

ART REVIEWS

Discipline to the max

Jen Aitken's works manage to be both abstract and organic

By DAVID JAGER



JEN AITKEN at Erin Stump Projects (1450 Dundas West), to June 14. 647-345-6163.

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Sculptures by Jen Aitken borrow from Italian Arte Povera.

It seems that younger artists are raiding the well-stocked storehouse of 20th-century art movements for their own pleasure. There's no unified narrative of art history any more: everyone has their fragmented hobby horse and seems to be having a good time.

Jen Aitken's Poda at Erin Stump borrows heavily from Italian Arte Povera: its preoccupation with simple structures and organic forms, and with bridging the artificial and the organic. Her low-lying structures, cast out of concrete and polyurethane, resemble terse quotations from modernist and brutalist architecture. Though they are abstract, they retain the organic intimacy of natural forms or bodies.

You're struck by the extreme discipline of the show. Aitken's forms, which in the past have been based on subdivisions and three-dimensional castings of the Fibonacci sequence, have a satisfying rigour and proportionality. The objects have been carefully denuded of everything but contour, form and line.

Two drawings are equally severe, no doubt related to the sculptures that are their genesis. Once again their use of line is more formal than usual for Aitken, but they are compelling in their insistence on rigour.

The contrast between the abstract and the sensual drives her work. Her sculptural surfaces are more complex than they first appear, integrating bits of canvas and patches of texture. Poda is a strong show built on a past era of sculptural history. It's hard to know if Aitken is quoting reverentially, sarcastically or ironically. Does it matter? Perhaps the faithful recreation of old modernist preoccupations is another way of taking us deeper down the conceptualist rabbit hole.

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