

Sharon Mizota. "Strange Beings Entice Senses," *Los Angeles Times*, 20 Sept. 2013, p. D-15. (in print)

## Los Angeles Times

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AROUND THE  
GALLERIES

# Strange beings entice senses

BY SHARON MIZOTA



MICHAEL UNDERWOOD  
*Various Small Fires*

**ROY DOWELL'S** paintings take on a symbolic effect, executed with an assured, experienced hand.

### Simple forms in totemic shape

The big, basic, almost naive shapes of Roy Dowell's paintings, collages and sculptures at *Various Small Fires* bring to mind Marsden Hartley or, in their more agitated moments, Jean-Michel Basquiat.

Like them, the L.A. artist seems to draw from a vocabulary of personal symbols that give his work an idiosyncratic, totemic quality.

The paintings and collages achieve a pleasing balance between gestural efforts, letterforms and flat, geometric areas of color or pattern.

They get more interesting the more you look at them, like art historical palimpsests that span prehistory to our media-saturated present. And they are executed with an assured, experienced hand.

Yet it's the clarity and charm of Dowell's modest cardboard and paper sculptures that steal the show. They're not as loose as the 2-D work, but their quirkiness and suggestion of some kind of usefulness are more intriguing and mysterious. Painted in patently Afrocentric colors (red, white, green, yellow and black), they evoke footstools, masks or other ceremonial objects.

Through them, Dowell seems to look squarely at modern art's appropriation of African cultural imagery. The works are not a restoration or a return — it's much too late for that — but they do acknowledge that ambivalent transcultural moment. They then leave it up to you whether to call it influence or theft.

**Various Small Fires**, 1212 Abbot Kinney Blvd., (310) 426-8040, through Oct. 19. Closed Sunday and Monday. [vsf.la](http://vsf.la)