

November 21, 2013

# Valérie Blass

By ROBERTA SMITH

*Parisian Laundry Projects*

*at the Hole*

*312 Bowery, near Bleecker Street, East Village*

*Through Wednesday*

Valérie Blass, a Canadian sculptor of considerable talent in her mid-40s who has shown in Canada since 1992, is making her New York gallery debut under the auspices of Parisian Laundry Projects, her Montreal gallery, in the roomy back space at the Hole. Two catalogs of Ms. Blass's work indicate that her talent has not always been used well, but, nonetheless, they display her impressively ambitious range, and the work on view offers a very convincing snapshot of her versatile pursuit of sculpture about sculpture.

"I See Your Nose Grow," a chunk of polished black granite resembling an irregular tombstone, touches lightly, with marked emotional resonance, on different sculptural techniques. This starts with stone carving and continues with two ambiguous laser-etched images that evoke modeling, welding, found-object tableaux and possibly the destruction of objects for working materials. Especially unsettling is the image of a sculpted head with a block of wood in its mouth.

Equally interesting are spindly assemblages made from sticks whose mystifying surfaces employ hobby moss, spray paint and wood shavings, while their forms flirt with Cubism, Surrealism and, in one case, a gallows overstocked with rope. A similar delicacy operates in three quirky photographs in which various objects, ropes and a piece of draped fabric are held aloft by a human infrastructure: several black-shrouded Bunraku-type puppeteers.

Finally, in a sculpture titled "She's a Nympho, I'm a Therapist," Ms. Blass — who is something of an expert at imitation surfaces from five years working in film-set design — fashions an elongated, twisted somewhat Brancusian structure of Styrofoam that appears to be pieced together from marble, granite and wood, and adds two found objects — a plaster hand and a glazed porcelain image of a female torso — that gesture toward the title. It is the quiet standout in a standout show.