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Review: The tree is cast bronze, the blankets are carved stone: Gagosian's gasp-worthy scene

Leah Ollman



“The Shaman” by Tatiana Trouvé, 2018. Patinated bronze, marble, granite, concrete, steel, sand, water, on view at Gagosian.(Fredrik Nilsen Studio / Gagosian)

In her first show in L.A., Paris-based Tatiana Trouvé stages architectural interventions in both large galleries at Gagosian. One leans dystopian, the other utopian. Both are ambitiously staged, immersive environments that insinuate themselves into the psychic realm via the physical, dramatically redefining the spaces our bodies move through. Both rely on high production values and impressive scale to effect, as in good theater, subtle interior shifts.

“The Shaman” is the more poetic of the two installations, and also the more sensational — a gasp-worthy disruption of the pristine white box. Trouvé has cast an oak tree in bronze and then felled it. It has landed on its side in a dark pool of water, its severed trunk immersed and its exposed, frizzled spray of roots continuously trickling water from multiple spots.

Whatever unseen force brought the majestic growth down appears also to have shattered the gallery’s raised concrete floor, whose immense, jagged shards pose just enough of a hazard to slow one’s step.



Detail of Tatiana Trouvé's "The Shaman." (Fredrik Nilsen Studio / Gagosian)



Another detail from "The Shaman." (Fredrik Nilsen Studio / Gagosian)

Earthquake, hurricane and flood all come to mind as potential causes of such a scene. Where there is breakage, though, Trouvé inserts hints of repair: one branch rests gently on a marble pillow; blankets and cushions also carved of stone stand ready for use, draped over a metal stand along with a large ring of old keys.

Trouvé has conjured a natural disaster as fable, stocking the tale with power, fear, tenderness, witness (two sculptural pieces titled "The Guardian" stand by) and mysterious channels of agency. The cataclysm is all too familiar from the nightly news, but indeterminate context and transposed textures turn the contrived calamity into something emblematic, mythic, the stuff of shamanic visions.

In the second gallery, Trouvé presents two closely related series of drawings, mounting them back-to-back on the implied walls of a structure defined only by horizontal and vertical metal struts. The skeletal architecture extends far overhead and in its purity and order exudes a sense of hope and promise after the wreckage in the other room.



Tatiana Trouvé's "On the Eve of Never Leaving," 2019, on view at Gagosian.(Fredrik Nilsen Studio / Gagosian)



*Untitled by Tatiana Trouvé, 2019, from the series "Les Dessouvenus." Pencil, bleach, copper and linseed oil on paper mounted on canvas, 49-3/16 inches by 78-3/4 inches by 1-3/8 inches.
(Florian Kleinfenn/Gagosian)*

In both groups of drawings, Trouvé works in pencil on colored paper stained with bleach or painted in watercolor to mimic such stains. The process recalls Surrealist exercises in automatism, engagements with chance and accident. While the drawings are uneven in interest, at their best the dreamlike fluidity of the indoor and outdoor spaces they evoke — studio, stage set, quarry, home, street — is entrancing.

The disorientation and ambiguity that prevails in the images contrasts explicitly with the stability of the metal armature that supports them. It's the orchestration of the physical space that has the strongest impact here, the way Trouvé manages to reduce our own scale, casting us as wanderers in the presence of a grand idea.