

Review The Underdog on Post-it notes and other nostalgic bits, revived with a twist

By **Leah Ollman**

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Kristen Morgin practices rapturous devotion to the textures of time. Call it clay vérité. New work on view through Saturday at Marc Selwyn Fine Art deepens her longstanding exploration of objects and icons that spur personal and collective memory, images that trigger a rush of recognition and the attendant complications of nostalgia.





Kristen Morgin, "One Legged Donald," 2017, unfired clay, paint, ink. 12.5 inches by 2.5 inches. (Robert Wedemeyer / Kristen Morgin and Marc Selwyn Fine Art)

Consider “The Shoot Out,” a gut-flipping arrangement of sculptures in unfired clay, drawn and painted to evoke old photographs and cartoon figures propped up like paper dolls, a Little Golden Book, an “Apollo 13” VHS box, a Wonder Woman puppet and more. The objects seem worn, the tabletop assembly casual, as if Morgin had reached into a box in the attic and retrieved a dozen random relics from her youth. This isn’t found-object assemblage, but it’s convincing copy, invented from the rawest of matter, with the utmost skill.

Standing as if in the very front of the grouping, facing out, is a replica of the famous image of little John F. Kennedy Jr. saluting his father’s coffin. It becomes a kind of lens through which everything else on the pedestal is regarded, and “The Shoot Out” does the same for the show overall, encapsulating several of its most potent themes: powerlessness at the mercy of power; gritty reality papered over by fairy tales and cartoon fantasies; the inescapable friction between innocence and experience.

In another small, bittersweet work, Los Angeles-based Morgin sculpts a tired, coverless copy of a children's book, permanently open to the page in which Harold stands ready to drive away a huge and forbidding witch with a stroke of his purple crayon.





Kristen Morgin, "All Harold Had to Do Was Drive the Witch Out of the Enchanted Garden," 2017, unfired clay, paint, ink 7.5 inches by 5 inches by 2.25 inches. (Robert Wedemeyer / Kristen Morgin and Marc Selwyn Fine Art)

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In a wall installation (the sole non-clay piece in the show), she draws what looks to be a parade balloon Underdog across hundreds of little square Post-it notes that flap in a fan-fueled breeze. "There's No Need to Fear" gently but pointedly mocks our need for reassurance, our flimsy hopes for deliverance.

The first commandment of imaginative play is that anything can double as something else. Morgin's entire enterprise begins there, with clay masquerading as a panoply of other substances, and keeps going, pushing deep into emotional, psychological and sociological territory. She troubles the line that stretches from illusion to delusion, and in these anxious cultural times, her incisiveness and brilliant humor are particularly apt.

Marc Selwyn Fine Art, 9953 S. Santa Monica Blvd., Beverly Hills. Closes Saturday. (310) 277-9953, www.marcelwynfineart.com

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