

Image Above: *A Perfect Swarm (detail)* Cover Image: *Sheep (detail)*



Northeastern
ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY
Fine Arts Center Gallery
5500 N. St. Louis Ave. Chicago, IL 60631-4699

Nancy Lu Rosenheim
*Driftless: Can't See the Forest
for the Trees*

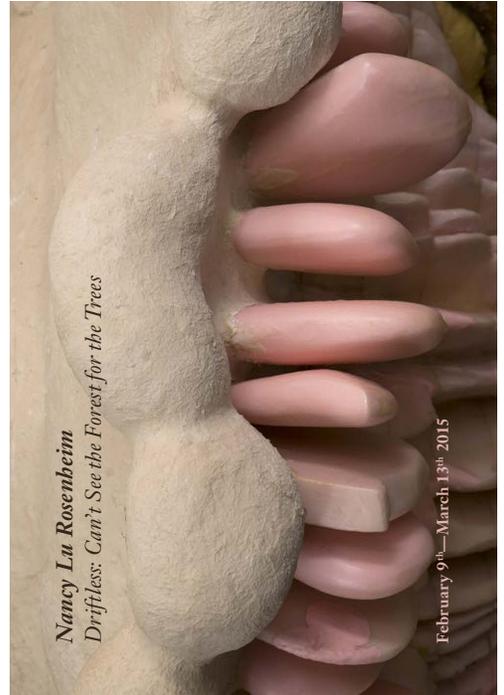
February 9th—March 13th 2015

Reception: Friday February 20th 6—9 pm

Artist Talk: Thursday March 5th 3 pm

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Driftless: Can't See the Forest for the Trees

February 9th—March 13th 2015

Last year in late December it was a little over 70 degrees Fahrenheit in New York City.

I remember pale and beautiful men walking their dogs throughout Greenwich Village in shorts and tank tops; girls wearing sandals in colorful knee-length tights and half-shirts lounging around Washington Square Park; kids lining up outside a Mister Softee truck for double-dip cones and sundaes. Of course, this was an entirely disturbing scenario, as I never would have thought that our slow grind into ecological ruin would be responsible for such a beautiful day. But there you have it—balmy afternoons are in the forecast for oblivion.

I think about this disturbingly pleasant winter Sunday in 2013 when I look at Nancy Lu Rosenheim's sculptures for this exhibition. I see an artist who is clearly in love with the forms and mysteries of the natural world. Rosenheim's touch is filled with reverence when she reproduces the sweeping, seductive curves of a weeping willow, or glorifies the architectural splendor of a chrysalis. But I also see someone who is keenly aware that nature is in the process of a great and sinister transformation, dying and mutating at an alarming speed, right before our eyes.

When I look at *A Perfect Swarm*, I see a formal configuration that subtly echoes the composition of a lynching in plate 32 from Goya's *The Disasters of War*. A sheet of chicken wire is slung between two large, dead branches over a small patch of cardboard grass that is cut to look like rows of jagged teeth. Stuck in the wire mesh appears to be some large agglomeration of pods made from plastic Easter eggs, sealed together with a dun-colored substance that looks like dried mud or congealed pus. The eggs are synthetically bright, more toxic-seeming



than the most vividly chromatic things in nature, but there is nothing about them that signals fecundity. Their fakeness is obvious—they are hollow and inert.

Shelf Mushroom is a gorgeous, eerily Brobdingnagian bracket fungus. Its gills are skillfully carved from pink Styrofoam and topped off with a blob of plastery, off-white alien ooze. Its hyperbolic, cartoony facture is more ominous than funny—as if a mycological organism that size got there by feeding off an infinite supply of radioactive blight.

Rosenheim's objects are effigies of nature—cruel yet thoughtfully conceived artworks based on an irrevocably damaged environment that is irritated and out for revenge. But please: don't take her for some mordant doomsayer. She's just calling it like she feels it, channeling the spirits of our fraught and contaminated time, like a good artist should, and creating a family of weird and tenderly wrought things that are rich, disturbing and lovely.

I remember my mother calling me from snowy Indiana, sharing her take on that strangely temperate weekend when she heard about it on the news: *Well, think about what happens to your body as you leave this mortal coil—all those chemicals going off in your brain, causing all kinds of nice hallucinations, and giving you a sense of peace and calm as you're heading towards your very last moments of life. It's not so bad, and it makes sense. So think about those unusually nice days on Earth like that from here on out—after a long and miserable sickness, this planet's just doing what it needs to do, heading towards the end.*

A bit of cold comfort for such a warm and pretty day.

*Alex Jovanovich
December, 2014*

Image: *Weeping Willow (detail)*