

BUZZINE

CULTURE AND ENTERTAINMENT

SO BIG IT HURTS

By Tara Storozynsky, October, 2008

For anyone who is a fan of art bordering on the neurotic, Leigh Salgado's recent sculptures are a must-see. Her show, "So Big it Hurts," is currently up at Patricia Correia Gallery in Santa Monica. When I say "neurotic," I am referring to the painstakingly detailed and time-consuming process – bordering on OCD – by which Salgado whips up these lavish pieces of eye-candy.

All of the sculptures are done by cutting away tiny little bits of paper to create a three-dimensional effect, then painted and stained with ink. At first, I did not believe that all of the cut-outs could possibly be what they appeared. But as I stepped closer, I realized that indeed, this stunning paper imitation of lace, flowers, and cloth was made of hundreds, perhaps thousands of holes – each incision individually carved with careful intent as if by a great surgeon into paper flesh. After a couple seconds, I felt dizzy. My breath had been taken away.

I would say it is reasonable to be taken aback simply by the idea of so much time and work put into a single piece of art, let alone an entire show. I looked around the room and wondered how long this took. How many weeks or months did it take to create all of this rococo splendor? I imagined sitting in one spot for hours upon hours, listening to loud music, entering a meditative trance as little snips and chunks and slivers are cut away, breathing life into sheets of paper. The show is an achievement fueled by passion and dedication.

Salgado aims to recreate the texture of brilliant draped cloth and flowers – some rectangular decorative compositions, some building three-dimensional forms. Sculptures of perfectly wrinkled lingerie hug the gallery wall like climbing vines – delicate yet purposeful. The stronger works use images of a grossly decadent nature. There is a towering chocolate cake, women's torsos and thighs, and those instantly recognizable skeleton lovers from Pompeii revealed in precisely-crafted lace and blossoms. The overall impression is pretty but gaudy, though I feel the intense rococo effect is an appropriate parallel to her themes of overindulgence.

These works seem aimed to churn one's stomach, to make one reflect on the concept of "too much," if only for a few moments. Do we want too much? Will what we have ever be enough? Do we really need perfectly pretty, sexy, shiny sweet everything? If we were to have it all, with a wax finish and a cherry on top, would that not sicken us a little bit? Would it ever be enough to cover everything?

These questions are particularly relevant in Los Angeles, a city which took the American Dream and insisted it needed a face-lift and breast augmentation. Nothing is ever quite perfect enough here, but Salgado's opulent sculptures remind us that there is, in fact, such a thing as overindulgence. The show's title, "So Big It Hurts," is a phrase which perfectly captures its seductive/repulsive aesthetic, as well as the self-destructive nature of excess.

I found the extravagance to be initially overwhelming, yet the work is so incredibly well-thought-out and undeniably intriguing that I was reluctant to leave this self-deprecating shrine to return to the world of unashamed coveting. "Too much of a good thing," as Oscar Wilde once said, "can be wonderful."

"So Big It Hurts" will be on view through November 1, 2008. For more information, visit the gallery website.