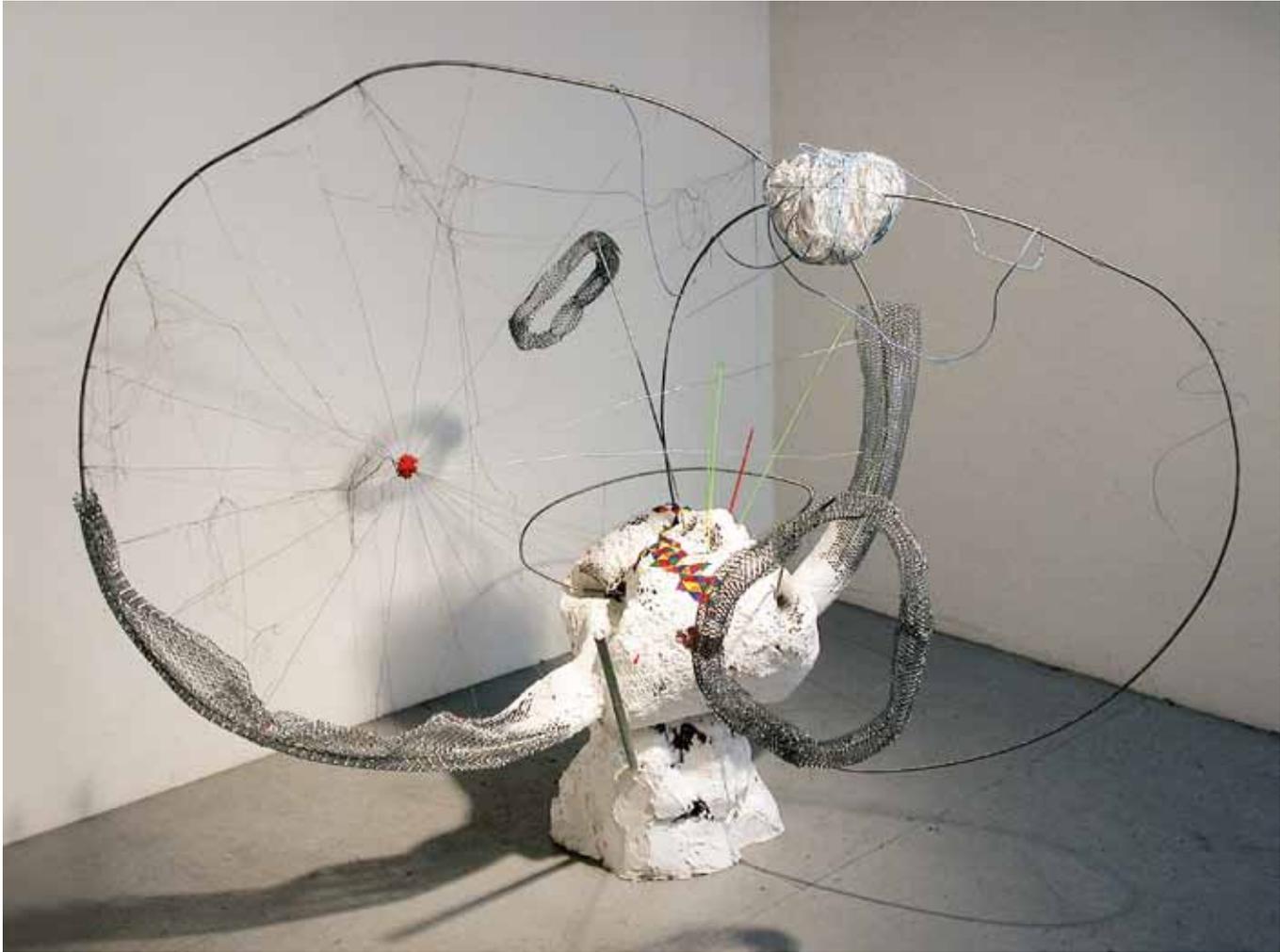


## Michelle Segre by Huma Bhabha



*Synapse, 2011, metal, papier-mâché, plaster, foam, plastic, modeling clay, pebbles, and string, 59 x 70 x 64 inches. Images courtesy of the artist and Derek Eller Gallery.*

One of the bonuses of being friends with an artist for an extended period of time is that gradually, after countless openings, studio visits, and long conversations, you become somewhat of an expert on that person's work. I have been fortunate to have such a relationship with Michelle Segre and her work—from collages of gangs of legs cut from comic book pages, gnawed alien-bone mobiles, and giant pieces of moldy bread and larger-than-life mushrooms recalling the soft sculptures of Claes Oldenburg, right up to her current work. Her recent sculptures retain the core theme of literally digesting Pop art (food and digestion are timeless themes in Segre's work) while introducing a new, seemingly raw, but actually quite sophisticated, deconstruction of its cartoon narrative.

This new direction approaches the material from a childlike point of view that goes beyond the obvious gigantism of much academic Pop art in that it also has a seemingly childlike playfulness on a conceptual level. The cat-and-mouse narrative of cheese, traps, and holes is splattered into postmodern DNA

samples. Where Segre's history begins remains a mystery—the work of Nancy Graves provides a clue, Franz West another. Plaster and mesh wormholes, as imagined by the architect Antoni Gaudí, lead to countless art-historical dimensions.

The wax, which was predominant in Segre's work till 2008, has now been peeled away and discarded like old, burnt skin to reveal what lies beneath, forgotten broken relics of her own past work, which, in one piece, take the form of an enormous bone ready for its *American Idol* solo. The geometric patterns that appear and disappear like rashes refer to her older drawings that influence the sculptural forms. Segre's recent sculptures function as enlarged models of the brain at work based on superstition rather than on science. Planets and galaxies symbolize ideas that are linked together by webs combining hippie and spiritual craft with industrial craft, as embodied in the metal mesh, which was once completely covered in wax. The importance of the absence of the wax cannot be emphasized enough, because it is through this deletion of



*Godzeve, 2011, metal, plastic lace, yarn, pebbles, papier-mâché, string, plaster, and mailbox, 101 x 40 x 15 inches.*



*Untitled, 2011, metal, papier-mâché, modeling clay, acrylic, plastic, pebbles, rock, string, and clay, 59 x 40 x 37 inches.*

material that the almost surrealist, prop-like function is replaced by a more personal language. Idealized labor connects plaster thought balloons surrounding a satellite dish transmitting brain activity from a Stone Age world's fairground of the mind. Self-portraits of a cranial circulatory system . . . Is this what Segre's sounds like? Are these new sculptures instruments that are played by looking? Is it a child's elementary-school science project made with help from tripping parents? The fact that there is no quick answer to the meaning of her work is what keeps you going back to look again and always finding a new clue that makes the mystery only more unsolvable.

— HUMA BHABHA was born in Karachi, Pakistan, and currently lives and works in Poughkeepsie, New York. She was included in the 2010 Whitney Biennial and participated in an exhibition of sculpture at City Hall Park in New York, organized by the Public Art Fund.

WATCH A VIDEO OF A STUDIO VISIT WITH MICHELLE SEGRE AT BOMBSITE.COM



*Untitled, 2011, Hydrocal, metal, foam, acrylic, modeling clay, plaster, enamel, beeswax, and papier-mâché, 82 x 44 x 67 inches.*