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Maura Bendett at Post

Like portholes that reveal candy-colored, fairytale worlds, Maura Bendett's new tondo reliefs emphasize the fantasy element of decoration. Bendett arranges cutout drawings of flowers in 5-foot, all-over compositions. She draws on clear and colored sheets of acetate, adding hues to her images with tinted glues. The drawings are then cut out and sewn together with fishing line to create weblike circles which are attached to the wall with nails, leaving a 1-inch gap so that light can shine through the translucent acetate to the wall. The result is an effect reminiscent of stained glass.

Bendett's loose drawing style references both doodles and the bold forms of Matisse's cutouts, giving her works a casual, free-form grace. Glued-on seeds and pod fragments add texture, along with the varied thickness of the colored glues. In *Disintegrating Flowers*, a border of red, fuzzy-felt flowers sets off the busy bouquet. Green, plastic-coated wire spirals out from the edges of *East of the Sun and West of the Moon*, recalling one of the fanciful frames of Florine Stettheimer. The extenuated tendrils and languishing fronds of this work, along with its loopy sense of color, also seem indebted to Stettheimer's flower paintings. Bendett's are sexy, fanciful still lifes that assert an elegant outlandishness. With its palette of blues and greens, *Sea Breeze* integrates underwater plants and creatures into a vivid mix. A gaggle of blue and yellow lobsters are arranged Busby Berkley-style around a central blue flower, giving the piece a feeling of wafy aqueous growth.

The elevator shaft of Post—a gallery in the downtown loft of artist Habid Kheradyar—has been the site of some of the most imaginative installations of the past year. Visible from the elevator's open, roofless cab, Bendett's 21-foot-high papier-mâché relief in the form of a plant, *Object Resemblance*, makes the ride to the second floor an updated version of Jack's excursion up

the beanstalk. In *Day-Glo* and fluorescent limes and greens, stalky tendrils flow up the wall, blossoming with autumnally shaded pods and reddish fruits that dangle on wires like vegetal earrings. Purple papier-mâché pods on stems resemble half-sucked Tootsie Roll Pops. The curvaceous splendor, luminous colors and cartoony humor of this work make it the best example to date of Bendett's quirky literalization of organic abstraction.

—Michael Duncan

Maura Bendett: *Sea Breeze*, 1997, mixed mediums, 65 by 62 by 3 inches; at Post.

