

Sono Osato @ Brian Gross

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by David M. Roth

In her newest body of work, *Submergence*, Sono Osato moves from affixing machine parts to panels to physically representing them in a blend of tinted rabbit skin glue and oil paint. Where the New Yorker's earlier widget-strewn assemblages looked like accretions of detritus washed



Shathqo, 2017, tinted rabbit skin glue and oil on panel, 30 x 24 inches

downstream, these new works, based on the innards of old typewriters, are decidedly sparer than their immediate predecessors, which included wood, bone, bedsprings and computer parts encrusted in thick paint.

The conceptual strength of *Submergence* lies in the way the artist establishes mimetic relationships between the machines from which she extracts source material and the printed characters those devices once produced. Out of that process comes an "alphabet" whose emotional charge falls somewhere between that of cave painting and early 20th century non-objective art.

Gears, type bars and die-cut pieces of metal are the reoccurring elements. They combine in floating jumbles festooned by looping swirls that imbue the paintings with kinetic energy. Highlights include *Shathqo*, *Mawja* and *Tamusuta*, all measuring 30 x 24 inches. What makes these cryptically titled paintings worthy of prolonged viewing — apart from their persistent semiotic references — is the artist's highly nuanced paint handling. Osato piles up forms up in a great many layers, each rendered at different opacities, giving the works the foggy look of an x-rayed archeological

site. Scumbling, crosshatching and brushy strokes contribute to that effect, producing a degree of surface tactility not often seen in paintings realized with such an economy of means. It's a sharp break from the heavy impasto the artist has employed throughout much of her 35-year career.

Like Marco Maggi, another artist who uses abstract shapes to suggest alphabets and language, Osato relies on the human predilection for linking the speculative to the familiar. *Submergence* does this by summoning the clatter of typewriters, the chaos of colliding signs and the cadence of imaginary sounds that will never become words.



Tamusuta, 2017, tinted rabbit skin glue and oil on panel, 30 x 24 inches

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