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Art review: Kristen Morgin's 'Snow White' at Marc Selwyn Fine Art

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“Snow White in Evening Wear and Other Works” is Kristen Morgin’s fourth solo show in Los Angeles. It’s also her best. That’s saying a lot because her first three, in 2006, 2008 and 2009, are among the most memorable of the last decade.

This one is unforgettable: tragically sad and heart-wrenchingly bittersweet, it sings of loss with unsentimental intensity. Rather than coming off as despairing or even depressing, Morgin’s installation is quietly inspiring, not glibly uplifting but profoundly heartening in its clear-eyed insightfulness.

At Marc Selwyn Fine Art, nearly all of Morgin’s new sculptures are made of unfired clay, on whose fragile surfaces she draws and paints with great delicacy. Many pieces take the form of old-fashioned toys, most broken, and handcrafted puppets whose missing limbs have been replaced with ad hoc prosthetics. Others are low-relief collages, homemade renditions of such cartoon characters as Mickey, Popeye and Jiminy, whose heads, bodies and limbs are mismatched. Put together with devilish purpose, these piecemeal talismans often include worn playing cards and frayed game boards alongside comic books, paperbacks,



bottle caps and jar lids. Even Morgin's thumbtacks and pushpins are made of clay.

On the floor, Morgin has laid out two multipart pieces. Each is masterful.

Their setups recall the way kids play with toys, combining unrelated objects to create worlds that work in their imaginations. Using clay trains, guns, blocks and various fairy-tale figurines, "Two Thirds of May" recasts Goya's famous painting of Spanish citizens being executed as a violent nightmare from which humanity has still not awakened.



"In the Conservatory, With Mr. Bill, On A Silent Night" features an even stranger cast of characters: Mr. Peanut, Mr. Bill, Colonel Mustard, Dorian Gray, Cinderella, Superman, the holy family and the Jetsons. The narrative that unfolds under a wobbly ladder and chair is as harrowing as it is open-ended, just the stuff for a culture in which forgetfulness and the inability to grow up go hand in glove.

Marc Selwyn Fine Art, 6222 Wilshire Blvd., Suite 101, (323) 933-9911, through March 10. Closed Sundays and Mondays. www.marcselwynfineart.com

Images, from top: Kristen Morgin, "Snow White and Woodland Creatures," 2011.

"Charlie Chaplin," 2011. Credit for both: Marc Selwyn Fine Art.