

Reviews

Kiki Smith

★★★★★

Russell Bowman Art Advisory, through Mar 15 (see Galleries, River North).

Smith's first solo show in Chicago may not be as raw as her previous body-based work, but these bronze sculptures, ink drawings and nature-oriented prints—completed over the last four years—still inspire awe.

The life-size bronze sculpture *Seer (Alice I)* seems to have emerged from a fairy tale to greet visitors to the gallery. Covered in white auto-body paint, it depicts a woman lying on the billows of her dress; her mysterious gaze evokes a sense of dreamy wonder. The same character appears in Smith's much smaller bronze sculpture *Sleepwalker*, but here she hangs from the ceiling, her expression pained. As in *Seer*, she appears to float in her ankle-length dress without actually moving. In both pieces, the unnamed woman suggests an open-ended story that the viewer must complete.

In Smith's large-scale ink drawings, the female body merges with nature. In *Tree*, the body of a nude, upside-down woman is covered in barklike ink strokes; her knees resemble knots and her imperfect figure follows the asymmetrical lines of branches. The piece feels so sincere it transcends any earth-mother clichés.

In the 1980s, Smith thwarted conventional notions of sculpture by creating 3-D objects and drawings that resembled organs, cellular forms and the human nervous system. In her new collection, she's embraced the figurative tradition she once inverted. But it's clear that her art explorations are far from finished—and still incredibly powerful.—*Alicia Eler*



Kiki Smith,
Sleepwalker,
2003.