

Kathleen Ryan

Weightless Again

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The old palm tree, circling itself, the triple-knotted neck of an ancient beast, survived somehow for decades in the shadow of a freeway bridge along the riverbed. With serpentine grace, here her smooth body turns with the rough and fast fragility of the stucco that skins a city of houses. Snaking and sinuous, what tied her up is unknown, but the dappled warmth of a distant sun still made it through. Stucco can survive just about anything though, even as it crumbles in your hand.

Stolen from another tree that crept through an alleyway crack like a weed, a couple of palm fronds when cast in iron take on the blackened heft of ancient industry and the cold endurance of this cutting element made with hard labor. That Mexican fan palm perseveres, resists, finds life in the denials of asphalt and again in the dark weight of frigid iron. Bend down and look closely into the length of those sharpened leaves, cupped like an open hand. Fingerprints deckle the iron, a soft body secretly imprinted like hieroglyphs in the hard metal.

Those polished pink bowling balls, fingered and named with the sentiment of lost owners, Bev, Deb, Tif. They dangle from the walls with the delicacy of a pearl necklace, but their cloudy marbled swirls lack the purity of that oyster's lustrous little sphere. "The pearl is the oyster's autobiography," said Fellini. Pearls are Eve's tear as she left paradise, Aphrodite's dowry. These bowling balls wear an adulterated beauty abandoned to the thrift store, another kind of debris made treasure. They are both heavy and light simultaneously. A tasteless plastic, a glossy polyurethane only made to look stoney. Their color like droplets of sunset, it's hard to resist mouthing these giant candies. Worth every chipped tooth, they are not without pleasure.

Wild, molten earth carved and contained into precise blocks for the testing of aerospace warfare find a precarious new life. Eight-thousand pounds of granite, cut with precise geometry, rests above and below a trio of porcelain oranges. Fragile and beautiful, a suggestion of pulp, the wetness of fruit cast to carry the crushing weight both psychic and physical, they remember the citrus groves disappeared for factories.

Any of us might be one of those wild parrots perched on the denuded skeleton of that shadeless backyard umbrella. Tropical creatures flocking from yard to yard, wild things free from cages but not the city. Escaped prisoners or abandoned orphans, they survive, they endure, even as our leisure-time furniture loses its skirt and with it an intended purpose. They are not parrots though, but biomorphic ceramic color only shaped like perched birds. They are and they are not. Those bowling balls are heavy rollers and lightest pearls. The twist of tree is an unlikely survivor and a cheap shelter. The fan palms are wispy California dreams and brittle black metal. These taut transformations and material doublings are not without shadow. They bear the weight of relics from a lost American past, the sorrow of faded industries. Only terrible heat can transform palms into iron. Only through loss and abandonment can anything be found. But they are found. Objects roused with unlikely poetry, lively with delicious tensions. - *Words by Andrew Berardini*

Kathleen Ryan (b. 1984, Santa Monica, California) lives and works in Los Angeles where she received her MFA from UCLA in 2014. Recent exhibitions include Josh Lilley Gallery, London (2016, solo); Ghebaly Gallery, Los Angeles (2015); Various Small Fires, Los Angeles (2014); Vincent Price Art Museum, Los Angeles (2014). Her work has been featured in Artforum, Frieze Magazine, and CARLA, among other publications.

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