

AROUND THE GALLERIES

Eben Goff's twisted reality

BY SHARON MIZOTA

In his latest exhibition at Diane Rosenstein, Eben Goff continues his exploration of the slippery relationship between the natural and the artificial. His engaging sculptures and photographs continually subvert this dichotomy, locating instances of the sublime at their intersection.

This tension is perhaps most salient in a series of sculptures in which hard-edged metal frames — pyramids, cubes, right angles — appear embedded in organic lumps of wood. The effect is reminiscent of tree roots grown into the sidewalk or pressed through the bars of an iron fence.

Yet upon closer inspection, these seemingly natural growths turn out to be the more “processed” of the two elements, carefully carved and segmented so that they fit puzzle-like around the metal bars. Goff



Diane Rosenstein

“BUTTE SPECULATOR” by Eben Goff turns the Montana landscape into sculpture with his “Arc.”

has left the seams between the components visible, revealing the pieces’ construction. These works throw into question the traits we perceive as “natural”: irregular surfaces, matte finish, rough-hewn shapes. The metal after all, despite its industrial sheen, once came from the Earth too.

Mining and the environmental devastation it wreaks appear more directly in the color photographic series “Butte Speculator” and a handful of black-and-white images also taken around copper mines in Montana. Goff built a wooden “Arc,” a hollow, curving shell about 8 feet tall that he wheeled around the mining sites and photographed at various locations.

The resulting images record a ravaged, totally denuded landscape pocked

with toxic pools and half-built or decaying structures. They are startlingly beautiful. Goff’s traveling Arc (or Ark?) rises amid the rocky, barren expanses like an alien monolith or a primitive shelter or a portal to another world. With this simple gesture, he turns the landscape into a giant sculpture.

The photographs take art back to its essential definition: the effects of human activity on natural materials, for better or worse. From a certain perspective, Goff’s work aestheticizes environmental degradation; from another, it unleashes it as an instance of the sublime, a concept that combines unsurpassed beauty with terror at its very vastness.

The works remind us where the raw materials of art and industry come from, and at what price. They only

become unnatural once they are melted, molded, chiseled or extruded into the stuff of everyday life.

Speaking of which, the exhibition also includes a few works created from the detritus of the L.A. River. Goff inserted metal armatures — a pyramid and two poles — into the river, leaving them there to accumulate debris. The resulting sculptures are disgustingly voluminous and startlingly colorful, composed not of decaying organic matter as one might hope but of plastic bags, synthetic fabrics, tangles of yarn and things perhaps better left unidentified.

These works are the inverse of Goff’s carefully carved and pieced wood-and-metal sculptures. Instead of bending natural materials to his will, he has given nature the reins, letting it make sculpture out of unnatural ones (and cleaning the river a little to boot).

Diane Rosenstein, 831 N. Highland Ave., (323) 462-2790, through Aug. 15. Closed Sundays and Mondays. www.dianeroseinstein.com