

ARTnews

Lee Bontecou

Freedman Art
Through February 11

Sailing into the future with a fleet of fantastic mobiles , this magnificent exhibition would indicate that Lee Bontecou has no intention of slowing down. The works here are at once delicate and powerful, modernist and contemporary, serene and frightening. It is a difficult balance, but Bontecou handles the contradictions with a masterful use of unconventional materials.

The sculptor earned her reputation decades ago with terrifying canvas wall friezes that offered up bottomless darkness. Losing none of her edge, she has gone on to transform the same combination of wire and enameled canvas into a trip of starships, created between 2004 and 2011, hanging from the gallery's ceiling. With spinnakers full of wind, these stationary vessels carry a bevy of lead weights, dripping down like tears. Both mechanical and biomorphic, the sculptures encapsulate Bontecou's favorite obsessions – fear and freedom – in three powerful forms.

Set on the floor, in separate areas, is a pair of sandboxes, in which, over the last six years, Bontecou has been playing with a variety of materials and formations. In one, she has experimented with white ceramic orbs with open mouths – striped lips and upper teeth – yowling to be fed. They are surrounded by glazed disks, which, like bulging eyes, emerge from the sand. The other sandbox is more of a garden of earthly delights, with plantlike forms made from wire and clay, framed by a row of ship sails on the left and a cluster of dried flowers on the right.

Installed throughout the gallery are Bontecou's drawings, riveting in their own right. In a 2011 series of graphite-on-paper works, she explores the vortex at the center of the eye. These drawings retain the artist's enduring appreciation of the horrors of nature. Carnivorous fish and hungry birds stab at viewers with their pointy teeth, vicious beaks and piercing gaze.

- **Barbara Pollack**

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