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Review A debut that eschews bells and whistles for discovery

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Erin Morrison uses a monoprint process to make low-relief sculptures that look like contemporary abstract paintings — of the lyrical variety — while putting visitors in mind of ancient ruins, medieval frescoes and prehistoric fossils, as well as death masks, tombstones, dry lake beds and the clay tablets on which early civilizations wrote the first words. That's a lot to pack into a work of art.

Morrison doesn't make a big fuss about what her weighty works are up to. At Samuel Freeman, the 29 year-old's solo debut skips the bells and whistles to get to the good stuff: the intimate inquisitiveness of art-making as a process of open-ended discovery and the equally open-minded attentiveness curious visitors bring to art.

Made of Hydrocal (a cross between concrete and plaster), Morrison's biggest pieces are more than 7 feet tall and 4 feet wide. Set in solid wood frames, each leans against the main gallery's walls.



Their mass is palpable. So is the hush that fills the exhibition with the kind of silence that can be experienced in out-of-the-way galleries or in off-the-beaten-track museums, where plaster casts of masterpieces often gather dust.

Morrison's palette is similarly muted: faded pastels, weathered whites, sun-bleached tertiaries. Her compositions are rudimentary: roughly drawn lines, irregular shapes, imperfect patterns. The surfaces of her works are where the details reside. Individual stitches, woven fabrics, palm fronds and air bubbles can be seen. Each is the result of Morrison's laborious process: gather fabrics, sew a quilt, lay it flat, build a mold, pour in Hydrocal, let it dry, tear out the quilt and then begin painting the cast slab.

All that is visible in the results. You don't need a guidebook to figure out, in broad strokes, how Morrison made her contemplative totems. Each tells its quiet story to visitors willing to slow down and look closely.