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## Culture Monster

ALL THE ARTS, ALL THE TIME

### Art review: Kristin Morgin at Marc Selwyn Gallery

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Seven life-size cellos, each more battered than the last, greet visitors to [Marc Selwyn Fine Art](#), where the lights have been turned low. Supported by makeshift bases cobbled together from old boxes and wood scraps, each damaged instrument stands upright, like a person in a silent choir or an ornate memorial wreath at a group funeral.

Melancholy does not merely waft into the atmosphere from Kristen Morgin's elaborately crafted clay, wire and wood sculptures. It pours forth in torrents, filling the gallery with sadness that it is palpable and almost unbearable.

And that's just the beginning. The powerful first impression made by the L.A. artist's loaded works from 2001 gives way to less obvious, more nuanced emotions. They simmer slowly and resonate deeply.

To look closely is to notice how different Morgin's sculptures are from real cellos. Aside from their profiles, which are fairly exact matches, especially in their gracefully curved bodies and slender, sexy necks, her homemade sculptures share very little with the real thing.



That is intentional. As an artist, Morgin is not a Realist who tries to trick viewers into thinking that her works are indistinguishable from actual objects. She is a Romantic, an unsentimental dreamer who believes that art comes alive only when it reaches a viewer's emotions – and that artifice is the best way to get there.

Some of her cellos are crude surrogates, rough remakes seemingly lashed together by a castaway struck by its unforgettable beauty. Others look as if they have been repaired so many times, like 1950s American cars in Cuba, that they have become something else altogether. Still others evoke crime-scene reconstructions or recall barnacle encrusted artifacts dragged up from the murky depths.

"Cello #9" appears fire-damaged. A clay bird nests in "Cello #3." "Cello #2" is stuffed full of mud balls, all tangled in a wiry web. "Cello #4" looks skeletal and "Cello #8" seems to be as fragile as ash, about to disintegrate in the wind.

All of Morgin's cellos appear to have endured well beyond their best years, persisting in the face of great difficulty and reconciling themselves to diminished expectations. Pragmatic and wise, they capture the tenor of our times.

**Marc Selwyn Fine Art**, 6222 Wilshire Blvd., Suite 101, (323) 933-9911, through Jan. 23. Closed Sundays and Mondays. [www.marcselwynfineart.com](http://www.marcselwynfineart.com)

*Image: "Cello #2." Credit: Courtesy of the Marc Selwyn Gallery.*