



"Runners" by Richard Rosenblum: The thrill and even the heroism of speed.

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PERSPECTIVES

On the brink of becoming human

By Christine Temin
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The sculptor Richard Rosenblum forages for roots, trees and vines that strike his fancy, lugs the sometimes immense objects back to his studio, studies them at length, prunes and pads, and comes up with a final composition that, at its most successful, doesn't look composed. The results, mostly cast in bronze, are on view at the Howard Yezerski Gallery, 186 South St., through April 29. Walk through the gallery door and you may imagine you've stumbled into some primeval forest, filled with works that are by turns majestic, funny and thrilling, and that range in scale from tiny twig to 11-foot-tall tree trunk.

It's not just any tree that appeals to Rosenblum, but the most gnarled, overwrought and freakish specimens, so decrepit they are past any practical purpose. His use of nature is partly inspired by Chinese rocks; he writes that "the Chinese prize special rocks because they have the magical property of appearing to be mountains, whole landscapes, or even microcosms of the world." Because he was once a traditional figurative sculptor, more often than not it's a human form that emerges from Rosenblum's trees or vines. Assiduously avoiding the cute, he instead conveys a respect for humanity, nature, and the act of creation. The instant he captures has mythic or biblical force: It's the moment when matter is trans-

formed and animated. He offers a tree on the brink of becoming human, the reverse of Bernini's depiction of Daphne being changed into a laurel.

"Runners," one of the larger works in the show, conveys the thrill and even the heroism of speed. The original marathon comes to mind. The piece is an almost two-dimensional arc, plunging forward into space. Its two feet are quite different: The front one is clunky, almost club-footed; the back one might belong to an elephant ballerina. The excitement of the piece lies in its wholehearted thrust, which is underscored by surface texture. The center of the work is knobby and gnarled, but the long, leaping front is sleek and polished, as if smoothed by an oncoming wind. "Runners" makes an impact both at a distance and up close, where its dozens of subsections look like lace or seaweed.

The funniest of the big works is "Newton Venus." A preening, overprivileged suburbanite whose twist of head suggests self-conscious posing, she could be E. F. Benson's Lucia or the lady I saw in Legal Seafoods this morning. What an imagination Rosenblum has, what a keen eye for posture that conveys character. By making slight and invisible adjustments to a tree he creates bulges and wrinkles and even split ends.

The smaller works are also successful, although it's the big ones that astonish. "Ferdinand" is based on the bull in the children's

book. A gentle beast, he lifts his nose to smell the flowers, and stands with front legs crossed as nonchalantly as Bing Crosby's.

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Alberto Rey, who is having his first Boston area solo show, at the Stavridis Gallery, 73 Newbury St., through April 19, bases his recent works on black lace, a fabric that is beautiful, mysterious and conjures up the artist's Cuban heritage: black lace mantillas in a Roman Catholic church service. Rey uses lace images to give an overall quality to his paintings and works on paper: The black tendrils and blossoms swoop from one edge to the other. Against this surface float discrete images. In "Black Lace Series: The Prayer" the ground is a loosely painted blur of black, lace seen through memory or in a dream. The grain of the wood on which Rey has painted shows through, adding to the lace's ethereal quality. A Christ-like figure defined in white, frosting-thick paint, floats against the ethereal ground.

Rey's surfaces are so lush and lovely that they overwhelm the occasional figures and obscure the meaning of the works. In "Black Lace" he uses oil and rabbit skin glue on a plaster compound to create a picturesquely cracked, fresco-like gray surface. And there are works using Japanese rice paper that are translucent and breathy: The overlay of the paper softens and distances the black lace beyond.