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The Weeping Line
Organized by
Alter Space
at Four Six One Nine
(S.F. in L.A.)

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Text by Matt Stromberg



The Weeping Line (organized by Alter Space) at Four Six One Nine; Mattea Perrotta, Mindy Rose Schwartz, Koak (installation view). Image courtesy of Alter Space. Photo: Phillip Maisel.

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Female representation in the art world is maddeningly low, even decades after the emergence of the feminist art movement. However, too many exhibitions of women artists take an essentialist view based on gender, thwarting a complex and nuanced reading of their work. The Weeping Line, organized by the San Francisco-based gallery Alter Space, and hosted by Four Six One Nine, opts instead to treat gender as beside the point, rather than as the lazy, reductivist frame so often used to group female artists together. Free of gendered cataloguing, the focus stays on the work itself, which can be evaluated on its own terms.

The three artists featured in The Weeping Line do not readily fit together, thereby encouraging a teasing out of the aesthetic and conceptual connections between the work. The show features three female artists from three different cities, working in three different mediums, spanning roughly three decades in age. While the artists may come from varying perspectives, running through all their work is an emphasis on the handmade—on craft, the physical, and the tactile. The exhibition feels unapologetically old-school.

Chicago-based artist Mindy Rose Schwartz has created rough and funky mixed-media constructions, composed of paper-mache, feathers, and string. Her all-white sculptures channel Louise Bourgeois's body-based surrealism. Oversized masks teeter on long, furry necks in *Harlequin Romance* (2016), with strings of tears streaming from their eyes. The piece walks the line between absurd and sincere. In *The Hands of God* (2011), two large, puffy hands hang down from the ceiling. They are meant to reference the *Yad*—literally translated to hand in Hebrew—which is the pointer that is used to read the Torah. Instead of the elegant, silver or gold instrument however, Schwartz's are misshapen, bulbous objects, further grounded in the material realm by the small, gremlin-like figures emerging from their centers. Here is the sacred made profane; the divine found in the debased.



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By contrast, the pastel and graphite drawings of San Francisco-based Koak have a completely different feel: they are lyrical and sensuous. These figurative works pull from the sweeping lines of Art Deco as much as from contemporary cartoon illustration. The female protagonists in her drawings—all ample curves and solid volumes, threaten to spill over the boundaries of the paper. The way in which Koak folds and twists these figures seems not so much like external violent manipulations, but rather organic expressions from within. In Koak's gorgeously sinuous wall-drawing, *Creep* (2016), a larger-than-life nude figure looks back at an open doorway, perhaps casting the epithet at anyone who gazes upon her form. Women are on view, but they also look back.

Ironically, the youngest of the trio, painter Mattea Perrotta from Los Angeles, creates work that feels the most like it could be from another era: confident, geometric abstractions. With prominent paint handling, she delineates imprecise, organic forms. *Garden in Bloom* (2016) features two irregular, pink hills set against a black background and topped with small bumps, revealing them to be breasts, unashamedly free. A small painting that resembles early Kandinsky, *The Swimmer at Playa Santa Maria* (2016) depicts a white body floating over brightly-colored waves. The titular beach could be referring to a location in Cuba, giving the historically passive genre of the bather an active and potentially charged subtext.



Koak, *Ramona's Smize* (2016).
Pigment and pastel on rag paper
mounted to panel, 30 x 24
inches. Image courtesy of the
artist and Alter Space. Photo:
Kevin Krueger.

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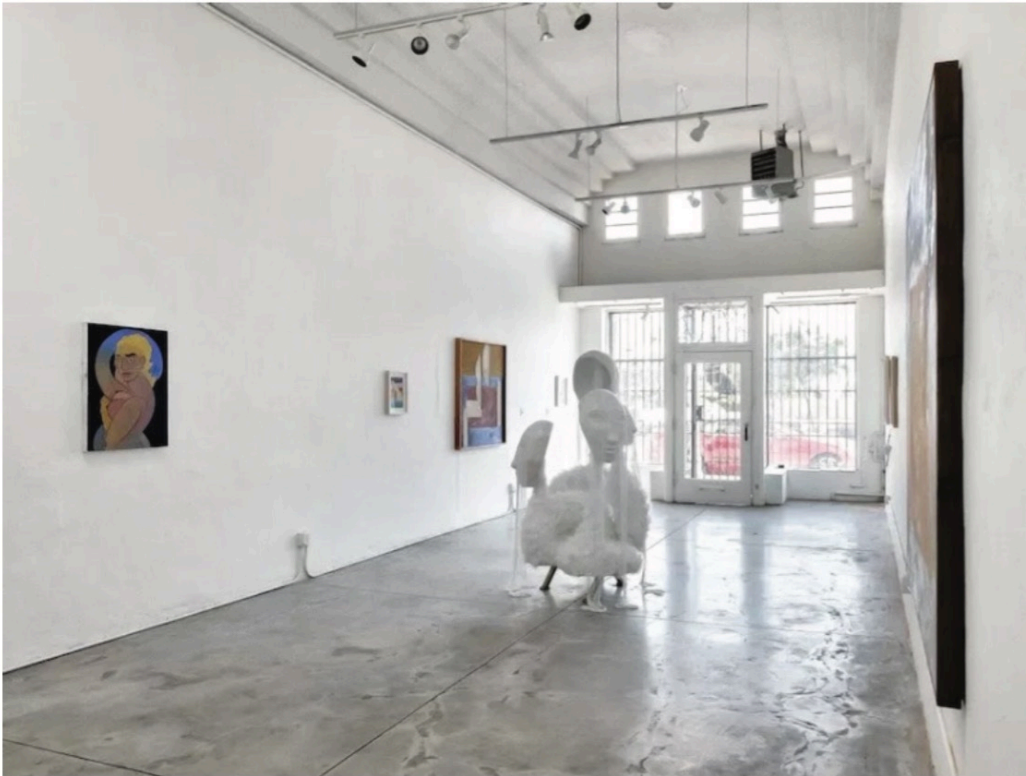
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Perrotta's most compelling piece is *Fata Morgana* (2016), a large orange-pink trapezoid on a coarsely brushed grey ground. The title refers to a nautical mirage that takes its name from Morgan le Fay, the fairy witch of Arthurian legend, who would conjure visions of floating castles over the ocean, luring sailors to their death. In this context, the painting functions as a rebuke against the unchecked male gaze: stare at your own risk.

What's perplexing about the title's allusion to weeping is the implication of emotional vulnerability, if not hysteria, that is often cited to delegitimize female perspectives. On the contrary, these artists insist that vulnerability does not preclude a wider range of emotions, as can be seen in the humor, pathos, and bite on view. The show displays a range and depth that could be easily lost by viewing it through an overly gendered lens. Despite the marked differences in their styles, all three artists engage with fairly well established artistic modes. The results however, mark quite a departure from historical precedents, proving that traditional media need not be abandoned to convey a contemporary message.



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Koak, *Sisters* (2016). Graphite on rag paper, 20 x 16 inches. Image courtesy of the artist and Alter Space.



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