

Todd Forrest says: "That's a plastic prickly pear." Photo of installation courtesy of Murray Guy Gallery



Michelle Segre's Land of Wonder

Imagine if *Alice in Wonderland* had been set somewhere between a drug-addled hippie version of the Arizona desert and Madame Tousseaud's. Take one look at Michelle Segre's sculpture and, as if you'd just gone through the looking glass, there you are.

An enormous cactus unfolds from a rocky, volcanic piling. Another rises straight upward in the form of a comical exclamation point. A single cactus shoot balances worm-like from another, its pinkish tip extended as if it was a witch's nail. And then there's the giant upside-down mushroom—perhaps the cause of it all—with undulating sexual folds, all honey-yellow golden, radiating out from inside the cap. Presiding over this mutant landscape is a huge white bunny rabbit immersed in a pile of what appears to be melted-down Easter candy. At least a few hundred pounds of the sickly stuff. The aroma that permeates the room is wonderful.

Made primarily of beeswax, Segre's sculpture is at first glance seductive. Then move in closely and you're both fascinated and repelled. While the air around them becomes more pungently perfumed, their mutation and decay is revealed. As in earlier work, where an overgrown slab of cheese was crazily veined with mold, Segre presents us with a living—and dying—organism. We're a long way from classical sculpture, with statues frozen perfectly in marble, figures which exalt and negate the human form. Even that most gorgeous of double amputees, the Venus de Milo, remains clinical. Segre's works are characters in a story, bodies in space, and as we move around them we become aware of our own. While she's molding these heaps of wax and papier-mâché, she also seems to be carving out a highly charged psychological trip. And it's not the only high.

The heady, psychedelic hues—luscious purples and pinks against chocolate brown and lime green—tap into the heightened sense of color you undoubtedly remember from the last time you sucked on a three-way tab of White Blotter. It's here that Lewis Carroll comes to mind, and not for the first time. When Grace Slick wrote "White Rabbit," one of the most infamous and dated drug anthems of the 60s, fairy tales and mind-expansion were entwined: "Go ask Alice," she sang, "when she's 10 feet tall." As Segre shifts the scale of objects beyond reality, the viewer's relation to them becomes childlike. It's here, beneath a mushroom over nine feet tall, that they are given—and we are given back—a sense of wonder.