

## AROUND THE GALLERIES

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Special to The Times

### Midas retouched: new looks at gold

The theme of this group show — as you might expect from the title, “Midas” — is gold and its notoriously equivocal effect on the human psyche.

Pointing to the current tide of political conservatism, with its dubious assurances of financial stability, curators Martin Durazo and Sherin Guirguis suggest that gold is back in fashion. If a cool palette of white, chrome and silver characterized the optimism of the '90s, they argue, the gold of today reflects a new desire for “warmth,” representing as it does “physical wealth and security in a world where trust of all that was once solid has now come into question.”

It is an interesting argument but, unfortunately, not one that the exhibition — a crowded and loosely governed affair — is entirely capable of bearing out. There's little evidence here of anything so widespread or coherent as a sociological trend.

What does emerge among the better works, however, is a striking impression of the visual and psychological potency of gold as an artistic element.

Alexis Weidig's “Izmini” (2003), for example — a wonderful construction of cheap gold chains, fake flowers, plastic beads and peacock feathers — revels in the kitschy glamour of gold, while Robert Miller's elegant ceramic vessels, all coated with a reflective gold glaze, convey a sumptuous splendor.

Guirguis' “California Gold” (2003) and Jane Callister's

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“Floating Landscape” (2001) incorporate the hue into elegant, near-abstract compositions, while Stacy Duffin — weaving gold thread into clear plastic sheeting to resemble a spider web — emphasizes its delicacy.

A thin, even coat of gold pigment underscores the spare yet dramatic effect of Jamie Scholnick's “I Can Almost Get My Arms Around It (The Infamous Mr. T's)” (2003), a roughly two-foot-wide globe of densely knotted coat hangers. Streaks of the same pigment enliven a large study of the same on paper.

Durazo himself comes closest to examining, albeit elliptically, gold's elusive promise of the pleasure of wealth — the blessing that so betrayed the show's namesake, King Midas — in his installation. A disco ball, a sheepskin, a bong and other found objects are scattered in and around a large trunk once used by the band Earth, Wind and Fire. Few forms of wealth are as alluring to the collective imagination as that of the rock star, but a grimy ephemerality underscores the pleasures represented here, suggesting that one should be careful what one wishes for.

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