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ROCHELLE GOLDBERG

Through May 14. Miguel Abreu Gallery, 88 Eldridge Street, Manhattan; 212-995-1774, miguelabreugallery.com.

Never less than ambitious, Rochelle Goldberg's sculpture installations suggestively combine low-lying ceramic forms and organic substances, including moss and chia seeds. With "Intralocutors," her extensive show at the Miguel Abreu Gallery on the Lower East Side, Ms. Goldberg considerably ups the ante, incorporating the figure and cribbing from art history and the Bible. The result is a tantalizing if fragmented narrative rescued from inscrutability by the intensity of its materials, forms and styles.

The focus is the three main Marys of the New Testament: the



COURTESY OF THE ARTIST AND THOMAS MÜLLER, MIGUEL ABREU GALLERY, NEW YORK

Virgin Mary, and two women usually portrayed as repentant sinners, Mary Magdalene and Mary of Egypt, whose lives the Roman Catholic Church often plays down. The prevailing mood is one of suffering: pilgrimages, confinement, penance and death.

The Marys are represented by 11 glazed-ceramic heads, busts and nearly life-size figures, all clearly based on Donatello's emaciated Mary Magdalene, a surpassing sculpture made in the 1450s on the verge of the High Renaissance. The busts rest on modern-looking palettes of tile in carved and painted medium-density fiberboard; the standing figures are covering themselves in raggedy yet luxuriant pieces of felted hair and fur.

Ms. Goldberg transforms the figures by using twisted coils of clay. They seem not only starved but also flayed, made of excrement or Medusa-like snakes. Two suspended arrangements of feathers evoke church vaults, but also swarming birds or locusts. A third piece suggests shattered bathtubs or maybe desecrated baptismal fonts. Elsewhere, delicate steel train tracks, resting on pieces of ginger root or glazed ceramic feet, traverse dry, desert-like scatterings of Chia seeds.

Like Elaine Cameron-Weir, Ms. Goldberg builds narratives from colliding materials, eras and styles, bringing to mind the 1980s sculpture of Bonnie Collura, whose own strange meldings, then and since, should be better known. **ROBERTA SMITH**