

KATE WERBLE GALLERY

83 VANDAM STREET NEW YORK, NY 10013

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ANNA BETBEZE: "MOSS GARDEN" AT KATE WERBLE GALLERY
KAREN ROSENBERG
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Kate Werble Gallery
83 Vandam Street
SoHo
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Flokati rugs, those fluffy white coverings traditionally hand-made in the Pindus Mountains in Europe and prized by contemporary designers, become wild-and-woolly wall reliefs in Anna Betbeze's first New York solo. Ms. Betbeze dyes, scorches, shreds, shaves and otherwise attacks these shaggy objects until they start to look more like sheep's carcasses than sheep's coats.

By choosing the flokati as her canvas Ms. Betbeze is starting out with an object that already has plenty of visual and textural interest. This sometimes seems like an unfair advantage. But she attacks it with the full arsenal of 20th-century abstraction, Helen Frankenthaler to Lucio Fontana, as well as a deep sensitivity to the material.

Sometimes she cuts large, irregular ovals from the rugs' centers, as in "Lacuna," or smaller slashes, as in "Frogger." Elsewhere, though, violence gives way to more decorative and naturalistic impulses. The singed ivory pile of "Hoarfrost" looks convincingly crystalline. And "Moss" is a kind of "Waterlilies"-manque, with its lush blues and greens and its mix of sheared and scraggly tufts.

These titles (and the show's title, "Moss Garden") refer to Michel Foucault, who lectured that "the garden us a rug onto which the whole world comes to enact its symbolic perfection, and the rug is a sort of garden that can move across space." Fortunately the artworks don't take themselves that seriously; they have a wonderfully forlorn, abject quality that inspires more empathy than theory.

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