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Review: Tam Van Tran at Susanne Vielmetter Los Angeles Projects

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Tam Van Tran's tabletop sculptures and piecemeal wall-relief at [Susanne Vielmetter Los Angeles Projects](#) look like ruins from the future: excavated artifacts from alien civilizations at once primitive and Space Age.

The single wall piece, made of such conventional materials as canvas, paper and paint as well as such untraditional ones as office staples and spirulina algae, has the presence of a giant sci-fi moth, a dormant cyborg whose carefully cut, painted and stapled segments appear to have been surgically repaired so many times that its monstrous body seems to consist of nothing but scar tissue.

Tran's ceramic sculptures are even gnarlier, their cobbled-together structures creating an abundance of nooks and crannies that provides great hiding places for all sorts of surprises: puddles of glistening goo, damaged talismans, ornamental skulls, larvae-like lumps and broken bits of shed skin, shells and husks.

Scale is always ambiguous. Sometimes Tran's little sculptures resemble miniature dioramas, their fractured forms evoking heaps of scrap metal and piles of detritus inhabited by post-apocalyptic castoffs. At others, they recall crude copies of Baroque tableware: candleholders, ashtrays and serving dishes, all of which could be the offspring of Humpty Dumpty (after his fall) and Italian Futurist sculpture.

Tran puts Rorschach-blot open-endedness to good use, employing it to suggest multilayered stories as dark as they are filled with imaginative possibility.

-- David Pagel

Susanne Vielmetter Los Angeles Projects, 5795 W. Washington Blvd., Culver City, (323) 933-2117, through Feb. 7. Closed Sundays and Mondays.

Above: Tam Van Tran's "Untitled" (2008), staples, acrylic, spirulina, on canvas and paper. Credit: Gene Ogami