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ALAN SARET

by Leah Triplett Harrington



Alan Saret, installation view of "Allies," 2022. Photo: Courtesy the artist and Karma, New York

In the 1980s, about two decades into a nascent career, Alan Saret withdrew from the commercial art world. Leaving gallery obligations and social engagements behind, he retreated to the studio to focus on his otherworldly sculptures made from found industrial and domestic materials. The works in "Allies," his current, small-scale retrospective (on view through June 4, 2022), show how he has worked methodically through variations of form, material, and idea. With each sculpture and drawing purposefully demonstrating the range of his gestures, the exhibition examines 50 years spent tracing the spectacular subtlety of nature through almost immaterial manipulations of wire and other manmade materials.

After studying and practicing architecture, Saret gravitated to art in the late 1960s. Cultivating a studio practice on the cusp of Minimalism, he eschewed easy labels, as well as the process art of contemporaries like Richard Serra or Eva Hesse. Unlike these peers, Saret was (and is) more interested in the relationship between the natural and the spiritual than in the material. He started using wire in earnest after a trip to India in the 1970s, and accompanied by his "gang drawings," it still serves as his primary medium.

While the gallery's first room is loaded with works from the late 1960s to 2022, the exhibition really starts outside, with a view of *Regnum Solae* (1986) hanging in the entrance lobby. Fiery orange-red and gray, with a snap of blue, this hourglass-shaped work consists of stainless steel, Teflon-coated wire, and magnet wire. *Regnum* can mean human reign or a taxonomic rank in biology, depending on the context; and *solae* is Latin for "alone." A harbinger of what's to come, this work hints at the major themes in Saret's work—time, natural forms, and individuality.

Clustered, but not too close, the sculptures in the main space are arranged to build on each other. The rusted steel wire *Root of It* (1995) forms a slack hourglass, with twin swirls of thick knots and shoots. Like many of Saret's titles, this one offers an indication of his devotion to natural forms, but just a clue. Similarly, *Flame Aura* (1986/2005) and *Blazing Be* (2008), installed on the floor almost as a pair, allude to flames in both color and shape; but the specificity of the reference is contradicted by the elusiveness of "aura" and the philosophical

“be.” Both works are patterned with distinctive repetitions of eye-hook loops. Flame Aura is a rich red with suggestions of green, its rounded shape edged with loops. Leaner and pointing upward from the ground, *Blazing Be* turns the loops inward, seemingly looking into its psyche. *Willow Creek* (2022) stretches from the floor toward the skylit ceiling in a hexagonal pattern of galvanized steel netting. It’s hard to tell if the delicate twists forming the structure’s bonds were made by Saret’s hand or by machine. At first, this work seems nothing more than conventional chicken wire, but as a glance turns into a gaze, it becomes a haze of mesh as Saret plays with layering. Like *Willow Creek*, *Zinc Cloud* (1967/1990) appears wall-like, and though completely permeable, it’s as opaque as a mist.

Saret has worked in the same studio for most of his career, moving between wire sculpture and drawing. In his “gang drawings,” he gathers a handful of colored pencils to make one unified gesture of differing marks and hues. Like his sculptures, these drawings seem to conjure life; many of them include “ensoulment” in their titles, which refers to the process by which a being or object gains a soul. Five such drawings from 2008 are in Karma’s back room. Drawn on black paper, the colored lines seem to glow off the page, almost like lightning strikes. *Storm Pass Ensoulment* alludes to a clap of thunder in its title and to a hurricane in its form. Nature and its ethereal phenomena continue to push Saret to fuse the biological with the artificial, as if it were possible to bring the outdoors fully inside. “Allies” suggests that the natural and the manmade are more united than we think, and Saret’s gestures encourage a closer observation of our everyday environment.