strands of the same fiber suspend the piece from the ceiling, as if its repair had merely consisted in restoring it to its original elevation.

Each of Traugot's works involves a similar process-conscious treatment of natural fragments: Solicitous on the one hand, hinting at ecological guilt, and on the other, indicting art or human culture generally as a sort of blight on the rest of nature.

Traugot's weird marriage of grotesquerie, tenderness and humor shows clearly in "Forty- Two Wasps" (2010), in which the insects hang individually from the ceiling on strands of yellow yarn, reanimated slightly by breezes from the gallery front door.

Lawrence LaBianca and Esther Traugot: Sculpture. 2-6 p.m. Fri.; 1-5 p.m. Sat. and by appointment. Through Sept. 18 Chandra Cerrito Contemporary, 480 23rd St., Oakland. (510) 260-7494.
www.chandracerrito.com or www.chandracerritocontemporary.com

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