

THE NEW YORKER

GOINGS ON ABOUT TOWN

ART

Kathy Ruttenberg

Think of this New York-based ceramicist as the un-Disney: in Ruttenberg's sculptural vignettes, themes of sex, violence, and metamorphosis play out in an enchanted wood populated by mythic figures and magical fauna. One rotating, motorized statue in this fantastic show, titled "Sunshine at Midnight," depicts a woman, in dishabille, with a bird emerging from the back of her head; she embraces a tree, surrounded by a ring of human-faced deer. Whether the herd's intention is protective or menacing remains unclear. Ruttenberg started out as a painter in the East Village scene of the nineteen-eighties, when expressive figuration was the dominant mode. Twenty years ago, she moved to the Hudson Valley, where she developed her surrealist-fairy-tale style and her glazed-ceramic technique, in which intricate (and often very large) sculptures are fired in sections before being assembled. Here, the elaborate tableaux spill beyond the gallery's interior and onto its small patio, where a fountain in the form of a towering daisy pours water into the open mouth of an elfish girl, whose patchwork dress teems with forest life—one of the lighter moments in Ruttenberg's supernatural wilderness of cryptic allegory and strife.

—*Johanna Fateman*

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